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Rebecca Skaggs and Thomas Doyle

Currents in Biblical Research 2009 7: 362
DOI: 10.1177/1476993X09104458

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REBECCA SKAGGS
Patten University, Oakland, California
rskaggs@patten.edu

THOMAS DOYLE
The Metanoia Ministry, El Cerrito, California, USA
metanoia1549@sbcglobal.net

ABSTRACT

As long as the Apocalypse has existed scholars have acknowledged the significance of the symbols of the lion and Lamb for understanding the message of the Apocalypse. The relationship between the two figures is particularly pivotal to the debate. There is, however, little scholarly consensus as to the nature of this relationship. The purpose of this study is to articulate and clarify the scholarly debate on this issue in order to shed light on the issues involved and to suggest some possible solutions.

Keywords: apocalyptic symbols; hearing; lamb; lion; revelation; seeing

Introduction

One of the major challenges to the reader of the Apocalypse lies in how to interpret the abundant figurative and symbolic material which enhances the entire text. In particular, the metaphor of the lion/Lamb (Rev. 5.5-6) has been acknowledged as highly significant for understanding the message of Revelation. Hence, through the ages, scholars have sought and struggled to find the interpretive key with which to unlock the meaning of the metaphor with the hope that the meaning of Revelation would then more clearly emerge. This article seeks to summarize and clarify the search in order to shed some light on the issues involved, and suggests some possible resolutions.

Currents in Biblical Research

Vol. 7.3: 362-375 http://CBI.sagepub.com ISSN 1476-993X DOI: 10.1177/1476993X09104458

The Lion/Lamb as Metaphor and Symbol

Many scholars have successfully shown that the nature of the Apocalypse is that it exists as multi-layered rather than as one single meaning. For example, Fiorenza in her search for the meaning of the symbols approaches the text as a 'poetic work with a symbolic universe and language' with many layers of meaning. She calls for 'the examination of the strategic position and textual relations of the symbols and images within the entire book' (Fiorenza 1986: 123). Barr goes even further and has constructed his entire theory of the Apocalypse on the idea that the text is 'a symbolic transformation of the world' (1984: 39-50). According to him, this transformation takes place through symbols and then the symbols are further transformed through story (Barr 2006: 206).

The point is that most scholars would agree that an understanding of the symbols in the Apocalypse is necessary for interpreting the message of Revelation.

A useful and necessary first step is to articulate the meaning of the two symbols which make up the lion/Lamb metaphor by identifying the main interpretations. The primary issue has to do with the relationship between the two symbols, but it is helpful first to consider them individually.

The Lamb

The 'lamb' (*arnion*, literally, 'little lamb') occurs 29 times in Revelation. In all cases but one (13.11), the term appears as a title for Jesus; notably, it is actually the title *most often* used for Jesus in Revelation. Apparently, then, it is significant for understanding Jesus in the Apocalypse. The only other occurrence of this term in the New Testament is in Jn 21.5 where the plural form (*ta arnia*) refers to the Christian community (Aune 1997: 367-68).

A consideration of the texts where the word occurs yields the following:

1. The Lamb is closely associated with God, the One on the Throne:

5.7	He stands near the Throne
5.8	He receives adoration from the heavenly worshippers
21.22	He is associated with the heavenly Temple
22.1, 3	He shares the throne with God

2. The Lamb has a special role:

5.10	He has made people into a kingdom and priests
7.10, 17	He is Savior, leader and shepherd of others
13.8; 14.10; 21.27	He is judge

3. In many cases, the Lamb is associated with death; he has been slain, and has been victorious through his death:

5.6	He is a lamb as though slain; because of this, he is worthy to open the sealed scroll
5.9, 12; 13.8	He has been slain
5.9	He has bought people by his blood
7.14	People have washed their robes in his blood

4. Although many of the references have to do with the endurance of violence by the Lamb, there are some cases where the Lamb is associated with doing violence:

6.16	the kings, generals, and people on earth hide in terror from the wrath of the Lamb
14.1-5	He is standing on Mt. Zion with the 144,000 imagery, which most scholars agree should be associated with eschatological battle
17.14	He engages in, and is victorious in, war

The question here is what does the figure of the Lamb signify? Many scholars associate the Lamb, particularly as slain, with Isa. 53.7 (the slaughtered lamb) and 53.8 the Passover lamb (cf. Beale 1999: 351; Comblin 1965: 26, 31; Swete 1907: cxxxix; Fiorenza 1991: 60-61; Bauckham 1998: 184). Aune notes that certainly the Lamb should be seen at least partially within the context of the sacrificial ritual, but it is not entirely clear as to which particular sacrifice (1997: 372) has an extended discussion on this subject. Ford points out that actually bulls' and goats' blood takes away sin in the Old Testament system as often as lambs (1975: 46; cf. also Dodd 1965: 233).

Ford suggests that apocalyptic background is significant for understanding the Lamb—in Jewish apocalyptic, the Lamb is a Ram, a strong synonym for the messiah. According to Ford, this context would explain the association of the Lamb with violence in the Apocalypse (Ford 1975: 89; cf. also Swete 1907: 78). On the other hand, Aune points out that although in the Near East, sheep were used to represent the gods or as symbols of the gods

(*ThWAT* 4.47-49, as cited by Aune 1997: 369), in Ancient Egypt, the ram was never used as a sacrificial victim.

Although there is some certainty that this apocalyptic context of the Lamb as powerful should be understood here, there is no question that the idea of death is significant. The question is whether the Lamb's death should be understood within the context of sacrifice.

A consideration of the term 'slain' (*sphazo*) is enlightening. Although it can be used in the sense of sacrifice, its more usual meaning is 'to kill a person with violence' (cf. 2 Kgs 10.7; Jer. 52.10 (LXX); Jos. *Against Apion* 1.76. For an analysis of the term, see Louw and Nida 1988; cf. also Michel 1967: 925-38). In the New Testament, the term clearly refers to slaughter (Rev. 6.4; 13.3), martyrdom (Rev. 6.7; 18.24), and fratricide (1 Jn 3.12).

Ford suggests that with this context in mind, perhaps the death of the Lamb most likely should be viewed in terms of martyrdom or death in battle rather than sacrifice. This would link the death of the Lamb more closely with the souls under the altar (Rev. 6.9) and the deaths of the prophets and saints (Rev. 18.24; cf. Frend 1967: 46-47, for a discussion on martyrdom as atonement). Ford further notes that in rabbinic thought, the martyr is associated with the sacrifice of Isaac, in which Isaac is ultimately not killed (Ford 1975: 90; cf. also Vermes 1961: 208, on the sacrifice of Isaac in relation to Israel; also, Farrer 1964: 94). Ford suggests that in the early church, the apocalyptic idea of the powerful Lamb became 'fused' with the concept of Passover, the suffering Servant, and the Eucharist (Ford 1975: 89).

Bauckham adds an element to the Lamb concept. He notes that although lambs in apocalyptic literature (e.g., Enoch 85–90) were associated with leadership (see also Aune 1997: 369-70, for an extended discussion of lamb as leader), the idea of sacrificial lambs as conquerors would have been new (Bauckham 1998: 184). He says, 'The novelty of John's symbol lies in its representation of the sacrificial death as the fulfillment of Jewish hopes of the Messianic conqueror' (184). Although the *Testament of Joseph* 19.8 would suggest that this idea might have been present in Jewish apocalyptic, most scholars agree that this source has been rewritten by a Christian editor (i.e., Bauckham 1998: 183; Aune 1997: 368; Clemen 1924: 383; Burchard 1966: 57, 228).

Aune agrees with Bauckham and suggests that Rev. 5.5-6 synthesizes the ideas of lamb as leader and lamb as sacrifice. In fact, he notes that a similar concept can be found in the Gospel of Mark, the writings of Paul, and the Gospel of John (Aune 1997: 52). Aune indicates the ambiguity of the symbols when he poses the question whether the image of the Lamb centers on its sacrificial associations (which John has expanded) or on its

apocalyptic and messianic association (which John has expanded to include sacrificial imagery). He concludes, 'It is not necessary to choose between these two possibilities, for it seems clear that the author of Revelation has fused *both* of these associations together in the single figure of the Lamb' (Aune 1997: 368, original emphasis; cf. also Dodd 1965: 232).

The Lamb, then, in the world of the Apocalypse, should most likely be viewed as multifaceted: certainly the idea of death (whether sacrificial or martyrological) is present; the Lamb, however, is not a defeated victim. Whether his apocalyptic nature as ram is accepted or not, the Lamb definitely appears as strong.

The Lion

The lion appears six times in Revelation, and three additional times in the New Testament. In three of the passages in Revelation (9.8, 17; 13.2), it appears as an image of 'wanton destructiveness, irresistible strength, and ferocity' (Resseguie 1998: 120; Bauckham 1998: 82). In apocalyptic literature, the lion appears as a symbol of irresistible strength. Three of the Revelation passages clearly portray the lion in this role: 4.7 where the lion is one of the four creatures around the throne; 5.5 where Jesus is introduced as the 'Lion from the tribe of Judah'; and 10.3 where the mighty angel's voice is described as the thunderous roar of a lion (Resseguie 1998: 136).

The lion as a title for Jesus is only used once in Revelation (5.5; see Baird and Thompson 1993). It is significant, however, that it is linked with the title 'Root of David'. Most scholars agree that the lion reflects Gen. 49.9 and the Root of David echoes Isa. 11.1. Bauckham explains, 'Both O.T. texts were *loci classica* of Jewish Messianic hopes in John's time' (Bauckham 1998: 180; cf. Ford 1975: 88-89). Both texts are favorites at Qumran (see Bauckham 1998, for examples); both texts 'characterize the Messiah as the warrior prince who will conquer the enemies of Israel' (Bauckham 1998: 181; cf. Ford 1975: 88-89).

In Jewish apocalyptic (e.g., 4 Ezra 11–12), the lion is also powerful and destructive (Bauckham 1998: 182). Ford further notes that the lion would also have represented the power of God and the power of the Torah; that is, the destructive yet saving, power of God against the enemies of Israel (Ford 1975: 88).

Along with this understanding of the symbols of the lion/Lamb, it is also necessary to consider their use within the text of the Apocalypse itself. The pivotal point of the discussion focuses on the relationship between the two figures. Does one obliterate the other? Does one of them (the Lamb, according to many scholars) reinterpret the other, or is the relationship

more complex than a simple 'either/or' or 'both/and'? Essentially, does one of the figures 'defeat' the other, does the lion lie down with the lamb, or might they even synthesize and become a Hegelian something other? Is it possible that the relationship is even more complicated, where each of them transforms the other so that ultimately both of them play a role in the apocalypse while at the same time each of them is transformed into something different from what they originally were? What impact does this relationship have on the understanding of the message of Revelation?

Lion/Lamb Alternative Interpretations

The Lamb Obliterates the Lion

The following is a consideration of the scholarly views of the relationship between the lion and the Lamb. The most extreme of the alternatives is that the symbol of the Lamb actually obliterates the lion, that is, the lion is transposed by the Lamb. Although most current scholars modify this position somewhat, there are still a few who strongly support it (Sweet 1979: 125; cf. also, Boring 1989: 108-10). Caird is one of the first and clearest on the position. In short, he holds that the Old Testament must be read in light of Christ's work on the cross. He advocates that John has transposed the images, 'What John hears is couched in the traditional messianic imagery of the Old Testament; what he sees constitutes the most impressive rebirth of images he anywhere achieves' (Caird 1966: 73). According to Caird, this is the key to the author's use of the Old Testament; John uses this language, but 'it must be read in the light of the fuller illumination of Christ' (74). The title 'Lamb', which is used almost exclusively of Christ, is 'meant to control and interpret all the rest of the symbolism. It is almost as if John is saying to us at one point or another: "wherever the OT says 'lion', read 'lamb'". Wherever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the cross' (74-75).

Steve Moyise refers to this position as the 'hermeneutic of replacement' and criticizes Caird for failing to focus on the main problem (Moyise 1995: 129). According to him, Caird fails to struggle with the tension between the two images and hence, he falls short in the search to resolve what this means for the understanding of a Messiah who is represented by both a lion and a Lamb.

The Lamb Reinterprets the Lion

Although few current scholars hold to the extreme position of the Lamb's 'replacement' of the lion, many agree that there is certainly a clear rein-

terpretation by the symbols. There is a certain amount of agreement that the Lamb *reinterprets* the lion. Generally, this is based on the fact that in Rev. 5.5 Jesus is introduced as the 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David' but John *sees* a 'Lamb as though slain'.

Sweet (1979: 125) suggests that 'traditional messianic expectation is reinterpreted by the slain Lamb: God's power and victory lie in self-sacrifice' (also, Roloff 1993: 78; Rissi 1965: 55; Giblin 1991: 78; 1994: 84; Harrington 1969: 64-65; Farrer 1964: 94; Achtemeier 1986: 288).

Several scholars agree with the idea of reinterpretation, but explain it as more of a shift in emphasis. For example, Beale says that the juxtaposition shows that John is emphasizing Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies of the Messianic kingdom—victory and reign—not through expected military might but through death. His followers are expected to follow his example, conquering through death. 'The Lamb is the one who not only conquered death but will conquer all of the persecutors of his people through historical punishments and the final judgment (6:1, 16; 17:14)'. Jesus was 'physically defeated but spiritually victorious' (Beale 1999: 353). In short, Rev. 5.5 explains *how* the Lamb conquers, namely by being slain (cf. also Lenski 1963: 200; Mounce 1977: 146; Michel 1967: 934).

A. Collins and Boring interpret the lion/Lamb imagery within an entirely different context, namely a court of law. Boring explains that 'conquer' for John means not only a violent military conflict, but also a 'forensic, legal connotation', indicating an acquittal in a court of law. The readers may be condemned as guilty by Roman law and executed, but their testimony acquits them in the courts of heaven. Victory has been redefined by Jesus' cross (A. Collins 1984: 14, 42; cf. also Boring 1989: 111).

Another group of scholars explains the relation as a combination of the two contrasting ideas. They advocate that indeed the lion does lie down with the Lamb. For example, Aune points out that by the striking contrast between the two images the author is 'combining and contrasting the type of warrior messiah expected by first-century Judaism with the earthly ministry of Jesus as suffering servant (see Mt. 11.2-6 = Lk. 7.18)' (Aune 1997: 373). Neither idea is subsumed or lost, but they are combined in the figure of Christ. Thompson has a similar idea, but he explains it in terms of politics. He suggests that the royal language of political power is combined with the religious language of sacrifice (Thompson 1990: 58-59; also, Metzger 1993: 52-53). Beasley-Murray explains that the point is not the sharply contrasting figures, but actually they are 'variant symbols of one idea, the all prevailing Messiah'. The Christ of the old covenant promise and apocalyptic hope is revealed in terms of the new

covenant fulfillment: the Lion, the Root, and the Lamb (Beasley-Murray 1974: 125; cf. Lambrecht 2001: 389).

Bauckham also notes the remarkable contrasts between the two images of the lion/Lamb, and agrees with Aune that this is John's way of reinterpreting (Christianizing) the Jewish messianic hopes (1998: 83). Bauckham, however, proposes something different. He suggests that by this juxtaposition, John is not dismissing the Jewish messianic hopes embodied in the strong messianic titles, the 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah' and the 'Root of David', nor simply combining the two concepts. Rather, he merges them, reinterpreting them and thereby creating something new: he 'forges a symbol of conquest by sacrificial death' (Bauckham 1998: 183; cf. also Moyise 1995: 129). Hence, by merging the two symbols something new is created, which incorporates and synthesizes both concepts.

Ford (1975: 87-95) also sees the merging of these two sharply contrasting concepts into something new. She notes, however, that actually, the two symbols are not in reality so distinct as first appears. The Lamb, seen within its Jewish apocalyptic context, is also a strong and powerful synonym for the messiah—a powerful and destructive 'ram', not all that far from the powerful and destructive lion (Ford 1975: 89; cf. also Dodd 1965, cited by Ford 1975: 89).

Barr masterfully explains this juxtaposition in literary terms as 'inversion' (2006: 214-15): 'the point is that this symbolic inversion is also a narrative inversion and that the narrative inversion is also a moral inversion: in this story evil only appears to be conquered by power. In this story, evil is conquered by the death of the Lamb' (218). Barr also notes that from this inversion something new emerges: 'This story inverts the images of violence, so that what at first appears to be coercive power (Jesus slays all his enemies) turns out on closer examination to be something else (he slays them with the sword of his mouth)… Renewal comes after violence but not though violence' (214-15).

This said, however, Barr in fact does not move all that much farther than Caird. Apparently, he sees the change from the merging of the lion with the Lamb, but does not acknowledge the change in the lion. Indeed, for Barr, Jesus, who has conquered by his own death, incorporates both a divine warrior and savior. But, evidently, according to Barr, the lion is subverted, not merely changed. With this inversion, however, the lion is lost: 'If you don't see both the violence and the subversion of violence in this story, you won't get it. The Lamb is the Lion, but the Lion is not the Lamb… Violence inflicted must always be read as violence endured… We read "war in heaven" but we must understand "blood of the Lamb" and "testimony of the faithful"' (Barr 2006: 216, 218, 219).

Moyise leads us to a more complex reading. He agrees with the concept of juxtaposition but points out that there is an inherent instability in this notion. Indeed, it is not entirely clear which term is the interpreter and which is the interpreted (Moyise 2001: 128, citing Boyarin 1990: 223). He explains that readers are not

> *forced* to reinterpret the apocalyptic violence in non-violent ways… The juxtaposition *allows* a non-violent interpretation but it also reveals a fundamental danger, namely, that the weapons of resistance can end up supporting the very violence being resisted. It does not do justice to the book of Revelation to advocate a position where Lamb simply replaces lion. Evil is much more complex than that (Moyise 2001: 194; original emphasis).

Moyise sets the issue within the context of how a reader should interpret a text; he expresses skepticism for those positions that 'confidently tell us that this is what John intended or that this is *the* proper literary reading of the text' (Moyise 2001: 193).

Resseguie (1998: 30) suggests the identification of literary criteria to help with this problem, such as point of view, setting, characters, and plot. Although there is a strong component of subjectivity, that is, the reader is required to fill in gaps 'the way the author imagines these gaps should be filled in', nevertheless, the clarification of these literary criteria *does* help to identify the intention of an author. According to Resseguie, 'The actions, setting and events are mediated through the narrators' perspective, which is expressed on five distinct planes: phraeseological, spatial, psychological, temporal, and ideological' (1998: 32). Although the ideological level is the most important, it is also least accessible to the reader (33). The other four planes do shed light on different aspects of the text. For our purposes here, the phraeseological point of view, expressed at the level of words, phrases and titles, is the most useful.

An example of these criteria with their benefits and disadvantages is one of the contrasts identified by Resseguie—the hearing/seeing contrast in Revelation. This contrast is indeed clear to the reader; John *hears* some things, and *sees* others. Whereas the seeing describes the outward appearance, the hearing uncovers the inner reality, the spirit, the essence of what is seen (Resseguie 1998: 32-33; see also Sweet 1979: 125-27, and Caird 1966: 73). The issue is whether there is something significant, or rather what is significant, about these distinctions. Often, one of these phrases complements the other, adding to the information John is receiving; at other times, one of them appears to reinterpret what he is receiving. For example, Jesus is introduced as the 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah,

the Root of David' (Rev. 5.5). John hears this, but when he turns, he sees a 'Lamb as though slaughtered' (5.6). On the one hand, the images of the lion/Lamb appear to be antithetical characteristics of Jesus: conquering might versus sacrifice (Resseguie 1998: 133). On the other hand, Resseguie observes, the Lamb could be an alternative symbol for the lion. Since the nature of the apocalyptic Lamb is also a symbol of conquering might, perhaps the two are merely interchangeable images (see also Ford 1975).

The lion, representing traditional messianic expectations for a Messiah (who will subjugate Israel's enemies by military might), is replaced by John's juxtaposition of the slaughtered Lamb. 'Thus, John's juxtaposition of the lion and lamb forges a new definition of victory: the way to conquest is by sacrificial death' (Resseguie 1998: 134). This new way to victory is also appropriately applied to the readers of the Apocalypse.

Moyise proposes that there is more than a juxtaposition of the terms; there is a dialogical tension. Rather than resolving this tension, John preserves it. The reader is asked to struggle with this tension, not merely to substitute one component for the other (cf. also Ford 1975: 30-31 for a similar idea). Moyise poses the question, 'Does John intend a resolution of the tension so that Rev. 5 represents the "true picture" (i.e., heuristic imitation)?' (1995: 131). Moyise answers his own rhetorical question, 'The text, as we have it, preserves the tension rather than resolving it, at least for some readers' (132).

In summary, we have considered several relationships between the lion and the Lamb:

1. Does one replace the other (Caird, Swete)?
2. Does one reinterpret the other?
    a. The Lamb changes the nature of the lion (Sweet);
    b. The emphasis is shifted (Beale, Mounce, Lenske, Michel);
    c. The two ideas are combined to create a new concept (Aune, Bauckham, Ford, Barr, Resseguie);
    d. Actually the two symbols indicate similar ideas:
        (1) In the context of a courtroom (Boring and A. Collins); or
        (2) As Apocalyptic symbols, they are very similar (Ford);
    e. They create a dialogical tension which John does not attempt to resolve (Moyise).

Conclusion

We began this study with three basic notions:

1. The lion/Lamb imagery is highly significant for understanding the message of the Apocalypse.
2. The relationship between the two symbols holds a particularly important key to understanding the Apocalypse.
3. There is notably little scholarly consensus as to the nature of the relationship of the lion and the Lamb.

The purpose of this study has been to articulate and clarify this scholarly debate. From the foregoing consideration of the scholarly issues regarding the symbols in the text of Revelation itself, we suggest that the following points emerge with a fair amount of clarity:

1. The Lamb becomes a *warrior*, that is, he takes on the characteristics of the lion. Although the figure of the lion does not appear again in reference to Christ, his characteristics become attached to the Lamb: as the Lamb marches victoriously through the text of Revelation, he appears distinctly as leader and warrior who wreaks devastation, engages evil victoriously in war, and celebrates a warrior's victory. In fact, 9 of the 28 uses of 'Lamb' are in combat scenes.
2. The Lamb is a *powerful* warrior. Of the 28 uses of the 'Lamb', 18 of them are in direct reference to the Throne of God. Blount notes that this 'might well be the most complete symbol of utmost power' (2005: 70).
3. The Lamb is powerful warrior *who conquerors through sacrifice*. It is imperative to note that although the Lamb acts like a warrior, he retains the aspect of having 'been slain' (as in the first mention of him, Rev. 5.6). Five of the 28 references to him note either his blood or some aspect of sacrifice. Clearly, he is the powerful warrior whose intrinsic characteristic is having been slain.
4. Finally, the Lamb is a powerful warrior who conquers through sacrifice *or the purpose of witness*. Blount has shown that 'witness' is a central concept of the Apocalypse (2005: 40-66; see also Bauckham 1993: 72). 'Witness', according to Blount, does not result in passive death; in fact, the death itself is not the important factor. It is the commitment to active engagement which achieves victory. Jesus as slaughtered Lamb provides the role-model for

his followers: as he courageously witnessed to God, even unto death, so also his followers should actively commit to witness even unto death.

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