

The Antichrist Tradition in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity



Mateusz Kacper Kusio

Wolfson College

University of Oxford

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PREFACE

St Paul instructs us: ἐν παντὶ εὐχαριστεῖτε, “Give thanks in all situations” (1 Thess 5:18a). Similarly, Marcus Aurelius spends the first book of his *Meditations* expressing to whom and how he is indebted. I would like to preface this thesis by offering my thanks to all those people and institutions that made its creation possible.

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I hope the reader will now excuse me as I would like to offer some special thanks to those who have been there with me from before I was a student. I want express them in my native tongue in which I say things that are of utmost personal importance to me.

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Denique, Deo gratias.

Warsaw, Feast of St Timothy

26 January 2020

THE SHORT ABSTRACT

My thesis, entitled “The Antichrist Tradition in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity”, answers the following research question: in ancient Jewish and early Christian thought, what is the function of antimessianism in relation to messianism? Bearing in mind the achievements as well as the shortcomings of the scholarship on the topic, I propose a new framework for the understanding of this phenomenon. Three core claims are advanced throughout the work. Firstly, the references to the Antimessiah/Antichrist should be understood to constitute a tradition within which certain texts and concepts were transmitted and re-engaged by successive reading communities. Secondly, there are non-Christian Second Temple Jewish sources which speak about antimessianic eschatological actors. Thirdly, antimessianic conflict is structured around two central motifs, namely violent conflict and mimetic rivalry.

The thesis consists of eight chapters. CHAPTER I offers a history of scholarship on the Antichrist and positions my research within it. CHAPTER II deploys reception historical tools to the study of certain passages of the Hebrew Bible which were taken by later Jewish and Christian interpreters as referring to the Antichrist. Subsequent chapters trace the antimessianic/Antichristological expectation in different ancient corpora: the Dead Sea Scrolls (CHAPTER III), the New Testament (CHAPTER IV), the extracanonical Biblical literature (CHAPTER V), the Patristic writings (CHAPTER VI). The conclusions of the thesis are presented in CHAPTER VII.

The major contribution of my work is to provide a viable methodology for the study of the Antichrist tradition along with its definition which allows to incorporate a wealth of previously disregarded sources. My study shows the presence of antimessianic speculation in Second Temple Jewish writings and the paramount importance of Biblical exegesis to its development.

THE LONG ABSTRACT

My thesis, entitled “The Antichrist Tradition in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity”, answers the following research question: in ancient Jewish and early Christian thought, what is the function of antimessianism in relation to messianism? In order to answer this question fully, I advance three core claims. First, with regard to the form of antimessianism, I argue against certain long-established scholarly frameworks under which references to the Antichrist were categorised, such as myth and legend. Tradition and traditionary process, understood as repeated reading, engagement, and application of core authoritative texts and concepts, are instead proposed as a more suitable model. The idea of a messianic enemy, based on Scriptural texts, migrates between writers and interpretative communities, undergoing important changes, but at the same time retaining a significant degree of stability.

Second, on the question of sources, my thesis aims to counter the long-standing view that the Antichrist is a Christian invention with little precedent or counterpart in the ancient Jewish sources. By presenting evidence from the Hebrew Bible, its ancient versions, the Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and even the Rabbinic sources, I argue for the presence and proliferation of antimessianic speculation across ancient Judaism. Furthermore, the Jewish aspect of this phenomenon is highly informative and, indeed, necessary for understanding its development within Christian circles.

Third, my argument identifies the presence of two motifs as the crucial marks of antimessianism. They are a violent conflict between the Messiah and his opponent, and mimetic rivalry (a term I borrow from the work of René Girard), i.e. deceptive imitation on the part of the latter. Both these construals of the antimessianic conflict show the Antichrist to be intimately bound or even fully dependent on the Messiah for his existence. These two ways of understanding the eschatological confrontation emerge

already in the Hebrew Bible and are represented in all other literary corpora that I investigate. Although they accentuate either the direct (violent) or the indirect (mimetic) aspect of messianic combat, they are by no means mutually exclusive and are woven together in many texts.

Recognising the methodological confusion of the existing scholarship, I follow Horbury (1998a) in offering a standardised and simple, yet rigorous definition of the Antichrist as an enemy of a messianic actor. In order for a text to properly belong to the Antichrist tradition, it must speak about a Messiah in conflict—be it direct or indirect—with another being who wants to defeat or replace him. This clear criterion does justice to the sense of the term itself, avoids anachronism, and allows for including a wealth of passages which have been previously overlooked by scholars.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. CHAPTER I presents the history of scholarship on the Antichrist. There, I detect certain core problems and arguments, such as that relating to the presence of the Antimesiah in non-Christian Jewish sources which is accepted by Bousset (1896), Charles (1920), Horbury (1998), and Lorein (2003), but disputed by Jenks (1991) and Lietaert Peerbolte (1996). I also discuss the projected methodology of the study, as summarised above.

CHAPTER II offers a reception historical study of six formative portions of the Hebrew Bible—Gen 3:15; 49:16-17; Isa 11:4; Ezekiel 38-39; the books of Psalms and Daniel. The character of this chapter is different to all others that follow. I do not claim that these texts are themselves antimessianic, but rather that they can potentially be read as such. I trace the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of these texts and investigate how Jewish and Christian exegetes used them to further their own antimessianic speculation. Importantly all of these texts either constitute key messianic prooftexts themselves or occur in the immediate vicinity of such prooftexts. This chapter shows not only the significance of

exegesis of texts perceived as Scriptural for the Antichrist tradition, but also how intimately the latter is connected with Jewish and Christian messianism.

CHAPTER III delineates the scope of antimessianism in the Dead Sea Scrolls through the exegesis of several relevant texts—the *War Scroll* (1QM); the *Messianic Anthology* (4Q175 & 379); the *Daniel Apocryphon* (4Q246); the *Book of War* (4Q285); and 11QMelchizedek (11Q13). Whilst the eschatology at Qumran involves multiple evil agents, such as Belial, Mastema, or the Kittim, I am careful to pinpoint these instances where they function as actual enemies of the Messiah. Most of the documents (with the peculiar exception of 4Q246) speak about a messianic figure engaged in the eschatological conflict. On the other hand, the *Messianic Anthology* construes a symmetrical picture of the end-time opponents. My reading of these texts confirms the claim about the presence of antimessianic speculation in non-Christian Jewish sources of the Second Temple period. Furthermore, Qumran antimessianism involves both violent conflict and mimetic rivalry.

The relevant evidence from the New Testament is discussed in CHAPTER IV. I argue that the Antichrist tradition is represented there in four instances: in the Synoptic Apocalypse; 2 Thessalonians 2; 1-2 John; and the Book of Revelation. Not only is it in the Johannine Epistles that the word “Antichrist” is first found, but it is also here that the entire tradition takes an important turn, as the notion of an Antimesiah—or, indeed, of any eschatological antagonist—becomes inflected by the figure of Christ. All of the above texts express concern with false teaching and prophecy which is especially pronounced in the Johannine Letters. Jesus’ eschatological discourse, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation are keen to present the false Messiah as the foil of Christ, with the latter two combining this motif with the end-time violent confrontation.

CHAPTER V establishes the presence of the Antichrist tradition in the extracanonical texts, encompassing the diverse category of both the OT Pseudepigrapha and the NT Apocrypha. This diverse group of texts presents significant difficulties, as it encompasses Jewish and Christian writings from different periods, locales, and genres. Particular attention is therefore paid to whatever can be reasonably inferred about the origin and provenance of these documents. They are, however, tied by their non-canonical status which decreased their resonance among later authors. Many of these texts, such as *Psalm of Solomon 17*, *2 Baruch*, and *4 Ezra* display keen interest in messianic figures in combat and thus contribute to the antimessianic tradition in its violent aspect. On the other hand, texts such passages from the *Sibylline Oracles*, *Ascension of Isaiah*, and the Coptic *Apocalypse of Elijah* provide clear examples of mimetic rivalry between the heavenly agents and their opponents, with the Antimesiah often portrayed as imitating the true Messiah. This chapter provides essential evidence for my claims about the presence of antimessianic tradition in the non-Christian Jewish sources and the centrality of violent and mimetic confrontations to this tradition.

CHAPTER VI investigates antimessianic speculation in Patristic literature. This corpus of writings contains the most explicit, sustained, and widespread attestation of the Antichrist tradition. Reflection on Christ's end-time enemy is found in the *Didache*, Irenaeus of Lyon, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen, Commodianus, Lactantius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Tyconius, and Augustine of Hippo. Their contributions to the Antichrist tradition show the importance of Biblical exegesis for early Christian eschatology, as well as the continued significance of the motifs of violent conflict and especially mimetic rivalry in antimessianism.

Finally, CHAPTER VII offers the general conclusions of the entire thesis.

My project contributes to the study of ancient Jewish and Christian eschatology in several ways. Firstly, I propose and substantiate the suitability of a new framework for understanding antimessianism. Seeing it as a tradition, rather than as e.g. a myth, captures its dynamics as well as its continuity. The authors of the texts I investigate approach the question of the Messiah's future enemy by referencing several shared texts, describing it by using similar motifs, and even echoing and drawing on one another. These traditionary processes cross the geographical, literary, and religious boundaries and attest that antimessianism was a vibrant and widespread idea within the ancient Judeo-Christian continuum.

Secondly, the definition of the Antimessiah/Antichrist used in my thesis and first argued for by Horbury allows one to take into account a plethora of sources and even entire corpora that have been previously disregarded. It also offers a stable framework which has been heretofore lacking in the scholarship on the topic.

Thirdly, I show repeatedly that antimessianic expectation was not fuelled only by political circumstances, as was often claimed, but also by continued exegetical engagement with key Scriptural texts, both of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Many of the relevant passages, especially in CHAPTER II, introduce the figure of the Antimessiah as a result of their interpretation of the Bible. While political and historical issues definitely shaped the Antichrist tradition on some occasions and in different ways, it is Scriptural exegesis that was the stimulus and the guide for the development of the Antichrist tradition.

Fourthly, by tracing the messianic and antimessianic reception of certain passages in the Hebrew Bible, I am able to evidence the intimate connection between the development of Jewish and Christian antimessianic expectation and messianism. Core Scriptural passages and books that were taken by later interpreters as envisaging a

Messiah were also very often understood as speaking about his end-time enemy. Many interpreters deduced that the Messiah would be an embattled figure by linking previously separate details of their source texts. As the existence of the Antimessiah is dependent on that of a messianic figure—as shown by the mimetic rivalry between them—messianism is a tradition more important in understanding the Antichrist than, for instance, the Satan tradition.

Fifthly, I challenge the long-standing academic argument that antimessianism is absent from Jewish eschatology. My findings with regard to ancient Jewish literature show beyond doubt that its creators envisaged an embattled Messiah along with his enemies. Jewish antimessianism must be treated as counterpart to its equivalent in the early Christianity: both displayed shared exegetical knowledge and appear to have remained in dialogue with each other, as shown especially in CHAPTER II.

Finally, my thesis offers the first survey of the depictions of the Antichrist as a mimetic rival of Christs and other heavenly agents. This motif, the name for which I borrow from René Girard, is widely attested in early Christian literature and proves to be the organising principle for some writings, e.g. Hippolytus' *De Christo et Antichristo*. Nevertheless, it has never before been extensively studied.

To recapitulate, my thesis will advance the academic discussion of the Antichrist tradition. I attempt to show its pluriformity and, at the same time, its common features across different reading communities and periods. More broadly speaking, my aim is to present and understand a shared aspect of the ancient Jewish and Christian eschatology which focalises in itself its historical circumstances, Biblical exegesis, and eschatological expectation.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1 Statement of the argument

The story of the Antichrist has over the centuries grown to become one of the most potent aspects of the apocalyptic mindset. It stemmed from a plethora of eschatological antagonists envisaged by the Abrahamic faiths in antiquity and the early Middle Ages, and exerts noticeable influence on modern secular culture. Attempts to characterise and identify this figure have long continued to occupy the minds of exegetes, theologians, and believers and fuelled eschatological expectation. Understanding their cultural heritage and, to some extent, the present cultural moment requires investigating the ancient idea of the Antichrist which gave rise to all of its later iterations and metamorphoses. My thesis is devoted to such an investigation.

The present state of scholarship on the topic reveals several unresolved issues. The claim that a stable idea of an Antimessiah¹ was transmitted from Jewish into early Christian milieux—as it was usually argued around the beginning of the 20th century—has been seriously challenged, but not defeated, in the last decades. Thus, the question whether antimessianism is to be found in the pre-Christian Jewish sources is still open. Furthermore, no satisfying framework for the study of the Antichrist has been fully formulated, whereas the collection of sources that are usually investigated fails to yield a complete picture of antimessianic expectation. Finally, scholars have heretofore failed to fully acknowledge the various ways in which the eschatological opponents counter the Messiah across ancient literature.

¹ In general, I treat the terms “Antichrist” and “Antimessiah” as broadly synonymous. In what follows, I use “Antimessiah” to describe the messianic opponents in the Jewish sources, and both “Antimessiah” and “Antichrist” with reference to the Christian sources.

This thesis will attempt to answer the following research question: in ancient Jewish and early Christian thought, what is the function of antimessianism in relation to messianism? The answer to this question will constitute the three core claims of my thesis:

- (1) the Antichrist story functioned as a tradition, i.e. a transmission and reuse of certain core texts, ideas, and motifs which are elaborated on by subsequent authors;
- (2) the tradition about the Antimessiah/Antichrist is to be found across ancient Jewish eschatology, in Christian and non-Christian sources alike;
- (3) two motifs are the crucial marks of ancient antimessianism, namely violent conflict between the Messiah and his opponent, and mimetic rivalry on the part of the latter; both these motifs show antimessianic expectation to be a phenomenon dependent on ancient messianism.

I will offer a full discussion of each of these points after a review of the relevant scholarship to date. Such a survey will reveal not only the undoubtable value of the previous academic engagements with the Antichrist, but also their confusion and shortcomings which my treatment of the antimessianic tradition seeks to amend.

1.2 Literature review

1.2.1 *Earliest scholarship*

Although most reviews of the Antichrist scholarship begin with the work of Wilhelm Bousset, it is important to realise that his was not the first attempt to offer a historical analysis of that figure. This title can only be awarded to Tomàs Malvenda's (1566-1628) monumental *De Antichristo*, first published in 1604 in Rome (reprinted in 1621 in Valencia) and later expanded in the posthumous Lyon edition of 1647.

The Dominican's work constitutes the point at which an actual expectation of the Antichrist's Parousia begins to give way to a scholarly survey and assessment of those expectations. Malvenda most certainly harbours a futuristic expectation of the Antichrist, but at the same time takes great pains to assemble and scrutinise the relevant Biblical and Patristic evidence. He critically evaluates multiple past identifications of the Antichrist, from Antiochus IV Epiphanes to Martin Luther, showing that none of them exhaust the evil to be expected from Christ's deceitful counterpart.

De Antichristo is frequently referred to by Bousset, while McGinn calls it "the most complete treatment of the subject".² Such accolades are, however, rare. In spite of the current oblivion into which he has fallen, Malvenda must be recognised as the one who laid down the foundations for future scholarship.

Another foundational work for the study of the Antichrist is H. Gunkel's *Schöpfung und Chaos* (1895; reprinted in 1921). His argument, whose reverberations are palpable in the scholarship to this day, is that Revelation 12 cannot be an originally Christian composition, but rather it preserves ancient Babylonian creation and combat mythology. This background is also present in the creation story in Genesis, on which Revelation 12 heavily draws, and in multiple other passages of the Hebrew Bible. The value of Gunkel's work, even though it was eclipsed by later scholarship in its details, lies in making the study of ancient mythologies into a key component of the exegesis of many parts of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, especially Revelation 12. His conclusion, that this chapter is somehow alien to the rest of the book and, more generally, to the early Christian belief system, has been widely accepted by later exegetes.

Most importantly for my present purpose, *Schöpfung und Chaos* had a formative influence on Bousset. Gunkel's claim about the transmission of the mythic material

² McGinn 1988: 1.

through an esoteric oral tradition is Bousset main assumption for the development of the Antichrist myth.³ The way Gunkel understood the inner structure of the apocalyptic came to establish the ways Jewish and Christian antimessianism was to be studied for decades to come.

1.2.2 *The initial consensus (Bousset, Charles)*

As rightly noted by Jenks,⁴ Bousset ought to be considered the father of the critical study of the Antichrist myth which started with his *Der Antichrist in der Ueberlieferung des Judentums, des neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche* (1895; English: *The Antichrist Legend: A Chapter in Christian and Jewish Folklore*, 1896). His work, steeped in the tradition of *Religionsgeschichte* and following in Gunkel's footsteps, attempts to show that the mentions of Antimessiahs in the Jewish sources of the Second Temple period, the New Testament, and the Church Fathers hark back to an oral apocalyptic tradition of Jewish origin.

This idea guides the way Bousset's work itself is structured. He first analyses the sources available to him, from which he later attempts to distil a coherent narrative about the Antichrist. He distinguishes several commonplaces which are widely exemplified in various writings and were supposedly present in the original legend, such as the Antichrist's Jewish origin, association with the end of the current political regime, session in the Temple, slaughtering of the two witnesses (usually Enoch and Elijah), etc.

Bousset's work has been rightly praised for its learning, breadth of the scrutinised sources, and pioneering historical-critical approach to the problem of the Antichrist. Many of his conclusions hold to this day, while his recounting of the story of the Antichrist still provides a good overview of its main motifs. Nevertheless, the selection

³ Gunkel 1921: 252–7; Bousset 1896: 6.

⁴ Jenks 1991: 5.

of texts Bousset approaches has been criticised as arbitrary as he excludes some, such as *1 Enoch* and the *Psalms of Solomon*, and incorporates others, e.g. the much later pseudo-Ephremic writings. His recourse to an overarching secret oral tradition behind all of its particular textual instantiations is deeply problematic, too. It seems methodologically unsound to posit the existence of such narrative, as the existing evidence can more easily be explained as texts influencing one another directly.

Bousset's contribution to the Antichrist research is not limited to *The Antichrist Legend*. In *Die Religion des Judentums im neu testamentlichen Zeitalter* (1903) he comes into dialogue with R.H. Charles and deemphasises the supposition of the esoteric oral tradition.⁵ A fuller, but essentially very similar summary is offered in his entry on the Antichrist in the first volume of the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, published in 1908.⁶ Slightly earlier, in his commentary on Revelation, Bousset references the Antichrist tradition briefly in an excursus on Rev 11:1-13:5, reiterating most of his previous conclusions.⁷

R.H. Charles—a towering figure in the early scholarship on apocalypticism and the Pseudepigrapha—continued and developed Gunkel's and Bousset's work. His main contribution to the scholarship on the Antichrist is included in the introduction to his edition of the *Ascension of Isaiah* and his commentary on Revelation.⁸ Charles generally follows Bousset, while at the same time correcting, expanding, and systematising his repertoire of sources. In a move later criticised by scholars, he fits the available evidence for the eschatological opponents into three categories, namely the myths about the Antichrist, Beliar, and Nero. He argues that the Antichrist tradition merged with the one about Beliar (which is supposedly the case in 2 Thessalonians 2) and, separately, with the

⁵ Bousset 1903: 242–4.

⁶ Idem 1908: 578–82.

⁷ Idem 1906: 324–30.

⁸ Charles 1900: li–lxxiii; 1920: 76–87.

Neronic legend (as in the *Assumption of Moses* 10:1). Finally, in Charles' understanding, all these entangled strands of the antimessianic speculation are fused together into several related forms.⁹

Charles' treatment of the Antichrist is more systematic than Bousset's, as he is focused on the Second Temple and early Christian sources and offers a clear taxonomy of the traditions they represent. He also incorporates important material absent from *The Antichrist Legend*, most importantly the Beliar tradition.

The robust classification offered by Charles cannot, however, be seen as unproblematic. The strands of tradition he identified are said to be merged in earlier writings (the Beliar-Antichrist myth in 2 Thessalonians), only to reappear as distinct in the later ones (Antichrist in 4 Ezra, Beliar in Revelation 12); Charles' picture is thus by no means diachronic which is apparently his aim.¹⁰

As noted by Jenks, the scholarship of Charles and Bousset has had decisive influence over the decades of discussion to follow, producing "the Bousset-Charles' consensus".¹¹ It spread mainly through dictionary entries and NT commentaries, usually on 2 Thessalonians, the Johannine Epistles, or Revelation, with later monographs on the Antichrist were produced only by those challenging the consensus. Thus, the idea of a myth/legend of the Jewish Antichrist, which fuses with other distinct traditions and makes its way into Christian eschatology became the standard scholarly view until Jenks' 1991 book, in spite of the serious criticisms raised in the meantime.

1.2.3 *The first challenges (Friedländer, Billerbeck, Rigaux, Ernst)*

The Bousset-Charles' paradigm encountered its first challenge as soon as 1901 when M. Friedländer published his *Der Antichrist in den vorchristlichen jüdischen*

⁹ Charles 1900: lxvii; this typology is repeated in idem 1920: 83–4.

¹⁰ Charles 1920: 77.

¹¹ Jenks 1991: 16–7 with an enumeration of the works within the consensus.

Quellen. The work is hardly ever referred to in scholarship, let alone critically engaged. The main reason for that is Friedländer's attempt, later widely criticised, to localise the esoteric teaching behind the Antichrist legend in the putative sect of Minim. The work, however, offers in its last four chapters a cogent analysis of sources pertaining to Beliar and the Antichrist.

Friedländer argues that one aspect of the gnostic teaching of the Minim was the fall away from God; this fall in turn was personified by Beliar, the forerunner of the Antichrist.¹² He identifies Beliar primarily as a deceiver, based on the usual LXX rendering of the Hebrew בְּלִיעֵל as παράνομος.¹³ Friedländer reasons that the appearances of παράνομος in the Second Temple Hellenistic literature, e.g. 1-2 Maccabees, should therefore be explained as referring in some way to Beliar.¹⁴ He then adduces rabbinic passages which identify Belial or Belial's sons as the transgressors of the law.¹⁵ This apparently stable tradition leads Friedländer to make inferences about texts, such as *Sib. Or.* 3.63-74, arguing for their closeness to the Beliar tradition and, consequently, its Jewish origin.

The figure of the Antichrist is treated at greater length. Friedländer identifies this figure as the chief apostate and opponent of God.¹⁶ Although Friedländer speaks about the Antichrist as a primarily Christian phenomenon, he sees it as being in essential unity with the Beliar tradition. The selection of the Christian sources he works with does not differ substantially from the primary sources discussed by Bousset and Charles, as he makes use of the NT, the *Sibylline Oracles*, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus. In line with the governing thesis of his book, he sees parallels between the Jewish ideas about a lawless

¹² Friedländer 1901: 118–9, 131.

¹³ Ibid. 119–20.

¹⁴ Ibid. 121.

¹⁵ Ibid. 122–6.

¹⁶ Ibid. 132.

end-time opponent coming from the Minim and the Antichrist arising from among the Jews. These parallels extend further, as Friedländer offers a closer look at the two peculiar features of the Jewish as well as Christian antimessianic belief, i.e. that the Antimessiah would originate from the tribe of Dan and would come from Capernaum.

A scholarly assessment of Friedländer's work, although it must reject his overarching thesis about the connection between the putative Minim and the Antichrist tradition, ought to recognise the author's enduring contributions. He was the first—and, sadly, one of the very few so far—to give a fair hearing to the Jewish rabbinic sources that might be relevant to the discussion. The reach back to the OT and its translations to find the possible sources for the later development of the antimessianic traditions is also commendable. Friedländer also keenly notes the mimetic aspect of the Antichrist, as he claims him to be a copy and a forgery of Christ.¹⁷

It must be noted, however, that the book suffers from serious shortcomings, as it overestimates the role of the Beliar material in the antimessianic tradition as a whole, and disregards the influence of other sources, such as Daniel. Nevertheless, *Der Antichrist in den vorchristlichen jüdischen Quellen* has been unjustly forgotten in the subsequent research and I will try to counter that by drawing on Friedländer's specific insights in my work.

Even less specific attention has been offered to the treatment of the Antichrist by P. Billerbeck.¹⁸ While commenting on 2 Thess 2:3 in the monumental and otherwise widely acclaimed *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (1926, published jointly with H.L. Strack), he approaches the question of the Antichrist and his supposed Jewish origin.¹⁹ Billerbeck's claim is contrary to the basic tenets of the Bousset-

¹⁷ Ibid. 174.

¹⁸ Billerbeck's contribution to the Antichrist scholarship is very rarely acknowledged; the only one to do so is Horbury 1998a: 113.

¹⁹ Str-B 3:637–40.

Charles' paradigm, as he argues that there are no points of contact between ancient Jewish literature and the depiction of the Antichrist in the NT.²⁰ Whilst he is ready to concede that the Jewish ideal of a Messiah could face political enemies, such as Rome or Gog and Magog, no evil religious counterpart is in sight in the Second Temple and early rabbinic sources.²¹ A figure combining these two strands would not arise in Jewish literature until the post-Talmudic times which saw a growth of interest in Armilus.

Billerbeck has done a great favour to scholarship by amassing a wealth of sources on the rabbinic ideas of antimessianic opponents. Nevertheless, his conclusion has not stood the test of time. The findings at Qumran, obviously unknown to him, necessarily change the scholarly view of antimessianism in the Second Temple period. Furthermore, the distinction between the political and the religious Antimessiah is anachronistic,²² since the ancient concepts of politics and religion are usually entangled beyond separation. The attempt to introduce an imperial statue into the Jerusalem Temple by Gaius, which was recounted by Philo and Josephus and possibly known to the earliest NT authors, shows exactly that. There one sees a political figure asserting their authority through an act of profoundly hostile religious implications for Judaism. Consequently, Billerbeck's division of the Antimessiahs is problematic, and hence his scepticism about there being a Jewish antimessianism in the pre-Talmudic era seems ungrounded.

A less sharp, but still notable attack on the Bousset-Charles' paradigm happened with the publication of B. Rigaux's *L'antéchrist et l'opposition au royaume messianique dans l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament* (1932). He departs from the line of his predecessors especially by extending his scrutiny firmly into all of the Hebrew Bible. He rightly argues that the study of the antimessianic material there contained is justified in

²⁰ Ibid. 637.

²¹ Ibid. 638.

²² For this criticism, see also Horbury 1998a: 127.

and of itself, but can also inform the Christian teachings; the same holds true for the research into Apocrypha.²³ He acknowledges the research done by his predecessors; nonetheless, he sees Bousset's work as dated and Charles' treatment in his commentary as too brief.²⁴

Rigaux's study of the antimessianic tradition in the Hebrew Bible relies on a very broad understanding of the term which would encompass the foreign rulers and opposition to God and Israel. This classification allows him to detect relevant material in Genesis 3, some Pentateuchal passages, as well as the prophets, especially Ezekiel, and Daniel. He transports the notion of the opposition to Israel as *per se* antimessianic into his reading of the Apocrypha, as he approaches *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and the *Testaments of Twelve Patriarchs*.²⁵ The concept of messianic opposition becomes sharper in the analysis of the *Psalms of Solomon*, especially *Psalms* 17 and 18, *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, and the *Sibylline Oracles* where the images of the Messiah and of his enemies alike gain specificity.²⁶ Rigaux concludes that, as far as the OT and the Apocrypha are concerned, the antimessianic opposition is primarily political and national in nature.²⁷

The second part of the book investigates the Antichrist in the writings of the NT, especially the Gospels (Synoptics as well as John), 2 Thessalonians, the Johannine Epistles, and Revelation. Rigaux sees a fundamental discontinuity between the perception of antimessianism in these and the OT, as the belief in Jesus necessarily eliminates the nationalistic element of any such enmity. Conversely, the Antichrist becomes the present persecutor of the Church.²⁸ On the other hand, the spiritual and supernatural opponent of

²³ Rigaux 1932: x.

²⁴ Ibid. x–xi. There is almost no interaction with Friedländer.

²⁵ Ibid. 174–9.

²⁶ Ibid. 180–202.

²⁷ Ibid. 203–204.

²⁸ Ibid. 396–7.

Christ is the focal point of the future embattlement and deception of the believers at the Eschaton.²⁹

Jenks might be right in counting Rigaux in the Bousset-Charles paradigm,³⁰ as he did not depart from their methods, nor did he arrive at remarkably different results, his criticism of their faults notwithstanding. Lietaert Peerbolte and Lorein also have a point in noticing serious shortcomings in Rigaux's work which overestimates continuity of traditions in the OT, interprets all opposition to God and Israel as antimessianic, and does not pay enough attention to the sources of the Second Temple period.³¹ Rigaux is also too keen to differentiate between the political and the religious aspect of the antimessianic opposition, as these two spheres cannot be easily distinguished in ancient contexts. For instance, the political foreignness of the opponents of Israel was at least to some degree caused by their divergent religious practice; it cannot be then claimed that their enmity was solely political.

The value of Rigaux's book, and the mark that distinguishes it from Bousset and Charles, is its thorough-going emphasis on the importance of the OT for understanding the Antichrist tradition. He points to the value of looking for its traces beyond the repertoire of sources used by Bousset, Charles or even Friedländer. Something to be accentuated throughout this thesis is that the pertinent Second Temple or early Christian sources draw on heavily on the Scriptures, thus making the Antimessiah or the Antichrist not only a future tyrant, but also an exegetical construct.

An important step forward in Antichrist scholarship was afforded by J. Ernst in his *Die eschatologischen Gegenspieler in den Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (1967) which is the most substantial book on the topic in the period between the works of Charles

²⁹ Ibid. 397–8.

³⁰ Jenks 1991: 16.

³¹ Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 10; Lorein 2003: 18.

and Jenks. The argument of the work is plain from the very start, as Ernst argues that the NT does not know of a singular Antichrist, but rather speaks about multiple different eschatological opponents.³² As opposed to Bousset and Charles, Ernst is not interested in arriving at a stable mythic story about the Antichrist but rather in the genealogy of the particular end-time antagonists.³³

Four passages from the NT receive direct attention from Ernst: the Synoptic apocalypse, i.e. Mark 13 and its parallels, 2 Thess 2:1-12, Revelation, and the Johannine Epistles. He is careful to observe the specific differences between these sources, such as the character of the opposition or whether the opponent is an individual or a collective, and not to force them into a uniform pattern.

The great methodological value of Ernst's work lies in the claim that the NT authors he discussed "keineswegs nur das niederschreiben, was ihnen unmittelbar eingegeben wird, sondern aus reichem Traditionsgut schöpfen".³⁴ Therefore, in a move not unlike that performed by Rigaux, he seeks in the OT the sources of inspiration and motifs for the later antimessianic tradition. His list includes seven such places: (1) Daniel, (2) the Gog oracle in Ezekiel, (3) the enemy for the north, (4) the eschatological opposition of the nations, (5) the serpent in Genesis 3, and finally (6) the mythical material. Each of these has contributed in a particular way to the later antimessianic depictions, with Daniel exerting the most pervasive influence on the NT in that regard.

As rightly noted by Jenks and Lietaert Peerbolte,³⁵ Ernst's work marks a shift in the academic discussion, since it moves away from the all-encompassing theories of Bousset and Charles towards an appreciation of the evidence in its diversity. My work will also draw on Ernst's methodological innovation, as he seeks to unearth the genealogy

³² Ernst 1967: 3.

³³ Ibid. xi.

³⁴ Ibid. 182.

³⁵ Jenks 1991: 18–9; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 11–2.

of the antimessianic discourse. His investigation of the Scriptural sources of this opposition is commendable and still deserves careful scholarly attention. Ernst does justice to the Antichrist as a tradition which arises from, preserves, and creatively rethinks key Biblical passages.

Nevertheless, it remains problematic that Ernst makes very little use of the Pseudepigrapha and none whatsoever of the DSS (some of which, including the *War Scroll*, had already been published by that time). This omission undercuts the value of his recourse to the OT as the source of inspiration for the antimessianic tradition. The ancient authors most certainly read and interpreted their Scriptures to inform their eschatology, but did so in and under the influence of their peculiar theological and cultural milieu, which can only be illuminated by the scrutiny of extracanonical writings and the DSS.

Ernst produced, despite his shortcomings, the most substantial and valuable corrigendum to the Bousset-Charles' paradigm, as he offered new ways of looking at the relevant Biblical material.

1.2.4 *The revision of the consensus (Jenks, Lietaert Peerbolte)*

The Origins and Development of the Antichrist Myth (1991) by G.C. Jenks is the consummation of the erosion of what he himself calls the Bousset-Charles' consensus about the Antichrist. Jenks' main argument is that what came to be known as the Antichrist was a Christian appropriation of the earlier Jewish traditions about the opposition to God with a Christocentric tendency to it.³⁶ He rejects Bousset's idea of a much older oral tradition standing behind the extant testimonies about the Antichrist, granting at the same time the importance of oral transmission of some of those texts.³⁷

³⁶ Jenks 1991: 361–3.

³⁷ Ibid. 359.

Jenks' method is revealed in the order he approaches the sources. The first part of his book analyses the evidence from the period 180-300 CE. This constitutes a break from the scholarly tradition which saw Patristic testimonies as a later development and clarification of the already existing traditions. Jenks argues that "[p]rior to Irenaeus the evidence for the Antichrist myth is problematic, but from ca 180 onwards there is no doubt that such a figure is being written about."³⁸ On the basis of his reading of the NT, as well as the Christian apocrypha and the Patristic sources, he develops what he calls "sketches" of the Antichrist.³⁹ These characteristics are ultimately not unlike those presented by Bousset, although Jenks places emphasis on the Antichrist's pride and cunning.

This pattern is later imposed onto earlier sources as Jenks attempts to trace the development of the Antichrist myth. He distinguishes four distinct pre-Christian Jewish strands of tradition: *Chaoskampf*, the Satan myth, the False Prophet tradition, and the Endtyrant tradition.⁴⁰ It is only in the NT that these traditions begin to merge, so as to become the Antichrist myth in Irenaeus. Consequently, Jenks sees the Antichrist as an early Christian creation, based on earlier traditions but in itself unprecedented in the Jewish milieu.

Jenks' methodology definitely deserves merit, as it has a clear idea about how to construct the definition of the Antichrist. His answer to that is remarkably simple and seemingly plausible—such definition should come from those writings where the Antichrist is first mentioned. Importantly, Jenks embraces many sources, ranging from Daniel to the pre-Nicaean Fathers; importantly, he is the first one to incorporate the insights from the DSS into the Antichrist scholarship on a large scale.

³⁸ Ibid. 27.

³⁹ Ibid. 49–116.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 363.

Nonetheless, there are serious risks in taking this path. Jenks' approach is not fully guarded against the threat of anachronism, as he derives his definition of the Antichrist solely from the Christian, and particularly Patristic sources. By judging whether earlier sources represent a similar construct of an antimessianic opponent, Jenks disregards the evolution of such construct in the Jewish and Christian contexts. Therefore, his conclusion about the absence of a Jewish antecedent to the Christian Antichrist is strongly biased, as he defined the Antichrist *qua* Christian. Furthermore, the author does not offer any self-reflection on his problematic choice of framework within which to place the Antichrist. Jenks refers to the Antichrist as a myth most of the time, including in the title of his book, although none of the ancient sources understand this eschatological expectation to be a μῦθος. He also seems oblivious to the methodological aspects of the study of myth. I will offer a generalised critique of the mythical framework as applied to the antimessianic expectation in the later section of this chapter. In sum, Jenks' study by its innovative treatment of sources and a new methodological approach transformed the scholarly discussion, but at the same time is not without its own significant difficulties.

Jenks' work on the Antichrist myth is a watershed in the academic discussion of the topic in that, even when challenged, it casts a long shadow over any subsequent contributions to the debate. L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte's *The Antecedents of Antichrist* (1996) represents exactly that. In his book and in the earlier review of Jenks,⁴¹ Lietaert Peerbolte offers some of the most penetrating critiques of Jenks' approach, and there is some useful progress made in terms of methodology. At the same time, his own conclusions do not land far away from those of Jenks. This is because he agrees with his basic assertion that "the notion of the Antichrist arose from a christocentric adaptation of earlier traditions".⁴²

⁴¹ Lietaert Peerbolte 1991: 377; idem 1996: 13–4.

⁴² Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 13.

In the first part of the study, Lietaert Peerbolte offers an analysis of the Christian sources representing the Antichrist tradition, including the NT, *Didache* 16, *Ascension of Isaiah* 4, and *Apocalypse of Peter* 2:7-13. Unlike Jenks, Lietaert Peerbolte does not try to distil a narrative framework which would then be applied to other sources. Instead, he uncovers the major trajectories and themes the early Christian writers supposedly develop while thinking about the Antichrist: the worldwide eschatological upheaval, false prophecy, end-time tyranny, and the Beliar tradition.⁴³

The discussion included in the second half of the book focuses on the Jewish sources: Daniel, *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, the DSS, the *Assumption of Moses*, *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, and the *Sibylline Oracles*. Lietaert Peerbolte compares the dominant antimessianic themes present in these writings with those represented in early Christian texts and concludes that these two sets differ significantly. Whereas the Jewish sources of this period foreground the role of the eschatological tyrant and a Gentile invasion, the Christian ones focus on false prophecy. Furthermore, the belief in Christ was a catalyst for the early Christian expectation of a singular evil counterpart to the messianic figure—something much rarer in Judaism.⁴⁴

Lietaert Peerbolte's work is commendable for a greater stress on methodological clarity in its approach to sources. It moves away from Jenks' anachronistic definition of the Antichrist "myth" and looks at both Christian and Jewish sources in their own right and without expecting them to tell the same story. Lietaert Peerbolte's approach leads to a much more fine-grained picture of the antimessianic traditions.

Nevertheless, his conclusions do not represent a considerable step forward for the scholarship and have been since read as a reiteration and expansion of Jenks' views.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid. 210.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 342–3.

⁴⁵ Horbury 1998a: 113; Lorein 2003: 24–5.

Lietaert Peerbolte thinks that the concept of the Antichrist, although drawing heavily on Jewish traditions, constitutes a uniquely Christian reconfiguration. The previously disparate eschatological opponents coalesced into a singular one due to the person of Christ whose presence called for a foil.⁴⁶ One of the major problems of Lietaert Peerbolte's treatment is that it shies away from defining the Antichrist. This leads him to the same conclusion that was achieved by the overly stringent definition of Jenks, namely that the Antichrist can only be understood as the anti-*Christ* for whom the Christian Messiah is a prerequisite.

Furthermore, the belief in Christ cannot on its own explain a stable notion of the Antichrist, as some early Christian writings, e.g. the Synoptic Apocalypse and Revelation preserve the plurality of such figures whilst sharing in the belief about Jesus' messianic status. Secondly, the delay of around 150 years in introducing an actual narrative about the Antichrist by Irenaeus cannot be linked to the earlier "fervent anticipation of the imminent end" which precluded a more robust vision of "the events that would have to precede the end".⁴⁷ The author of Revelation most definitely harbours a strong and imminent eschatological expectation, at the same time constructs an arcane narrative of what is to be expected before the arrival of the New Jerusalem.

In some sense, the work of Lietaert Peerbolte complements that of Jenks in a way similar to how Charles corrected the errors of Bousset, at the same time strengthening his conclusions. Although *The Antecedents of the Antichrist* offers a lot of cogent exegesis, some of its fundamental assumptions are flawed and still in need of correction.

⁴⁶ Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 344–5.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 345.

1.2.5 *Most recent developments (Horbury, Lorein)*

W. Horbury's "Antichrist among Jews and Christians" (1998) continues the renewed interest in the Antichrist in the wake of Jenks' work, but counters its main conclusions.⁴⁸ Horbury ventures on a risky voyage towards a definition of the Antichrist that would not derive from the Patristic writings and could possibly be applied to earlier sources without anachronism. While noting that the idea itself belongs to Christianity, he argues that "there is much to suggest that, like the figure of the christ or messiah, [the Antichrist] derived from pre-Christian Judaism in its Greek and Roman setting".⁴⁹ This fact is supposedly evidenced by the lack of explanation attached to the first appearances of the figure in the NT and the early Christian reliance on the Jewish traditions when describing it.

Horbury is able to find multiple passages in the Second Temple literature suggesting the presence of an antimessianic opponent, as well as the Scriptural passages that seem to have incited such speculation, e.g. Num 24:17; Isa 11:4; Ezekiel 38-39; Psalm 2. These are received in the rabbinic texts speaking about the end-time messianic opponent, and also find their way into the Christian apocalyptic, as is the case with Isa 11:4 to which 2 Thess 2:8 and Rev 11:5 hark back. Horbury notes also the multiple instances of Messiah's fight with his enemies in the Second Temple Jewish sources, including the DSS. Horbury judges that "[t]he great foe to be slain by the messiah was therefore a familiar figure in Jewish biblical interpretation of the Second Temple period".⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Jewish Antimessiah and the Christian Antichrist are to be seen as a continuum rather than two distinct categories which may or may not exhibit similarities.⁵¹ Interestingly, Horbury notes the similarities between the Jewish and

⁴⁸ Reprinted under the same title in Horbury 2003: 329–50. References are made to the original article.

⁴⁹ Horbury 1998a: 116.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 126.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Christian antimessianism and the Graeco-Roman myths about the Titans' assault on the gods.

Horbury's study offers a sound methodology which allows Jewish sources to be included alongside Christian ones. This methodology is grounded in defining the Antichrist in what can be termed functionalist way, i.e. as any agent that would have the function of an Antimessiah, that is, the Messiah's enemy and/or false imitator. This approach is not prejudiced towards the evidence, as it does not construe superfluous criteria that would determine which sources speak about the Antichrist. At the same time, it provides a way of establishing which antagonists can be said to be genuinely antimessianic; to perform that function, they need to be in conflict with a messianic figure. Furthermore, Horbury's identification of several core OT texts appears to be justified in view of their Jewish and Christian reception; this claim merits attention and will be considered in CHAPTER II. Consequently, Horbury's work on the Antichrist represents progress from the problems of previous scholarship, especially that of Jenks, in terms of methodology and selection of sources.

The reaction against Jenks' thesis, begun by Horbury, is fully fleshed out in G.W. Lorein's *The Antichrist Theme in the Intertestamental Period* (2003). The book primarily argues for the presence of Jewish antecedents to the Christian expectation of the Antichrist in the Second Temple period as well as in the OT. Importantly, Lorein thinks that the Antichrist theme can be successfully elucidated without a recourse to the Babylonian or Persian mythologies (but not without the insights from the Graeco-Roman belief systems, however), but should be rather understood as stemming from the OT and the history of Israel.⁵² In this, he counters the well-established scholarly approach dating back to Gunkel's *Schöpfung und Chaos*.

⁵² Ibid. 233.

Lorein's work offers an important methodological insight, as he notes that the history of the Antichrist research has been plagued by the lack of clarity about how to define the figure.⁵³ His definition names the following features of the Antichrist: humanity; appearance at the end of times; subordination to Satan; deceptive character; being a tyrant; claiming divinity.⁵⁴ Lorein construes it on the basis of the NT and Patristic evidence.⁵⁵ Consequently, his definition is a narrative one which is problematic because, as Lorein himself admits, no single source presents such a narrative in its entirety. This way of defining the Antichrist is remarkably close to the descriptions offered by Bousset and Jenks who also distinguished it on the basis of a story-like framework. Therefore, Lorein imposes definitional stability on sources that represent fluidity.

Having formulated an outline of the Antichrist theme, Lorein points to several passages in the OT which, in his opinion, encapsulate a rudimentary antimessianic image: Deut 13:1-6; the encounter between David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, and Zech 11:15-17. He then proceeds to discuss the possible antimessianic overtones in a wide range of the intertestamental writings, such as 1-3 Maccabees, *Judith*, the third *Sibylline Oracle*, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and the *Psalms of Solomon*. He concludes that many of them contain some notion of enmity which he then is quick to relate to the Antichrist theme. Next, he approaches the DSS where he also discovers some elements of the antimessianic theme.

Lorein's rejection of Jenks' and Lietaert Peernbolte's claim about the absence of a Jewish Antimessiah is interesting and resonates with my own argument. Nevertheless, his approach to sources constitutes the major weakness. The author, having formulated a definition of the Antichrist, repeatedly fails to apply it consistently to the texts under

⁵³ Lorein 2003: 25–6.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 29.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 26–9.

consideration. None of those is proven to yield the conjectured theme in its entirety. Consequently, Lorein claims for that the Antichrist theme appears in writings that envisage a historical tyrant, e.g. Antiochus in the Maccabean literature or Holofernes in *Judith*, solely because the Antichrist would also be a tyrant or because these writings bear some resemblance to the Goliath narrative in 1 Samuel. In general, Lorein often provides very few persuasive arguments for the presence of actual antimessianism in the sources he discusses, and focuses instead on distant allusions and parallels.

The argument that the Antichrist theme draws on specific Scriptural passages is an interesting one, a form of which I will present in CHAPTER II. A great deal of antimessianic expectation in Second Temple Judaism, the NT, and also later is fuelled by exegesis of certain core Biblical texts. I will, however, disagree with Lorein in his selection. None of the texts he presents as foundational—Deut 13:1-6, 1 Samuel 17, or Zech 11:15-17—receive much exegetical interest in later antimessianic speculation. I will therefore propose an alternative set of core Hebrew Bible texts and argue that their *Wirkungsgeschichte* profoundly influenced the development of the antimessianic tradition.

1.2.6 *Looking beyond the Scriptures (McGinn, Hughes, Bădiliță)*

Aside from the historical-critical discussions focused on the texts from Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity, recent years have seen a rise in studies which bridge this area of academic discussion with that of the role of Antichristological expectations in later periods. The main value of these works is that they present the Antichrist story as a stable narrative re-emerging in different historical periods. Interest in that sort of a project is already visible in embryonic form in Bousset who does not hesitate to draw on early Mediaeval sources, thus proving the larger cultural viability of the Antichrist story.

A popular, yet academically rigorous history of that story was provided by B. McGinn in his *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of Human Fascination with Evil* (1994) where he traces the development of the Antichrist belief from antiquity to the present. The book accentuates the flow of the ideas and motifs from the Jewish sources into later periods and writings. Whereas the way McGinn understands the ancient sources does not differ substantially from Jenks' approach, he is the first to pose critical questions about the framework within which the Antichrist should be understood.⁵⁶ He distinguishes between myths, legends, and folk tales, and places the apocalyptic discourse in between the two first categories. Whilst Jewish, and later also Christian, eschatology goes beyond the standard mythical placement of events *in illo tempore*, it nonetheless mythologises historical events and thus elevates them to a level of an archetypal narrative "to create a new genre: the future, or apocalyptic, legend".⁵⁷ Although I believe this approach can and should be amended, McGinn's methodological reflection is very valuable for a proper understanding of this topic.

Another work on the Antichrist, which begins with a discussion of the ancient sources and carries on into later periods, is K.L. Hughes' *Constructing Antichrist: Paul, Biblical Commentary, and the Development of Doctrine in the Early Middle Ages* (2005). This book offers an unusual take on the growth of the Antichrist tradition, as it traces it through the Patristic and medieval re-readings of the key Christian antimessianic text, namely 2 Thessalonians. Hughes argues against the view that the Biblical text and its interpretation constituted a mere surface, upon which current apocalyptic expectations were projected. Instead, "early medieval commentaries on 2 Thessalonians constitute a tradition of Scriptural inquiry through which the doctrines of Antichrist and the end of the world are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed over the first Christian

⁵⁶ McGinn 1994: 17–20.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 19.

millennium”.⁵⁸ Hughes’ book, although it cannot tell the entire story of the Antichrist, which is not exhausted by either 2 Thessalonians or its reception, holds two valuable insights. Firstly, it foregrounds the continuity of the antimessianic traditions which are taken up from texts deemed to be authoritative and then carefully transformed and elucidated by later interpreters, whose work might of course become itself authoritative later on. Secondly, Hughes cautions against treating the reception of apocalyptic texts simply as repurposing them for new socio-political contexts. It is more fruitful to think of it as having a genuine exegetical task in mind, i.e. aiming at seeing the actual meaning of a given text.

The year 2005 also saw the publication of C. Bădiliță’s *Métamorphoses de l’Antichrist chez les pères de l’église* which, beginning with the study of the Antichrist in Daniel and the NT, focuses primarily on the Church Fathers’ vision of the figure. Having discussed authors such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Augustine, Bădiliță categorises their ideas about the Antichrist as (1) mythical, non-history and of cosmic significance (Cyril); (2) historical, where the Antichrist is end-time tyrant, sometimes preceded by heretics (Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Commodianus, Victorinus, among others); and (3) spiritual, where the Antichrist is personified in the present by false interpreters of Scripture (Origen) or possibly in every believer (Augustine).⁵⁹

Bădiliță’s study has furthered the Antichrist scholarship in two distinct ways. Firstly, it shows the continuity and change of antimessianism between the NT and the Church Fathers and among the Fathers themselves. Interestingly, he notes that the Patristic thought on the subject does not represent a linear evolution but rather a

⁵⁸ Hughes 2005: 18–9.

⁵⁹ Bădiliță 2005: 507–9.

dialectical polyphony.⁶⁰ Secondly, Bădiliță does reflect, unlike many scholars, on the methodological framework of his investigation which he subsumes under the term “myth”. This choice is not without justification, as he points to the fluidity and cultural power of the Antichrist story across centuries and cultures.⁶¹ Although I will ultimately disagree with this approach, Bădiliță’s insight is highly valuable and well-grounded.

1.2.7 *Summary*

Scholarship on the Antichrist has arrived at important conclusions since the magisterial publications of Gunkel, Bousset, and Charles. Nevertheless, the debate is still entrenched in the contrary positions that either propose or deny the existence of a coherent antimessianic story before the Patristic period.

There are three major reasons for this confusion. Firstly, no stable definition of the Antichrist has been arrived at, and the ways in which scholars construe it vary greatly. Early scholarship, represented primarily by Bousset and Charles, failed to offer a clear definition altogether and conflated various eschatological figures. Similar unwillingness to offer a single definition is present in Lietaert Peerbolte. On the other hand, Jenks and Lorein, though in the end stating different conclusions, defined the Antichrist by providing a narrative framework, based on certain traits, e.g. human or supernatural status, connection to Satan, deceptive activity, etc. These features were derived from the later Christian sources with undoubted references to the Antichrist and then applied to the earlier writings. The third way of formulating the definition is to be found in Horbury who understands the Antichrist functionally as the opponent of the Messiah.

Secondly, there has been little discussion, let alone agreement with regard to the theoretical framework of the Antichrist figure, i.e. the type of the narrative that the

⁶⁰ Ibid. 505–6.

⁶¹ Ibid. 6–8. Interestingly, just like McGinn, he discusses both myth and legend, but, unlike McGinn, he chooses the former as the preferred framework.

references to the Antichrist fall into. It is, however, essential to establish the form and the structure of that story, as it determines the ways in which to investigate it. Multiple terms have been used for that purpose. Bousset applies the label “die Sage”, whereas Ernst calls for “eine Genealogie der Endzeitgestalten”.⁶² The word “myth” is used by Charles, Jenks, Bădiliță, and, in a qualified sense, by Horbury.⁶³ More recently, the terms “legend” (McGinn) and “theme” (Lorein) have been in the vogue. These terms are not, however, in any sense synonymous and each calls for a different methodological approach.

Thirdly, the selection of the Jewish and Christian sources relevant for the study of the Antichrist is not stable across scholarship. Most of the authors include the NT and pseudepigraphic evidence, but their interest in the material from the OT, the DSS, and the Patristic writings varies which inevitably leads to discrepancies in the resulting pictures of the Antichrist.

1.3 **Methodology**

The aim of this study is to understand the Antichrist story by extending the range of pertinent sources and placing them within a new methodological framework. I will therefore move on to propose my solutions to the methodological difficulties inherent in the Antichrist scholarship.

1.3.1 *Definition*

As has been noted, offering a succinct description of what the Antichrist was in early Christianity and, possibly, in Second Temple Judaism has been a challenge to scholars. This cannot be escaped, however, as the lack of definition undermines the selection of sources which would have to be chosen arbitrarily. At the same time, more robust definitions based on a narrative outline are likely to exclude sources where only

⁶² Ernst 1967: xi.

⁶³ Horbury 1998a: 132.

elements of such an outline are present. One could limit oneself to surveying only the texts in which the words ἀντίχριστος or *Antichristus* occur.⁶⁴ This solution, however, would yield a patently incomplete and incoherent set of results, including, for instance, Hippolytus' *Commentary on Daniel* but disregarding the significance of Daniel itself. Furthermore, as it will be shown in CHAPTER IV, the first occurrence of the word ἀντίχριστος in 1 John 2:18 appeals to the audience's familiarity with this figure. Therefore, the explicit mentions of the Antichrist rely on what is implicitly known about him.

It therefore seems advisable to take the approach signalled by Horbury, and to define the Antichrist in keeping with the literal sense of the term as the "Antimesiah", i.e. someone who opposes and/or sets themselves up to be the Messiah.⁶⁵ This definition could be understood as functionalist, as any being functioning as the antimessianic opponent would fall under it. It clearly differentiates between the enemies of the Messiah and those of God himself, although it is still possible for one being to perform both functions. The definition allows a sufficient breadth of sources to be investigated in the course of my study, as it does not preclude the Jewish sources from harbouring such an idea. At the same time, it is precise enough not to encompass all kinds of eschatological opposition but only that associated with a messianic figure.

This definition has two important and interrelated consequences. Firstly, it makes any investigation of the Antichrist in any ancient text dependent on asserting that that text expresses an expectation of a messianic figure. Antimesianism cannot exist without messianism. In a sense, then, the definitional problems persists, only this time with regard to the identity of the Messiah. Fortunately, the scholarly attempts to establish the essence

⁶⁴ This solution, with reference to the word "Messiah" and its lexical equivalents, is advocated by Novenson 2017: 26–30.

⁶⁵ The twofold characterisation as an enemy and a deceptive imitator is embedded in the Greek word ἀντίχριστος itself; see the analogous forms cited by Horbury 1998a: 117.

of ancient messianism abound and by and large point clearly towards the idea of the Messiah as the eschatological redeemer.⁶⁶ I accept this definition, as it does justice to a vast number of texts that explicitly engage in the messianic discourse. On the other hand, Novenson rightly notes that this definition-based approach often produces mismatches when end-time saviours in ancient writings are categorised as Messiahs without that term even appearing in the document.⁶⁷ My understanding of the word “Messiah” will therefore rely on two explanations: the one mentioned above, with the messianic figure *in the broad sense* identifiable with an eschatological redeemer, and an anointed figure, that is, a literal Messiah *in the strict sense*.

The second issue raised by my definition of the Antichrist is that, while linking him closely to ancient messianism, I problematise his connection with other eschatological opponents and evil supernatural figures of ancient Judaism and Christianity. Most importantly, I do not focus specifically on the significance and development of Satan who is often associated with the Antichrist in the scholarship, but who is not by definition Messiah’s enemy.⁶⁸ Indeed, as I understand it, Satan and the Antichrist are two different kinds of figures, with the former being an opponent of God specifically and the latter a function to be fulfilled by any eschatological figure. As a result, Satan does happen to play the role of the Messiah’s foe, e.g. in the Christian reception of Genesis 3:15 to be discussed in CHAPTER II.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the stories of Satan and Antichrist, in spite of their points of contact, are of different origin and nature.

⁶⁶ See Novenson 2017: 26–7 for a survey of the major definitions.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 2017: 28.

⁶⁸ Literature on Satan is plentiful; the monographs and edited volumes on this topic published in the last couple of decades include Russell 1977; idem 1981; Forsyth 1989; Day 1988; Garrett 1989; Page 1995; Pagels 1995; Wray, Mobley 2005; Kelly 2006; Bell 2007; Brown 2015; Dochhorn, Rudnig-Zelt, Wold 2016; and Tilly, Morgenstern, Drecol 2016.

⁶⁹ See below, pp. 62–5.

1.3.2 *Framework*

The question of what kind of story the Antichrist material constitutes is prerequisite to achieving any conceptual clarity about the subject. Whereas Biblical scholarship, not only with regard to the Antichrist, uses terms such as “myth”, “legend”, and the like very freely, anthropology of religion and literary criticism can offer insights about how distinctive these labels actually are.

Probably the most stable and meaningful one was “myth” which term has been the mooring point for anthropologists and historians of religion for most of the last two centuries. The study of mythology stood at the cradle of the modern critical study of the Bible, and was most often understood in relation and opposition to the idea of history. Myths were often understood as being retellings of history (often imagined, as is the case for creation myths) through the lens of the supernatural.⁷⁰ The historical aspect of mythical narratives is central to perhaps the most influential proponent of the myth-oriented Biblical scholarship, namely D.F. Strauss who believed in the possibility of separating, at least to some degree, the historical from the mythical.⁷¹

The significance of the idea of myth so understood for the Antichrist story lies in the fact that myths, if understood as necessarily beholden to history at least to some degree, cannot grasp the essence of that story which is primarily a futuristic expectation. Although the narratives about the messianic opponents draw on historical figures and events, such as the reigns of Antiochus or Nero, they transport those adversaries into the

⁷⁰ See Koch 2003: 31–43 for a survey of the engagements of the 19th-century German Biblical scholarship with mythology. One ought to remember that the historicising understanding of mythology was first argued already by Euhemerus in the fourth century BCE; for a discussion of his thought and the fragments of his work see Brown 1946.

⁷¹ Strauss 1973: 87–92. Among the early studies of mythology, one should note J.L. George’s *Mythus und Sage* (1837). George makes distinction between a myth which derives the supposed facts from philosophical and religious ideas, and a legend (“Sage”) which represents history mythicised, supplying the actual events of the distant past with mythical explanation. The latter seems to fit the way Bousset uses the term “Sage”.

future. The Antichrist narrative is thus much closer to prophecy than to an embellished recounting of the past.

The second reason why myth is an unsuitable framework for the study of the Antichrist is that myths tend to perform an etiological function, i.e. they serve as explanations of the way the world is. Seeing myths as essentially explanatory is common currency among anthropologists since E.B. Tylor's seminal work *Primitive Culture* (1871) which saw myth and religion in general as intended to offer explanations of concrete states of affairs.⁷² Under this interpretation, apart from natural phenomena, a myth also "recounts the history of an institution, a rite, or a societal development".⁷³ This understanding of myth as essentially aetiological is shared by M. Eliade who states: "Myth, then, is always an account of "creation"; it relates how something was produced, began to *be*".⁷⁴ B. Malinowski, while criticising the strongly naturalistic reading of mythology as a quasi-scientific or quasi-historical explanation of events, still maintains that myth functions as the origin and source of rituals, beliefs, and morals, and as such a "living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies."⁷⁵ The Antichrist tradition does not perform any of these roles, as the story relies primarily (though not exclusively) on futuristic expectation rather than on an explanation of the present. Unlike myths, the Antichrist narrative does not explain or organise reality, but rather foretells its transformation by an eschatological figure.

As the term "myth" and the closely related "legend" appear defective, some less rigid frameworks must be sought. One of the core arguments of my present study is that

⁷² Tylor 1873: 2.392 et passim. See also Segal 1999: 7–35; Strenski 2015: 45–6.

⁷³ Jamme 2006: 3.1285; for application to the Bible see Long 1968.

⁷⁴ Eliade 1963: 6 (*italics original*); see also idem 1987: 63.

⁷⁵ Malinowski 1982: 100.

the concept of tradition is better suited to accommodate the evidence.⁷⁶ Now, “tradition” is another word that is used extensively in the scholarship on ancient Judaism and Christianity without having an exact definition.⁷⁷ However, the etymology of the word—*trado* in Latin and *παράδιδωμι* in Greek, both meaning “I hand over”—suggests strongly that any tradition must be concerned with certain practices or ideas being transmitted between different persons, generations, or groups across time.

Throughout my investigation I will argue that the antimessianic expectation relies on transmission and reuse of certain core texts, ideas, and motifs which are elaborated on by subsequent authors.⁷⁸ Furthermore, apart from their sources, the ancient discussions of the Antimessiah often share details and motifs, such as his deceitful imitation of the Messiah, his origin from the tribe of Dan, the length of his earthly rule, etc. Finally, the authors often appear aware or even make explicit references to other examples of earlier antimessianic speculation (noticeable especially among the Patristic authors discussed in CHAPTER VI). They are thus aware of being a part of a larger stream of eschatology focused on the Antichrist. The Antichrist story thus emerges across ancient Jewish and Christian literary corpora in discussions based on similar sources, incorporating similar features, and pointing towards one another. The process of how these discussions arose can rightly be understood as a traditionary process.

H. Najman’s reflection on such practices proves highly illuminating. In her 2013 article on *4 Ezra*, she argues that that work creates a textual tradition tied to a founding figure, namely Ezra, which recreates that figure by absorbing the characteristics of other

⁷⁶ The term “tradition” has already been used in relation to the Antichrist story; see Dunbar 1979: 84–93 who, however, does not try to define it. Interestingly, Jenks 1991: 358, too, uses the phrase “the Antichrist tradition”, but speaks about “the Antichrist myth” just a couple of lines below, testifying to the deep-seated methodological disorientation of past scholarship.

⁷⁷ The lack of definitional clarity is the case even for projects which centre around the very notion of tradition, e.g. *La Bible en ses traditions* edited by Albl et al. 2010.

⁷⁸ The importance of traditional transmission of Biblical texts is demonstrated by Kugel 1998 who, though without defining the concept of tradition explicitly, shows how Biblical passages and stories were read, transformed, and handed over by ancient interpreters in a traditionary process.

key Biblical personages. The traditionary process is therefore a creative technique of interpretation which draws together various Biblical motifs so as to reinvigorate them in the face of new religious and communal challenges (the destruction of the Second Temple in the case of *4 Ezra*). This framework cannot be directly projected unto the antimessianic story because the Antimessiah is by no means an auctorial or authoritative figure. Otherwise, however, the antimessianic texts draw earlier writings into their own tradition to reconfigure and illuminate them; this is the case with Isa 11:4 and 2 Thess 2:8, multiple rabbinic texts and the Gog oracle, etc. The interpreters reinvent the antimessianic expectation by exposing the potential of prior texts to be read as antimessianic, thus creating “a tradition that would not exist if not for its late exemplar”.⁷⁹

The notion of a traditionary process as presented by Najman is also able to do justice to the aspect of antimessianism which differentiates it from myth, i.e. the futuristic expectation. Najman argues that “tradition [...] has both a progressive or future-oriented direction, and a retrogressive or past-oriented direction”.⁸⁰ As the apocalyptic writers envisage the opponent of the Messiah, they engage older texts and historical events, but at the same time direct their gaze towards the future and expect such a figure to arise. The antimessianic expectation entangles the past, present, and future, which cannot be encapsulated with the standard mythic framework, but can be fruitfully understood as a tradition.

M. Novenson’s recent deconstruction of the concept of a messianic idea in favour of the “grammar of messianism” also helps in establishing my methodology. In his view, “what we call messianism is most basically a way of talking about the world, a set of linguistic resources [...] inherited from the Jewish Scriptures”.⁸¹ Novenson argues that

⁷⁹ Najman 2013: 109.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Novenson 2017: 14.

the texts talking about the Messiah are not outward facets of a much larger underlying idea, which is nothing but a modern production, but rather users of a common, Bible-based language. The importance of this point cannot be overstated and must modify the scholarly understanding of the antimessianic speculation. Consequently, whenever I will speak about the “Antichrist tradition”, “antimessianism”, or the like, I will do so without implying that antimessianism was a larger movement or, as Bousset had it, an esoteric tradition. The texts I will scrutinise cannot be plausibly read as testaments of a persistent and popular expectation of the arrival of the Antimessiah. They portray him based on core Scriptural texts, which are otherwise often read as messianic prophecies, and negotiate these depictions with other eschatological documents and their own historical contexts.

1.3.3 *Sources*

This thesis aims to study the Antichrist tradition partly as a rereading of authoritative texts with antimessianic potential and confronting them with changing political circumstances. This goal requires me to take into account a breadth of sources, both Jewish and Christian, over an extended time period. Following on from the work of Rigaux, Ernst, and Lorein, I will identify and analyse core texts from the OT from which later antimessianic tradition draws, thus retroactively placing them within that tradition. It will be necessary and fruitful to traverse the standard canonical limits of the OT and NT to recover the entire scope of the antimessianic expectation by scrutinising the DSS, Pseudepigrapha, and Apocrypha. Much attention will be devoted to the study of the NT the Church Fathers where antimessianic discourse becomes explicit and complex.

Finally, I will not be able to engage the Rabbinic sources fully. I will only touch upon them in Chapter II to discuss their antimessianic readings of the Hebrew Bible. Rabbinic antimessianism, although definitely present in texts such as *Sefer Zerubbabel*, has not yet been studied. I cannot undertake this valuable task, as the relevant sources are

considerably later (usually early mediaeval) and therefore cannot substantially contribute to or change my claims about *ancient* Jewish antimessianism with which, to be sure, they are in close continuity.

I will also not discuss the Graeco-Roman traditions that might have possibly influenced the sources I discuss. Some partial parallels, especially to the Titan's struggle with the Olympic gods, can indeed be found and some ancient authors, most notably Celsus (in *Cels.* 6.42), made the connection explicitly.⁸² These parallels, however, would require a different methodological framework and cannot be subsumed under the heading of "antimessianism", as nothing like the Judeo-Christian messianism is known to Greeks or Romans.

1.4 Motifs

Having discussed the definition, framework, and sources of the Antimessiah/Antichrist, I need to offer a brief explanation of the two motifs I claim to be at the heart of the tradition. In the sources to be discussed in my thesis, I distinguish two most basic ways in which the conflict between the Messiah and his foes develops.

Firstly, it can unfold as a violent confrontation involving the two parties actually fighting one another, with the Messiah eventually subduing his opponent. This motif functions within the larger framework of the end-time combat between the forces of God and evil, most famously represented in the *War Scroll* from Qumran.

The second mode of conflict is much more subtle and indirect in nature. It consists of the Antimessiah imitating the Messiah's nature, qualities, and actions, as well as possibly God and other agents, in order to usurp their status for themselves and gain followers among people. Although deceitful imitation is a prelude and a cause of the subsequent violent conflict (so e.g. in Revelation), some authors do not make this

⁸² Horbury 1998a: 127–33; McFall 2011-2: 106–50.

sequence apparent and focus on the antimessianic mimicry alone (Hippolytus in *De Christo et Antichristo*).

To encapsulate this aspect of the eschatological conflict I will borrow René Girard's term "mimetic rivalry". Girard's whole *œuvre*, which straddles the divide between literary theory, anthropology, and theology, has come to loom large behind modern studies of violence and imitation—concepts key to my understanding of antimessianism.⁸³ Girard perceives mimesis not simply as representation of reality (as did Plato) but rather as a feature of human desires and thus as an acquisitive impulse. The idea of mimetic rivalry denotes for him the imitation of somebody else's desires which ultimately leads to antagonism between the two desiring subjects.⁸⁴ Translating this framework into the language of eschatology, the Antichrist desires Christ's status and imitates him in order to usurp it, but is then met with the resistance on the part of the Christ who defends his position.⁸⁵

I will evidence the recurring presence of these two motifs throughout the ancient Jewish and Christian antimessianic tradition. They often emerge together, but are also frequently encountered separately. They are by and large exhaustive of the way the end-time messianic conflict is presented in the relevant sources. The only other noticeable way of construing antimessianism in the relevant sources is to present doctrinal opponents and heretics as Antichrists. This pattern emerges especially in Christian literature, most prominently in the Johannine Epistles, where the Antichrist(s) are neither mimetic nor

⁸³ See Fleming 2004: 4–8 for an introduction to Girard's life and work and Finamore 2009: 95–130 for a discussion of the resonance his work continues to have in the modern humanities.

⁸⁴ See especially Girard 1965: 73–4; idem 2001: 19–46; idem 2013: 161–89. For the mention of Girardian mimetic rivalry in connection to apocalyptic conflict (specifically Revelation) see Finamore 2009: 174–5.

⁸⁵ While I accept Girard's terminology at this point, I resist reading Jewish and Christian eschatology *en bloc* through a Girardian lens. The mimetic conflict is, according to Girard, resolved through scapegoating, as he famously claims to be the case in the Gospel narratives; see Girard 2013: 121–53. This cannot be claimed for any of the end-time scenarios I investigate in this thesis. The mimetic desire of the eschatological opponent to become like Christ and the ensuing rivalry usually end in a direct confrontation, but are never sublimated by scapegoating.

violent, but rather preach false doctrine. As it will be shown, the heretical aspect of antimessianism cannot be fully subsumed under the two motifs noted above, but is usually appended to one or the other.

1.5 Thesis plan

My thesis will be divided into eight chapters. CHAPTER I has just presented a review of scholarship to date and the methodology of my study. CHAPTER II will explore some portion of the Old Testament that were seen by later interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, as key for developing the antimessianic expectation. This chapter will perform a task distinct from the other parts of the thesis, as it will constitute a reception-historical study of certain passages in order to reveal not their antimessianic character *per se* but rather their antimessianic potential. CHAPTER III will discuss the Antimessiahs in the Dead Sea Scrolls, whereas the crucial transformation of the antimessianic tradition in the New Testament, where it coalesces with the emergent Christ belief, will be discussed in CHAPTER IV. CHAPTER V will be devoted to the analysis of such figures in the extracanonical documents, namely the OT Pseudepigrapha and NT Apocrypha. CHAPTER VI will trace the development of the Antichrist in the Patristic writings. The discussion of the overall results of my investigation and conclusion will be offered in CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER II

The Old Testament and its reception

This chapter will explore certain portions of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament which some of the later interpreters understood as referring to an antimessianic figure. I will scrutinise these passages in terms of their context and content and then focus on their *Wirkungsgeschichte*, trying to find instances when these texts inform the antimessianic expectation. The value of my analysis does not depend on whether the passages discussed have originally expected a messianic figure and his adversary (which might only be claimed with reference to Isa 11:4 and Daniel). It will be claimed, however, that the reception of these texts has retroactively drawn them into the antimessianic tradition. Consequently, this tradition can only be fully understood if one comprehends the way it claims some parts of the OT for itself. In arguing this, I follow the approach pursued previously by Rigaux, Ernst, and Horbury.

I will discuss the following texts: Genesis 3; the blessing of Dan in Genesis 49:16-17; Isaiah 11:4; Ezekiel 38-39; Psalms; and Daniel. I do not claim that this list is exhaustive in respect of the Scriptural sources of the antimessianic tradition. It contains, however, the most important texts which generated the largest amount of exegetical discussion. Their common feature is that later exegetes, both Jewish and Christian, used them as the main sources for their messianic expectation. Each of these texts and passages—to diverging degrees and in different ways among different communities—was either treated as speaking about a Messiah (Gen 3:15; Isa 11:4; Psalms; Daniel) or occurs in the proximity of such a passage (the blessing of Dan and the blessing of Judah in Gen 49:8-12; the Gog oracle and Ezekiel 37 speaking about the Davidic prince). Consequently, ancient antimessianic speculation drew on the same Scriptural sources as did Jewish and Christian messianism.

The purpose and significance of this chapter for my overall argument are quite different from other parts of the thesis. I will not investigate only one group of texts, but trace the quotations and echoes of particular OT texts in the corpora to be discussed in the subsequent chapters. As a result, the discussion to follow will substantiate my claim that the Antichrist story is a tradition, with different later authors engaging a set of core Scriptural texts in order to inform their own antimessianic speculation. Those OT texts are used in relation to the Antimessiah very frequently and contribute to the stability of the antimessianic tradition.

Furthermore, the major contribution of this chapter lies in showing the importance of Biblical exegesis for ancient eschatology and particularly antimessianism. My reception-historical investigation will evidence that the ancient authors, while talking about the Antichrist, were not only engaged in political or historiographical discourse, but rather focused on Scriptural interpretation.

Lastly, I will study the after-life of the relevant OT passages in both Christian (the NT, the writings of the Church Fathers) and Jewish texts (the DSS, some of the Pseudepigrapha, Rabbinic literature). Both categories of texts will yield relevant data and thus evidence the shared (though not identical) exegetical and eschatological concerns present in ancient Judaism and Christianity. To that end, this chapter will engage post-Mishnaic Jewish sources, that I cannot otherwise discuss in the thesis, but which offer clear evidence for non-Christian Jewish antimessianic speculation in late Antiquity and the role of the Hebrew Bible in it.

A final note on the methodology of this chapter is in order. As I will be primarily using the tools of reception history to trace the antimessianic appropriation of the OT, I need to make clear how I will establish when the Scriptural texts are reflected in later writings. This chapter will accept the standard division of the usages of the Hebrew Bible

into quotations, allusions, and echoes.¹ In the material to be surveyed, explicit and verbatim quotes from the OT will constitute only a fraction of the relevant passages. Should a use of the OT not be identified as such by the text, I will consider it either an allusion if there is detectable verbatim dependence on a version of the source passage, or an echo if the source and its appropriation share lexemes (including synonyms).

2.1 Genesis 3

2.1.1 *The serpent in Genesis 3 and its Ancient Near Eastern context*

The first portion of the OT, to which the antimessianic imagination attaches itself, is the story of the fall of humanity contained in the third chapter of Genesis, more specifically to the figure of the serpent, introduced in Gen 3:1. The verse announces the serpent as *הַיָּה עָרוֹם מִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה*, “the most cunning of all the field beasts which the Lord has made”² (3:1a). He then argues with Eve, persuading her that eating from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, eating from which was explicitly prohibited in 2:17, would give her and Adam God-like knowledge (vv. 1b-5). After the first couple consumes the fruit and is then confronted by God (vv. 6-13), the serpent is cursed by the Creator and made into an eternal enemy of the woman and her progeny (vv. 14-15), on which text a lot of later interpretation of Genesis 3 hinges. The Masoretic Text (MT) of v. 15 runs as follows: *וְאִיבָה אֶשְׂרִית בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה וּבֵין זַרְעָךָ וּבֵין זַרְעָהּ*, “I will put enmity between you and between the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. It will injure you on the hand and you will injure it on the heel”.

Before approaching the history of reception, it is important to ponder the possible meanings of the text, both in itself and its historical context. When read in isolation from

¹ For this categorisation, see Moyise 2000: 18–9; Stamps 2006: 12–4. On allusions and echoes see especially Hays 1989: 20–33. For a different taxonomy see France 1971: 259–63.

² Across the thesis, all translations of ancient texts will be my own unless otherwise stated.

any doctrinal or exegetical traditions, the serpent does not appear to be a supernatural evil force.³ At the same time, the serpent from the story of the Fall would function within the broad context of snake symbolism and mythology of the Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Genesis 3 can be fruitfully illuminated by the evidence from those milieux.

A combination of a human or semi-divine hero, a snake, and the motif of cunning, similar to that in the fall story, is famously found in the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh* XI 294-309.⁴ There, having survived the flood, Gilgamesh intends to bring home a rejuvenating plant, but, while he is taking a bath at a stop, a snake snatches it, thus acquiring perennial youthfulness for himself.⁵ Although the trajectory of this episode is different to Genesis 3, in both cases the reptiles are associated with superhuman qualities. Smith draws attention to the affinity between the serpent figure in Genesis and Mesopotamian ophiomancy. He notices the possible wordplay between the Hebrew נָחָשׁ, “snake”, and נִחָשׁ, “to practice divination”.⁶ In 3:4-5, the snake presents himself as expressing the true reason motivating God, which is a chief function it was supposed to play in Sumerian augury. Based on their Akkadian equivalents, Smith understands טוֹב וָרָע as referring not only to moral insight, but also to the knowledge of fortunes and misfortunes.⁷ These connections point to a shared cultural background from which the Mesopotamian ophiomancy and Genesis 3 drew and within which snakes have a numinous power and constitute means of communication with the divine.

The ancient Egyptian mythology and art is replete with ophidian symbolism. Uraeus, i.e. a stylised asp, is the standard iconographic representation of pharaoh’s regal power and thus stands for the ruler’s divine status. Charlesworth points to occasions when

³ For this opinion, see e.g. Wenham 1985: 72; Sawyer 1992: 66; and, forcefully, Charlesworth 2010: 275–9.

⁴ I am using the versification by George 2003.

⁵ Joines 1975: 1–2; Charlesworth 2010: 294–6.

⁶ Smith 2015: 45–6.

⁷ Ibid. 42–3.

snakes are used in funerary art of Roman Egypt, as they were associated with immortality.⁸ Furthermore, multiple ancient Egyptian texts envisage the primordial serpent to be the divine holder of wisdom and the original legislator.⁹ Although in less of a direct contact with the Fall narrative itself, the ancient Egyptian culture still testifies to the variegated way in which snakes were conceived of in ancient Near Eastern milieux. In Egypt, the ophidian symbolism is strongly related to divine and political power, as well as to life and death.

Similar multivalence is also evident in the serpent being designated as עָרוֹם which can denote a variety of personal characteristics, ranging from “cunning” (so in Job 5:12) to “prudent” (multiple times in Proverbs). This semantic uncertainty is preserved in later translations. The Septuagint (LXX) renders it as φρονιμώτατος, “most intelligent”.¹⁰ Both Philo, *Leg.* 2.106, and Aquila (α') use πανοῦργος, “ready for anything”, which is also morally ambivalent. Likewise, some copies of *Targum Onqelos* describe the serpent as חָכִים, “wise”; however, as suspected by Smith, the original Targumic reading was the rare Aramaic עָרִים which maintains the ambiguity of the Hebrew original.¹¹ The same is the case for the Vulgate which uses the comparative of *callidus* whose meaning, again, oscillates between “prudent” and “cunning”.

In sum, Genesis 3 by itself does not construe the serpent as essentially evil, let alone supernatural. Consequently, this figure in its original context cannot be understood as satanic or antimesianic. At the same time, the text clearly has the potential to be read in this way which is due to the rich and diverse ophidian symbolism evident in ancient cultures, as well as semantic ambiguity of the way the serpent is described. Moreover,

⁸ Charlesworth 2010: 84–6.

⁹ Joines 1975: 4–5.

¹⁰ Hayward 2008: 33 notes that this adjective is used nowhere else in the LXX Pentateuch aside for its cognates, φρόνιμος and φρονιμώτερος, being applied to Joseph in Gen 41:33, 39 (translating נָבִין). The serpent's intelligence is thus acknowledged by the translator.

¹¹ Smith 2015: 45.

God's curse in Gen 3:14-15 has an unmistakable, albeit opaque, future orientation. Since then the paradisiac snake is a versatile figure, whose fate will only be realised in the future, it can be—and historically was—taken to represent an eschatological opponent. The opposition gains an antimessianic dimension if and when Eve's offspring in Gen 3:15 becomes an object of a messianic hope. The explorations of these interpretative possibilities will be discussed in what follows.

2.1.2 *The Septuagint*

The first instance of a messianic reading of Gen 3:15 might already be present in the LXX: καὶ ἔχθραν θήσω ἀνὰ μέσον σου καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τῆς γυναικὸς καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ σπέρματός σου καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς· αὐτός σου τηρήσει κεφαλὴν, καὶ σὺ τηρήσεις αὐτοῦ πτέρναν, “I will put enmity among you and the woman, and among your offspring and her offspring; he will keep your head, and you will keep his heel”.

The Greek verse is of exegetical interest on various counts¹² and especially due to the use of αὐτός. While being a correct translation of the Hebrew masculine pronoun אָנֹכִי, it does not agree with its Greek antecedent, i.e. τὸ σπέρμα, which would require a neuter singular αὐτό. As noted by Martin, such literalism at the cost of grammatical correctness is an exception to the way the LXX of Genesis translates personal pronouns.¹³ This fact has led some exegetes to suppose that the Greek of Gen 3:15 has in mind Eve's singular male descendent, possibly a messianic figure.¹⁴ Although all of the textual witnesses to the LXX of this passage come from the Christian circles, the same reading is preserved in

¹² See e.g. Hayward 2008 on the use of τηρεῖν.

¹³ Martin 1965: 426–7.

¹⁴ Ibid. 428; so also tentatively Michl 1952: 373–5. The latter points to an identical association of αὐτός and σπέρμα in the LXX of 2 Sam 7:12-13 and 1 Chron 17:11-12.

Philo, *Leg.* 3.65, 188¹⁵ which shows that the variant αὐτός in Gen 3:15 was present and possibly quite popular in the pre-Christian Hellenistic Jewish circles.¹⁶

It appears that the LXX in its earliest recoverable form understood τὸ σπέρμα as referring to a singular masculine figure, possibly the Messiah. Evidently, the hint here would be the slightest, with no other clues available. Should this, however, be the case, the serpent would have to become an antimessianic character. This claim is nothing but an inference, as the translator does not pay detailed attention to the animal. Consequently, the LXX of Gen 3:15 is at best a very tacit, but nonetheless noteworthy, attempt to envisage the future messianic conflict.

2.1.3 *The Pseudepigrapha*

Most of the readings of Genesis 3 relevant to my argument from the Second Temple period come from the OT Pseudepigrapha.¹⁷ Many of those writings exhibit increasing interest in the Fall story, at the same time transforming the image of the serpent into a supernatural figure. It is often claimed that Wis 2:24: φθόνῳ δὲ διαβόλου θάνατος εἰσηλθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον, πειράζουσιν δὲ αὐτὸν οἱ τῆς ἐκείνου μερίδος ὄντες, has been suggested as reading the figure of the devil into Genesis 3. The translation of this passage is difficult and most of the translations read something along the lines of “but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience

¹⁵ In *Leg.* 3.188, Philo seems perplexed by the language of the verse, even calling it a “barbarism”.

¹⁶ Michl, *ibid.* 373–4, mentions Theophilus, *Ad Auto.* 2.21 as the only Christian text quoting Gen 3:15 that diverges from the LXX and reads αὐτό rather than αὐτός. He bases this claim on Migne’s reading in PG 6:1086. However, Otto’s 1861 edition was the first one to make use of Codex Marcianus on which, as it is known today, all other extant copies of Theophilus depend and which also has αὐτός. This variant was accepted by the subsequent editions of Theophilus. Therefore, the earliest recoverable text of *Ad Auto.* 2.21 agrees with the LXX.

¹⁷ Neither Philo nor the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit interest in reading Genesis 3 in a messianic, demonological, or antimessianic way. Philo in *QG* 1.47 sees the serpent in an allegorical fashion as “epitome of desire”. The narrative of Genesis 3 is very rarely alluded to in the DSS. Col. I of 4Q422, a fragmentary retelling of Genesis and Exodus, appears to connect the eating of the fruit in the Garden with the emergence of יצר, “the evil impulse”, but does not mention the serpent’s role in it. In the *Discourse of the Two Spirits* of 1QS, one finds a possible echo of Gen 3:15: ויתן איבת עולם בין מפלגותם, “and he put eternal enmity between their divisions” (1QS IV 17; I thank Mr Ethan Schwartz of Harvard University for bringing this passage to my attention). Here, too, the serpent is suppressed from the picture.

it” (NRSV). On the other hand, Zurawski offered an alternative and, in my opinion, more persuasive interpretation and translation: “But through an adversary’s envy death enters the world, and those who belong to death’s party put humanity to the test”. He rightly argues against reading ὁ διάβολος as a supernatural antagonist and does not think the verse must refer specifically and solely to Genesis 3.¹⁸ Wis 2:24 cannot thus be included into the study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the passage.

The recasting of the serpent as an evil eschatological figure in other Pseudepigrapha is less doubtful. Towards the end of the Enochic *Book of Similitudes* (1 *Enoch* 37-71), probably in the material preserved from the so-called “Book of Noah”, the fallen angels and their transgressions are listed, and among them Gader’el who is accused of presenting humans with arms and, most importantly, of deceiving Eve (1 *Enoch* 69:6). It is noteworthy that this passage combines the aetiologies of evil from Genesis 3 and 6, ascribing to Gader’el the actions of both the paradisiac serpent and of the fallen sons of God (on which see 1 *Enoch* 8:1).¹⁹ A very similar exegetical combination is to be found in 2 *Enoch* 31:4-6 (the long recension) where Satanail enters paradise and corrupts Eve but not Adam.²⁰

Michl notes yet another way in which Genesis 3 might have influenced the *Similitudes*. The Son of Man (ወልደ:ሰብእ in Ge’ez of 1 *Enoch*) is called ወልደ:እግለ:እመሕያው, “the son of the mother of the offspring of the living” in 62:7, 9, 14; 63:11; 69:26-27; 70:1; 71:17, i.e. eight out of eighteen times that the Son of Man is mentioned in the *Similitudes*.²¹ This phrase echoes the etymology of the name Eve in Gen 3:20, and so the Enochic Son of Man fulfils God’s prediction in Gen 3:15. To be sure, the exact

¹⁸ Zurawski 2012: 366–99.

¹⁹ Nickelsburg, VanderKam 2012: 301.

²⁰ On the relationship between this passage and the Watchers tradition, see Arbel 2012: 438–41.

²¹ Michl 1952: 383–5; see also Nickelsburg, VanderKam 2012: 113–6 who also note that ወልደ:እግለ:እመሕያው is the Ge’ez translation of שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר in Dan 7:13.

meaning of the title “Son of Man” and its referent in the *Similitudes* are notoriously difficult to articulate and the figure does not engage in conflict.²² Nevertheless, it is safe to say that Genesis 3 stood in the background of some messianic traits of this figure.

In other Pseudepigrapha, the demonic and Satanic traits of the serpent are clearer still. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 23:1-11 depicts the monstrous dragon Azazel directly feeding the fruit of the forbidden tree (a vine in this case) to Adam and Eve whom Abraham sees embracing each other.²³ In *3 Baruch* 4:8, both the Greek and the Slavonic versions claim that the tree, from which Adam and Eve ate, had been planted by the evil angel by the name of Samael (so emended from the Greek original reading Σαμουήλ) or Satanael (so in Slavonic).²⁴ Later in the text, this angel is said to have put on the serpent to lead the first humans astray (9:7 in both versions). The Satan’s use of the serpent is also portrayed in the Greek *Apocalypse of Moses* (sometimes called the *Greek Life of Adam and Eve*), whose Latin version is known as *Vita Adae et Evae*. Both texts are unanimous and vocal about the satanic involvement in the Fall story; Satan admits it himself in *Vita* 15:3 and both Adam (*Ap. Mos.* 7:2-3; *Vita* 33:3) and Eve (*Ap. Mos.* 16:1-19:3) understand him to be cause of their sin. Eve’s confession before Adam’s death also recounts Satan’s entry into the serpent (*Ap. Mos.* 16:1-5).

The evidence to be gathered from the Pseudepigrapha points to a messianic interpretation of Gen 3:15, as shown by the way the Son of Man is styled throughout the *Similitudes of Enoch*, and to a frequent demonic and Satanic reading of the paradisiac serpent. These two exegetical tendencies do not appear to cross over, however, and so the evil serpent is nowhere shown to be the Messiah’s direct opponent. I nevertheless strongly believe that understanding the transformation of the Fall narrative in the Second Temple

²² Ibid. 113–25.

²³ See Orlov 2011: 20–6 for the interpretation of the scene as an evil representation of the divine glory.

²⁴ Kulik 2010: 193; see Gaylord 1982: 303–9 on the textual variants of this text and the traditions relating to the change of the angelic name from Satanael to Satan.

period provides essential background to its later antimessianic readings. It is to be noted that the pseudepigraphic writings discussed above are very difficult to date and might contain much earlier traditions which can well be contemporary with those in the Targumim, the NT, or the Church Fathers. Therefore, the fact that, on the one hand, Eve's offspring is understood to represent the Messiah, and, on the other hand, the serpent becomes a demonic or Satanic figure, enables later exegetes to combine the two into a pattern of messianic confrontation at the Eschaton.

2.1.4 *The New Testament*

The interpretation of the Fall narrative arrived at an inflection point with the writing of the NT, as the perception of Jesus as the second Adam naturally incited the rereading of Genesis 1-3. Three NT passages allude to and reinterpret God's curse of the serpent and its foreseen conflict with the woman's offspring: Luke 10:19; Rom 16:20 and Revelation 12.

An echo of Gen 3:15 is to be found in Rom 16:20 in one of the final sections of the epistle.²⁵ Beginning with 16:17, Paul warns his recipients against those causing dissent and stumbling and criticises their activity as self-serving. In 16:20a, he concludes the admonition: ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης συντρίψει τὸν σατανᾶν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας ὑμῶν ἐν τάχει, "and God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." On the surface, the verse does not reference nor bear any verbal similarities with the LXX of Gen 3:15. One must note, however, that Aquila's translation, admittedly later than Romans by around eight decades, replaces the problematic τηρήσει of the LXX with προστρίψει, "he will rub away" which is a cognate of συντρίψει in Rom 16:20. I noted previously that the Old Greek of Gen 3:15 was unsurprisingly perplexing to some interpreters, including Philo. Seeing

²⁵ See Jewett 2007: 986–8 for a claim that Rom 16:17-20 is a post-Pauline interpolation. It is unnecessary for me to take a stance in the discussion, as my argument does not rely on Pauline or deutero-Pauline authorship. I will continue to refer to the author of the passage as Paul for convenience.

Paul, who opts for a lexical revision similar to Aquila's, as one of those interpreters, allows for a more intimate relation between Rom 16:20 and the cursing of the serpent in Genesis.²⁶ He transforms the logic of the latter by explicitly equating the serpent with Satan. On the other hand, Rom 16:20 identifies God as the one crushing Satan. Interestingly, however, the trampling happens under the feet of the believers which suggests that they are the instrument of divine punishment. Paul's language does not contain any explicit traces of messianism, so serpent/Satan cannot be understood as an Antichristological actor. Nevertheless, Rom 16:20 constitutes a crucial point in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Gen 3:15 in its understanding of the serpent as satanic which would become the dominant Christian interpretation of that figure.

A probable trace of such an exegetical approach is also present in Luke 10:19: ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ὑμῖν τὴν ἐξουσίαν τοῦ πατεῖν ἐπάνω ὄφεων καὶ σκορπίων, καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ ἐχθροῦ, καὶ οὐδὲν ὑμᾶς οὐ μὴ ἀδικήσῃ, “look, I have given you authority to step on snakes and scorpions, and over all the enemy's power, and nothing will ever injure you”. This verse is a part of Jesus' receiving back the seventy (or, as in some MSS, seventy-two) disciples sent out in 10:1. Again, the wording does not indicate an allusion to the cursing of the serpent in Genesis; it might be a free variation on Ps 91:13 (90:13 LXX): עַל-שָׂחַל וְנָחָשׁ תִּדְרֹךְ תִּרְמַס כְּפִיר וְתַנִּין, “upon the lion and the asp you will tread, you will trample the young lion and the dragon”.²⁷ The Greek maintains the sense, but changes the pairs of animals for, respectively, ἀσπίδα καὶ βασιλίσκον, “the cobra and the basilisk” and λέοντα καὶ δράκοντα, “the lion and the dragon”.²⁸ Differences between the MT and

²⁶ Such a direct allusion is allowed by Salvesen 1991: 14–5; Fitzmyer 1993b: 746; Dochhorn 2007: 189–217; idem 2010: 301–3. Cf. Dunn 1988: 905; Jewett 2007: 994 who see the conceptual affinity between the two verses, but think no immediate relation is certain.

²⁷ The Hebrew תַּנִּין can be translated as “serpent” but is less precise than and must be therefore differentiated from שָׂחַל which is used throughout Genesis 3.

²⁸ The first one to make the connection between Luke 10:19 and Ps 90:13 LXX appears to be Justin, *Dial.* 76.6; see Grelot 1981: 91.

the LXX on the one hand and the Lukan logion on the other show that the latter's Scriptural background extends further than Psalm 91. Grelot cogently and, I think, rightly suggests Deut 8:15, which is the only passage in the OT that pairs snakes and scorpions, as standing behind Luke 10:19, too.²⁹ Apart from that, it is still possible to sense the influence of the Greek of Gen 3:15 in this verse. The evangelist's reference to ἐχθρός brings to mind ἔχθρα in Gen 3:15 LXX; indeed, ἐχθρός belongs to the NT vocabulary denoting the eschatological enemy (Matt 13:39). Most importantly, Luke 10:19 is preceded by the famous logion about Satan falling down from the sky like lightning which harmonises with the disciples receiving the authority over him. It appears that the third evangelist, just like Paul in Rom 16:20, began to read the serpent in Genesis as a satanic force and the community, here represented by the returning disciples, as being able to overcome it.

Neither Rom 16:20, nor Luke 10:19 present the serpent/Satan as directly conflicted with Christ. This exegetical move is made only by John in Revelation 12. This chapter, ripe with interpretative challenges, will be discussed at greater length later in the thesis.³⁰ My brief analysis at this point wants to assert that Revelation 12 draws on Genesis 3 for its image of the satanic Dragon and that the Dragon is in conflict with the messianic figure of Jesus. The crucial piece of information about that eschatological figure is offered in the string of names in Rev 12:9: ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, “the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the entire inhabited world”. The phrase ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος is universally understood as identifying the satanic Dragon with the serpent from Genesis 3.³¹ This is based not only on the fact

²⁹ Ibid. 92–4. This is now widely accepted by commentators; see Fitzmyer 1985: 863; Nolland 1993: 564–5; Bovon 2013: 30 n. 60.

³⁰ See below, pp. 181–7.

³¹ Charles 1920: 1.329; Aune 1998: 696; Koester 2015: 549. Cf. Gunkel 1895: 242 who argues that John reworked his source material for this chapter so thoroughly through the mythical lens that the starting point

that both texts use ὄφεις, but also share in their characterisation of it as a deceiver who, in Genesis, deceitfully tempts Eve and, in Revelation, leads the whole world astray.³² The question of the Dragon's conflict with the Messiah is a more problematic one, as the chapter presents it as fighting against Michael and his hosts (12:7-8). Furthermore, the dominant interpretation of Revelation, as I will discuss it later,³³ is that the antimessianic opposition is assigned to the Beasts of ch. 13 rather than to the Dragon. Nevertheless, the Dragon fulfils the definition of antimessianism stated in CHAPTER I as it hunts for and actively seeks to defeat the male child who is certainly a messianic figure (see the citation of Ps 2:9 in Rev 12:4; 19:15). In view of that, the satanic Dragon performs here an Antichristological function.

In sum, the readings of Gen 3:15 in the NT writings are in line with the rest of the Second Temple Jewish evidence. Luke 10:19 and Rom 16:20, just like the broadly contemporary Pseudepigrapha, see the serpent not yet as antimessianic, but definitely as an incarnation of Satan who is defeated by God and his community. The crucial turn in the reception history of Genesis 3 comes with Revelation 12. There, the Dragon is portrayed as the serpent and at the same time Christ's enemy which makes clear that John understands the Fall narrative as pointing towards the end-time messianic conflict. It is at this point that the antimessianic potential of Gen 3:15 is realised and the text begins to function within the Antichrist tradition.

2.1.5 *The Church Fathers*

Following on from the NT, which begins to explore the significance of Genesis 3 in salvation history, the Church Fathers paid great attention to this text. Their exegesis

of his thought cannot be unearthed. Gunkel's preoccupation with mythical criticism blinded him to the many ways Revelation 12 evokes the Fall narrative.

³² Beale 1999: 656.

³³ See below, pp. 188–96.

transformed the mention of Eve’s offspring in Gen 3:14-15 into the first messianic prophecy of the OT, the so-called “protoevangelium”.³⁴ Furthermore, they accepted the by then standard perception of the serpent as satanic. The combination of these two motifs led many Patristic authors to see the cursing of the serpent as a prophecy of the end-time conflict between Christ and Satan. This interpretative strategy is standard and abundantly attested in the Patristic sources,³⁵ so I will limit my survey to the two of its earliest and most forceful proponents, namely Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyon.

The standard pattern of the Christian interpretation, in which Eve stands for Mary, her seed for Jesus, and the serpent for Satan or the Antichrist, begins to take shape in Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* from around 160 CE. In *Dial.* 79.4, the reptile is listed among other divine opponents as Justin discusses the primordial angelic rebellion. In relation to the brazen serpent of Num 21:4-9, which is mentioned in 91.4 and 112.1-2, Justin argues that it must be seen as a type of Christ rather than a mere animal, as the latter would contradict God’s curse from Gen 3:15. Furthermore, Justin uses Isa 27:1 to show that Christ, identified as the sword, has already killed the serpent. A contrastive comparison between Eve and Mary is drawn in 100.5-6, as Christ is called the one δι’ οὗ ὁ θεὸς τὸν τε ὄφιν τοὺς ὁμοιωθέντας ἀγγέλους καὶ ἀνθρώπους καταλύει, “by whom God destroys both the serpent as well as the angels and people similar [to him]”; the serpent, although identifiable with Satan, is conflicted with Christ. The satanic interpretation of the serpent is strongly supported by Justin’s etymology of the Greek σατανᾶς (103.5) which he sees—wrongly—to be a compound of the Hebrew שָׁטָן, “to go astray” and שָׂטָן. In 103.4, Justin equates the serpent with the devil and Satan (just like in Rev 12:9) who is

³⁴ Although Gen 3:15 was understood as speaking about Christ ever since Justin Martyr, the term “protoevangelium” itself was first used in relation to this passage by Christoph Helwig (1581-1617) in his *Protoevangelium Paradisiacum* (1613); see Gallus 1979: 88–90.

³⁵ For a survey of the Patristic exegesis of Gen 3:15 see the excerpts in Louth 2013: 73–91.

vanquished by Jesus during the temptations. One should therefore conclude that Justin understands the serpent both as Satan and as an antichristological agent.

Irenaeus' *Adversus haereses*, which offers in its fifth book the first full Patristic treatment of the Antichrist,³⁶ engages the Genesis Fall narrative often and in multiple ways.³⁷ Irenaeus talks about the Gnostic reinterpretations of that story in *Adv. haer.* 1.30.1-15, which I will discuss shortly. His original interpretation of the paradisiac serpent is offered in 3.23.1-8 where Irenaeus counters the teaching of Tatian. There, the serpent injures Adam who in turn loses his life and becomes the strong man's, i.e. Satan's, vessel (3.23.1). Irenaeus links God's curse upon the serpent with Matt 25:41, stating that it is it, rather than Adam, that will be cast into the eternal fire. This reading closely associates the reptile with Satan, as the fire in Matthean verse has been "prepared for the devil and his angels". In 3.23.7, Gen 3:15 is claimed to be fulfilled only by Christ to whom the author applies Ps 90:13 LXX, certainly under the influence of Luke 10:19. Christ thus crushes sin, death, *leo, hoc est Antichristus*, "lion, that is the Antichrist" (see 1 Peter 5:8), and *draconem illum serpentum uetustum*, "that dragon, the ancient serpent" (see Rev 12:9; 20:2). Although the serpent in this case is not named as the Antichrist, he is nonetheless opposed to Christ. In 4.30.3 Irenaeus ascribes the will to turn creation against God to the devil who is thwarted by the cursing of the serpent and his ultimate destruction by Christ. 5.21.1 includes a very important passage stating that Christ, while recapitulating everything in himself, recapitulates also the conflict with the serpent (called also *inimicus noster*, "our enemy") as prophesied in Gen 3:15. While the passage does not identify the serpent with any concrete figure, it is clear that it serves here as a prefiguration of an eschatological opponent, Satan or the Antichrist. Finally, Irenaeus' apocalyptic reflection in the fifth book of the work includes yet another refutation of the

³⁶ See below, pp. 246–52, for the discussion of the Antichrist in Irenaeus.

³⁷ For substantial studies of Irenaeus' engagement with Genesis, see Holsinger-Friesen 2009; Presley 2015.

heretics (5.26.2) who are called *organa Satanae*, “Satan’s instruments”, as they are used by Satan in the same way he used the serpent. In sum, Irenaeus does not use ophidian imagery to describe the Antichrist himself. However, he clearly portrays the serpent as either identical with or operated by Satan and opposed to Christ who executes the curse of Gen 3:15.

Justin and Irenaeus, and most of Christian exegetes after them, continued and elaborated the interpretative strategy of seeing the serpent from the garden of Eden as both satanic and antimessianic, first found in Revelation 12. In both cases it is explicitly Satan that gets associated with the paradisiac reptile and the term “Antichrist” itself is not foregrounded. Nevertheless, it still fits my definition of the Antimessiah, as Justin and Irenaeus alike see the serpent *alias* Satan as Christ’s violent opponent.

2.1.6 *Gnosticism*

Probably the most peculiar approach to the serpent of Genesis 3 is that of the broadly construed Gnosticism.³⁸ It is obviously problematic to see Gnostic texts as just another corpus contributing to ancient antimessianism. Since they often espouse strongly dualistic cosmology and envisage human salvation differently from other strands of Christianity, their notions of messianism, eschatology, and conflict are not commensurate with those at work in non-Gnostic literature. I will therefore treat any Gnostic (or supposedly Gnostic) readings of Genesis 3 as only distantly relevant the antimessianic reception of the passage. Nevertheless, the volume and diversity of those readings, hardly paralleled in any other ancient literary corpus, call for a closer scrutiny.

³⁸ I cannot go into the continuing scholarly discussion about how suitable a label “Gnosticism” really is; for key contributions to the debate see Williams 1996; King 2003. For the sake of simplicity, I will use the term to describe both the texts and authors described as such by the Church Fathers as well as the documents from the Nag Hammadi library.

The Patristic reports about the Gnostics repeatedly testify to their fascination with ophidian symbolism, much of which was dependent on the Fall narrative. Several authors identify the Gnostic groups of interest explicitly as the Ophites (e.g. Origen, *Cels.* 6.24; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 37.1.1), whereas Hippolytus in his *Refutatio* mentions Naaseni (Latin from Hebrew נָחָשׁ; *Haer.* 5.2, 6-9; 10:9), Peratics (4.2.1-3; 5.3; 5.12-18; 10.10) and Sethians (5.4; 5.19-22; 10.11) who all supposedly emphasised the serpent's role in their theology.³⁹ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.1-15, recounts the Creation doctrine of an unnamed group according to which the serpent, also called Nous, is furnished by Ialdabaoth who is conflicted with both his mother and children and declares himself divine. The serpent functions as the source of evil (1.30.5), but is then used by Sophia, Ialdabaoth's mother, to seduce the first humans into eating from the tree, thus breaking Ialdabaoth's command (1.30.7). The serpent occupies a liminal space between good and evil, being used by either side of the cosmic conflict for their own purposes.⁴⁰ Another Gnostic interpretation of Genesis 3 is referred to by Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.23-28, as he recounts the teaching of Justin the Pseudo-Gnostic. According to him, the primordial half-woman, half-snake Edem unites with Elohim to produce Adam and Eve. Once Elohim abandons her for the sake of the true God, she sends her angel Naas (obviously referring to the נָחָשׁ of Genesis 3) to punish the humans. Naas becomes the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and is later said to commit sexual transgressions with Adam and Eve. It appears that in Justin's doctrine—which, to be sure, is only attested in Hippolytus' *Refutatio*—the serpent is read in line with earlier traditions as demonic and hostile to humans. A possibly different exegesis is attested by Epiphanius in *Pan.* 26.2.6 where he briefly mentions the otherwise

³⁹ Rasimus 2007: 468 rightly warns against treating the Ophites, or indeed any other Gnostic faction, as a coherent sect or even a formalised belief system; rather, the term can only be used to denote the sources sharing in the serpent speculation and nothing more.

⁴⁰ For a detailed analysis of Irenaeus' account of the Ophites, see Presley 2015: 62–8.

unknown *Gospel of Eve* according to which the first woman received revelation from the serpent, the latter being a positive agent in the Gnostic understanding.⁴¹

In the writings of the Nag Hammadi library, the serpent occupies a place smaller than what the Patristic heresiologists might have imagined, but is present and richly developed nonetheless. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II 4) begins with a recounting of the Biblical Creation story according to which the archons (whose leader is called Samael in 88,4, as well as Saklas and Ialdabaoth in 95,7-8, just as in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII 1 39,27), having spotted the reflection of the divine incorruptibility in the primordial waters and fallen in love with it, try to satiate their lust with the newly-formed Adam and Eve. The archons attempt to rape Eve, but her spirit abandons her, leaving behind a tree for the archons to defile. The feminine spirit then enters φαρ περταμο “serpent, the instructor” (89,31-32), who causes the first humans to disobey the rulers’ prohibition on eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thus resulting in them recognising their imperfection (90,15-19). In the meantime, the spirit leaves the serpent to be ογααφ εφο νρμνκαρ, “flesh of the earth” (90,12), later accursed by the archons (90,32-34).⁴² Here, just as in the case of the ophitic sect described by Irenaeus, the serpent does not play an autonomous role, but is a device used by higher powers for their own ends in the cosmogonic conflict.⁴³

⁴¹ In other heresiological accounts, the Gnostic reading of the serpent from Genesis 3 is often overshadowed by the combined exegesis of Num 21:4-9 and John 3:14-15 which allows the readers to link that character to Jesus and thus make it into a messianic agent of some form. This is the case in Ps.-Tertullian, Epiphanius, *Pan.* 37, Philastrius who refer to serpent worship. Tellingly, in Hippolytus, *Haer.* 5.16.8, the Peratics are said to identify Jesus as ὁ καθολικὸς ὄφις, “the universal serpent”.

⁴² The fact, that the spirit has already left the serpent by the time the archons curse it, conceptually resembles the Gnostic idea of Jesus being crucified only in appearance; see Kaestli 1982: 121.

⁴³ Rasimus 2007: 452; he also rightly rejects the unsubstantiated claim of Barc, Roberge 1980: 102–3 who argues that serpent-embodied spirit is Christ.

In the document related to the *Hypostasis*, namely *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II 5; olim *The Untitled Work*), the figure of the serpent is generalised into πῶνριον, “the beast” (114,1-2; 118,26), whose dependence on the reptile from Genesis 3 is nonetheless certain, as the beast is called the wisest of the animals (114,3-4; 118,25-26; see Gen 3:1). Interestingly, the beast is first introduced as an androgynous child of Eve, also bearing the name χοεῖς, “Lord” (113,30-35)⁴⁴ and πρεφταμο, “the instructor” (114,3). It leads Eve and, consequently, Adam to eat of the tree which angers the archons (the chief of whom is, just like in the *Hypostasis*, called Ialdabaoth and Samael; see 100,14; 103,18) and the apparently futile curse pronounced upon him (120,3-4). In sum, *On the Origin of the World* presents a closely related, but at the same time clearly more elevated vision of the paradisiac serpent to the one finds in the *Hypostasis*. In the former text, the serpent becomes an essentially benevolent actor.

The so called “serpent midrash” from the *Testimony of Truth* (NHC IX 3 45,23-49,10) presents an interpretation of Genesis 3 and related texts from the OT under which the serpent again functions as a positive actor.⁴⁵ The first part of the midrash (45,23-47,14) retells the story of Gen 2:16-17; 3. The second part (47,14-48,15) is a vivid theological reflection on the true meaning of that text, claiming on its basis that the Creator God is envious, lacks prescience, and withholds knowledge from humans. Finally (48,15-49,10), the midrash concatenates three Biblical texts linked together by serpent imagery: an unidentified text akin to Gen 3:14-15⁴⁶; Exod 7:8-12; and Num 21:9. The

⁴⁴ This designation can be plausibly understood to point to Cain. It can be traced to Eve’s announcement at the birth of her firstborn: אֶת־יְהוָה אֵשׁ אֶת־יָדִי, which can be read as “I have got a man, namely YHWH” (Gen 4:1b). This phrase seems to resonate with NHC II 5 114,2: ἀγίχπε οὐρῶμε πῶχοεῖς, “I have borne a lordly man”; see Pearson 1990: 99–102; Rasimus 2007: 454–5; cf. Painchaud 1995: 396–7 who offers a less plausible identification with Seth.

⁴⁵ On the Jewish background of the text, see esp. Pearson 1972: 457–70.

⁴⁶ For the identification of this citation, see Koschorke 1978: 149.

midrash concludes with a paramount identification of the serpent with Christ (49,6), based undoubtedly on John 3:14.

As the last piece of the Gnostic evidence, the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II 1; III 1; IV 1; BG 8502,2) offers a more complex reading of the Fall narrative. During a revelatory discourse Christ tells John that it was not the serpent but he himself that caused Adam to consume the fruit and disobey the archons (II 1 22,10 and par.). The serpent, on the other hand, led the first man to sexual desire, destruction, and so to a further subjugation to the chief archon (II 1 22,12-18 and par.). As noted by Rasimus, earlier in the text, Ialdabaoth either is a snake or has a face of a snake. Serpentine visages are also characteristic of Ialdabaoth's descendants, Iao (II 1 11,30 and par.) and Sabaoth (II 1 11,32 and par.).⁴⁷ In the *Apocryphon*, therefore, the serpent is closely related or even possibly identified with the evil archons⁴⁸ which is at odds the other Gnostic writings discussed above.

To recapitulate, both the Nag Hammadi writings and the Patristic heresiological reports give evidence of the many ways in which the serpent of Genesis 3 was interpreted in Gnostic communities. The exegetical approaches ranged from messianic idealisation (*On the Origin of the World*, *Testimony of Truth*, *Gospel of Eve*), through versatile positioning between the good and evil forces (Irenaeus, *Hypostasis of Archons*), to depreciation (*Apocryphon of John*, Hippolytus' Justin the Pseudo-Gnostic). In the last approach, the serpent becomes an enemy of the messianic figure, and hence can be understood as antichristological.

⁴⁷ Rasimus 2007: 456.

⁴⁸ Kaestli 1982: 124; Barc, Funk 2012: 288. Rasimus 2007: 456 disagrees with the identification on the grounds that the serpent, like Christ, persuades Adam and Eve to eat from the tree and thus to disobey the archons. In light of II 1 24,8-9 and par., however, when Ialdabaoth plants sexual desire in one of the first humans (Adam in III and BG, Eve in II and IV), serpent's action might be actually in line with the archons' plan. This would explain why the explicit purpose of the temptation in II 1 22,15 and par. is to make Adam useful.

2.1.7 *The Targumim and Rabbinic literature*

The tendency to set Gen 3:15 in an eschatological or even a messianic context is also articulated in the Targumic and some Rabbinic appropriations.⁴⁹ As with the Pseudepigrapha, these texts are usually difficult to date and might well be later than both the NT and the Patristic evidence. Nevertheless, they are usually assumed to incorporate and reflect earlier Jewish traditions originating in the first and second century CE.

Targum Neofiti, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, as well as the *Fragment Targum* offer an essentially identical interpretation of God's curse of the serpent. All think that Eve's children will prevail over the reptile by keeping the commandments and suffer his bites due to abandoning them. They then state: לבריה יהוי ולך חויה לא יהוי אסו דעתידין אינון מעבד, שפיותיה בעוקבה ביומוי דמלכא משיחא, “for her sons there will be a remedy and for you, serpent, there will not be any remedy, because they are going to make peace in the end, in the days of the king Messiah” (so *Tg. Neof.*). The full sense of the passage is not immediately obvious. The word שפיותיה, “peace, appeasement, serenity” appears to be a substantive from the pael of שפא, “to calm, to make peace”.⁵⁰ What is meant here is probably that the eschatological peace will bring healing to the people but not to the serpent which will not be admitted into the messianic bliss. This is confirmed by the opinion of R. Levi, recounted in *Bereshit Rabbah* 20.5: לעתיד לבוא הכל מתרפאין חוץ מנחש וגבעונים, “in the time to come, everything shall be healed, except for the serpent and the Gibeonite”. The Targumic author is also most likely to deploy a pun on the word בעוקבה, “in the end” which is related to the Aramaic עקבה, “heel”, obviously echoing the heel of Gen 3:15.

⁴⁹ Levey 1974: 2–3.

⁵⁰ Hayward 2008: 29. Cf. McNamara 1966: 219–21 who translates it as “cure”, claiming that it is a parallelism to “remedy”. Such translation would imply that people in the eschatological age will be able to find a cure for the serpent's bite on the heel. This reading is less acceptable on grammatical grounds and would not significantly change the overall trajectory of the passage.

A similar interpretation is present in *Targum Onqelos* which concludes the cursing of the serpent with the following statement: הוא יהי דכיר נטר מא דעבדת ליה מלקדמין ואת תהי, “the woman’s child] will be mindful of what you have done to him before, and you will preserve for him until the end”. The final phrase, surely elliptic, has been variously supplemented by interpreters. Grossfeld thinks that it is hatred that the serpent will continue to feel.⁵¹ Hayward, on the other hand, sees the animal as remembering the people’s sins until the end of time which could suggest that he will play a role of a prosecutor in the divine courtroom.⁵² Under both interpretations the serpent retains its character as adversarial or even hostile to humanity. The antagonistic nature of the reptile is further confirmed by the way *Tg. Ps.-J.* transforms the beginning of Gen 3:6: וחמת ודחילת, “and the woman saw Samael, the angel of death, and she was afraid”.⁵³

Whereas the Targumim (and the early midrash on Genesis) interpret Gen 3:15 with an eschatological mindset, this way of reading appears to have fallen out of favour in later Jewish exegesis. The later Rabbis sometimes use the designation נחש הקדמוני, “the ancient serpent”, resembling ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος in Rev 12:9. The serpent is sometimes referred to as primordial instantiation of evil (*t. Sotah* 4:17 and *b. Sotah* 9b with reference to lust and greed) and quite often in anti-Gentile polemic, identifying Gentiles as the serpent’s offspring (*Sifre Deut.* 323 on Deut 32:32; *Zohar* 28b; see also *b. San.* 29a on the question on not pleading for the *mesith*, i.e. the inciter to idolatry). Apart from *Bereshit R.* 20.5, however, there are no references to the serpent in relation to a messianic figure or to the messianic age. It appears that the Rabbis took a different exegetical path in

⁵¹ Grossfeld 1988: 46.

⁵² Hayward 2008: 24.

⁵³ Samael is also mentioned in a similar context by *Tg. Job* on Job 28:7 where Samael does not know the path of the tree of life. In a similar way, Samael rides the paradisiac serpent according to Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed* 2.30.

relation to Genesis 3 than their Patristic counterparts, accepting the serpent as the origin of evil but not foregrounding its eschatological role.

2.1.8 *Summary*

To recapitulate, the serpent of the Fall narrative generated a wealth of different interpretations, many of which influenced the ancient antimessianism. Although it is not portrayed as evil in the story itself, the variegated ophidian symbolism of the ancient Near Eastern cultures propelled exegetes to read it as more than an animal in a fable. The Pseudepigrapha, the NT, and the Church Fathers offer a plethora of interpretations which associate or identify the serpent with the fallen angels, thus casting it as a demonic or satanic actor. On the other hand, the LXX and the Targumim, as well as the majority of the Christian sources, understand Gen 3:15 either within the messianic mindset or, specifically, as pointing to the eschatological victory of the Messiah over the evil serpent. In some Gnostic sources, which appear to represent a variety of approaches to this text, this structure is inverted, making the serpent the benevolent revelatory agent. In conclusion, the serpent of Genesis 3 appears to be a satanic, but also an antimessianic agent in a large number of Christian, as well as in a few Jewish readings of this text.

Three further comments are in order. Firstly, the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Gen 3:15 shows that the traditionary framework I have proposed for antimessianism appears suitable to the subject-matter. The discussion above investigates a succession of authors and documents who all show interest in a particular text and explore its interpretative potential. Each uses the passage differently, but very often they see it in ways that are broadly similar to those of their contemporaries. The antimessianic reading of Gen 3:15 is thus a part of a larger tradition.

Secondly, the definition of the Antimessiah/Antichrist, for which I have argued in CHAPTER I,⁵⁴ is an effective methodological tool. Understanding the Antimessiah as just that—the opponent of a messianic figure—allows to see a plethora of relevant sources (in the case of Gen 3:15, mostly Christian) which other approaches tend to discount.

Thirdly, Gen 3:15 offers a glimpse of what will be argued to be a wider phenomenon, namely the interrelation between the messianic and antimessianic interpretation of the OT. Seeing Gen 3:15 as a messianic prophecy allowed Christian interpreters to present the serpent, already depicted as satanic in earlier reception, as Christ’s opponent. This confluence of messianic exegesis and antimessianic speculation will be shown to be the case for other OT passages.

2.2 Genesis 49:16-17

2.2.1 *The blessing of Dan in context and in inner-biblical interpretation*

The blessing of Dan in Jacob’s farewell discourse in Gen 49:16-17 is another Scriptural source for the later antimessianic discourse. The text is as follows: דָּן יָדִין עַמּוֹ, “Dan will judge his people like one of the tribes of Israel; Dan will be a serpent on the road, a horned viper on the path which bites the horse’s heels and the rider falls backwards”. The first sentence may involve a pun on Dan’s name, *dān yādīn* (see 49:8 for the pun on the name of Judah), based on Bilhah’s pronouncement after Dan’s birth in Gen 30:6: דָּנָה אֱלֹהִים... “God has judged me”... Therefore she called his name ‘Dan’”.⁵⁵ וְשָׁפִיפוּ, a *hapax legomenon* in the OT, completes the poetic parallelism with נָחָשׁ and is plausibly

⁵⁴ See above, pp. 39–41.

⁵⁵ Niemann 1985: 204–5; Westermann 1987: 234; Heck 1990: 24; Hamilton 1995: 668 n. 1; cf. Emerton 1968: 90–1 who postulates deriving דָּן not from דָּן but from a putative root דָּנ, “to be strong”, corresponding to the Akkadian *danānu* and Ugaritic *dnn*. Emerton’s solution is accepted by de Hoop 1999: 164–8 who also uses דָּן to translate Gen 30:6 as “God has strengthened me”. I follow the still more popular traditional translation, but Emerton and de Hoop’s case is strong; adjudicating between them is beyond the scope of this study.

identifiable with *Pseudocerastes persicus fieldi*, a Middle Eastern venomous snake.⁵⁶ Commentators are in general agreement about the meaning of the blessing which presents Dan as inconspicuous, yet possibly valiant and dangerous.⁵⁷ The tribe's importance is also foregrounded by its placement within Jacob's deathbed speech. Dan, alongside Judah and Joseph, is the only brother to receive a multipart blessing, that of judgement and of the snake-like ability. Furthermore, Dan's commendation comes as the seventh out of twelve (so also in 1 Chron 2:1-2), immediately before the address to God in 49:18.⁵⁸

Gen 49:16-17 appears to be in dialogue with several other texts in the OT. I will discuss the three most important ones: Genesis 3; Deut 33:22; Jer 8:16-17. Ophidian imagery is common to the Fall narrative and the blessing of Dan alike, as they both use the noun נָחָשׁ. They also share the detail of biting the heels in Gen 3:15; 49:17 (denoting the horse's hooves), both deploying the word עָקַב. What is said of the serpent in Gen 3:15 is attributed to the snake-like Dan in his blessing in 49:17. It will be shown that this point of contact did not elude later interpreters.

The relationship between Genesis 49 and Moses' speech in Deuteronomy 33 remains a contested topic.⁵⁹ Dan curiously emerges in the latter text (Deut 33:22) where it is described as מִן־הַבָּשָׁן יִזְנֹק⁶⁰ גִּיּוֹר אַרְיֵה, "the lion's cub which jumps away from the viper⁶¹". The phrase גִּיּוֹר אַרְיֵה appears to be incorporated from the blessing of Judah in Gen 49:9. The reference to a lion might be due the narrative of the settlement of the tribe of

⁵⁶ Skinner 1930: 527; Wenham 1994: 481; de Hoop 1999: 555; cf. the discussion in Niemann 1985: 197–8.

⁵⁷ Skinner 1930: 527; Westermann 1987: 234–5; Wenham 1994: 481; Hamilton 1995: 669–70; de Hoop 1999: 303; Arnold 2009: 382.

⁵⁸ Sasson 1978: 183. See Hamilton 1995: 670–2 for the significance of the cry and its relation to the Ugaritic imprecations against snakebites.

⁵⁹ For recent discussions, see de Hoop 1999: 1–78; Steymans 2007: 71–89.

⁶⁰ The root זָנַק is unattested elsewhere in the OT. Its semantic field in the Mishnaic Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic is broadly that of throwing, shooting, or gushing; ἐκπηδῆσεται, "he will rush out" in the LXX confirms that; see Gevirtz 1981: 30; Tigay 1996: 410–1 n. 174.

⁶¹ I follow Cross, Freedman 1948: 208, accepted by Gevirtz 1981: 30–1, in reading הַבָּשָׁן not as "Bashan" but as "viper" based on the meaning of *bṣn* in Ugaritic and Aramaic. In light of the relation between Gen 49:16-17 and Deut 33:22, this reading is more meaningful than the former, as nowhere in the OT is any relation between Dan and Bashan stated or implied.

Dan in Laish in Judges 18; the toponym is homonymous with the poetic word לֵיָשׁ, which means “lion” (Isa 30:6; Job 4:11; Prov 30:30).⁶² The tone of Moses’ pronouncement is different to that in Genesis 49. Whereas the latter speaks of Dan’s secretive might, the former paints its picture as an frightful lion which does not live up to its true nature. In Genesis, Dan is the viper, but in Deuteronomy he is scared off by it.

Finally, a relevant reference to Dan appears in Jer 8:16: מִדָּן נִשְׁמַע נִהְרָת סוּסָיו מִקּוֹל, “the snorting of their horse was heard from Dan, and the entire land trembled at the voice of neighing of their stallions, and they came and devoured the land and its fulness, the city and those who dwell in it”. Dan here, just as in Jer 4:15, typifies Israel’s northern outskirt through which the enemy army—possibly that of Nebuchadnezzar⁶³—enters the land. The equestrian imagery might be an allusion to Gen 49:16-17. This possibility is further strengthened by God’s announcement in Jer 8:17 that he is letting loose נָחָשִׁים צָפְעָנִים, “snakes, venomous vipers” among his people which parallels the double mention of snakes in Gen 49:17. Dan does not function here as the source of the evil befalling Israel, but is associated with it nonetheless.

Aside from these three passages, prophetic in nature, the OT repeatedly mentions Dan’s proclivity to idolatry and blasphemy. Already in Lev 24:10-11 a man, whose father is Egyptian and his mother is Israelite, instigates a fight within the camp and curses the Lord for which he is stoned to death (24:23).⁶⁴ The episode focuses heavily on the man’s mother whose name and origin from the tribe of Dan are revealed. The conclusion of the

⁶² Gevirtz 1981: 30; Niemann 1985: 213; Tigay 1996: 332.

⁶³ Lundbom 1999: 525.

⁶⁴ On this episode see Niemann 1985: 233–7.

account of Dan's migration in Judges 18 mentions the tribe's idolatry (18:30-31).⁶⁵ Finally, one of the two Jeroboam's golden calves is set up in Dan (1 Kings 12:29-30).⁶⁶

In sum, the OT paints a mixed picture of Dan, or indeed a mostly negative one. Whereas Gen 49:16-17 praises his hidden strength, other passages associate his progeny with unfaithfulness to God, cowardice (see also Judg 5:17 for the criticism of Dan's military inaction), and foreign invasion.⁶⁷ In what follows, I will discuss the diverse ways in which the ancient interpreters read the blessing of Dan and which were often affected by the other mentions of the tribe in the OT.

2.2.2 *The ancient versions*

Moving on to the question of reception of Dan's blessing in Gen 49:16-17, one has to bear in mind its co-text, i.e. its immediate textual environment,⁶⁸ especially its proximity to the blessing of Judah in vv. 8-12. The latter has been very often treated by Jewish and Christian interpreters as a messianic proof-text. It might therefore be the case that associating Dan with an Antimesiah in later tradition was due to the influence of the messianic exegesis of the earlier blessing of Judah.

The LXX of Dan's blessing runs as follows: Δαν κρινεῖ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ λαὸν ὥσπερ καὶ μία φυλὴ ἐν Ἰσραὴλ. καὶ γενηθήτω Δαν ὄφις ἐφ' ὁδοῦ ἐγκαθήμενος ἐπὶ τρίβου, δάκνων πτέρναν ἵππου, καὶ πεσεῖται ὁ ἵππευς εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω, "Dan will judge his own people just as also one tribe in Israel. And let Dan become a serpent on the road who lies in wait on the highway, biting the horse's heel, and the horseman will fall to the back". The Greek translator evidently did not understand נִשְׁחָץ and consequently decided to use a participle of ἐγκαθῆσθαι, "to lie in wait, to ambush".⁶⁹ It has been suggested that the consonantal

⁶⁵ On the Danite narrative in Judges 17-18 see *ibid.* 61–147; Bray 2006.

⁶⁶ This episode is alluded to in the Targum on Jer 4:15; 8:16-17.

⁶⁷ Sarna 1989: 340.

⁶⁸ I use the term "co-text" in the sense espoused in Sgall 2006: *passim*.

⁶⁹ This rare word, however, was translated correctly as *cerastes*, "viper", by Jerome and ܡܨܚܚܐ, "a poisonous snake" in the Syriac; the Vulgate and the Peshitta of this verse are altogether very close to the Hebrew.

similarity between שׁוֹרֵךְ and שׁוֹרֵךְ in Gen 3:15 (which is not used elsewhere in the Pentateuch) might have resulted in the use of the semantically close ἐγκαθῆσθαι and τηρεῖν, respectively.⁷⁰ Thus, the link between the two verses, which is palpable in the MT, might have been recognised and carried forward in the LXX. Furthermore, in 49:18, the Greek renders Hebrew Pi’el indicative קִיֵּיתִי, “I have longed for”, implying Jacob himself to be the speaker, with the participle περιμένων, “awaiting”.⁷¹ This form requires a different subject which can be plausibly identified as the most recent masculine nominative, i.e. ὁ ἰσραὴλ a verse earlier.⁷² Consequently, the text might imply that the horseman awaits God’s rescue from the predicament caused by the snake-like Dan.

The Targumim, keen to offer a messianic reading of Jacob’s blessing of Judah and other verses in this chapter,⁷³ merge their concern for future salvation with the crucial datum from elsewhere in the Scripture, namely that Samson originated from the tribe of Dan (Judg 13:2). A synopsis of all the available Targumic readings of Gen 49:16-18 is to be found in the APPENDIX.⁷⁴ All of the available texts develop the Biblical text extensively and in a haggadic way, embellishing it with the narrative details from Judges. The Targumim agree in seeing a future redeemer as arising from Dan and identifies him either implicitly (so *Tg. Onq.*) or explicitly (*Tg. Neof.*, *Tg. Ps-J.*, *Frg. Tg.*, the Cairo Genizah MSS) with Samson. This detail is either the source of or a development parallel to the Rabbinic exegesis of the verse which I will discuss in what follows. While Samson’s military exploits are praised and linked to Dan’s snake-like cunning, he clearly falls short of offering full redemption. The haggadic elaboration on 49:18, present in all the versions

⁷⁰ Hamilton 1995: 669 n. 5; Tov 2015: 196.

⁷¹ So the Göttingen edition; it is corrected by Rahlfs to περιμένω “I await”, in agreement with the MT, without any textual grounds.

⁷² Harl 1994: 311; Brayford 2007: 446; cf. Wevers 1993: 830 who implausibly thinks the participle is governed by Dan from v. 16.

⁷³ See McNamara 1966: 230–3; Levey 1974: 5–11; Syrén 1986: 101–19.

⁷⁴ See below, pp. 297–301.

save for *Tg. Onq.*, has Jacob utter his dissatisfaction with redemption by either Gideon or Samson, as he looks forward to divine or, as the Cairo Genizah MSS have it, messianic help. This detail might be related to the Rabbinic criticism of Samson, present in e.g. *b. Sot.* 9b and *Vayikra R.* 23.9.⁷⁵

On the surface, the Targumim do not consider Jacob's blessing of Dan as speaking about an end-time opponent of the Messiah. Nevertheless, the issue of eschatological redemption looms large behind the Targumic elaborations. In speaking about Samson, the Aramaic interpretations of Gen 49:16-18 show a temporary and insufficient redeemer, with true salvation being offered only by God or by the Messiah. Consequently, Gen 49:16-18 is seen as speaking not about an Antimesiah, but rather not-enough-of-a-Messiah. The Targumim thus acknowledge and explore the negative interpretative potential of the blessing of Dan—something sensed also by the Christian exegetes, but side-lined by the Rabbinic interpreters.

2.2.3 *The early Christian literature*

The implicit link between Gen 49:16-17 and other Biblical texts, as well as the co-textual influence of the blessing of Judah come to the fore in the early Christian treatment of this passage.⁷⁶ Whilst there are no allusions to this text or to Dan in general in the NT, Irenaeus in *Adv. haer.* 5.30.2 uses that silence to fashion an argument about the Antichrist's origins. He notes that Dan is not listed in Rev 7:5-8 among the tribes from which those sealed for salvation are taken, links this fact with Jer 8:16 which is said to speak about the Antichrist's violent coming, and concludes that Christ's eschatological opponent will come from the tribe of Dan.

⁷⁵ Aberbach, Grossfeld 1982: 297.

⁷⁶ For surveys of the relevant literature, see Bousset 1896: 171–4; Friedländer 1901: 144–50; Hill 1995: 99–117.

A document roughly contemporaneous with Irenaeus is the *Testament of Dan*, a part of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. The questions surrounding this collection relating to its text, author, provenance, and genre are complex and cannot be discussed here. It is, however, reasonable to treat the present form of the text as stemming from the Christian circles in the late second century CE and as preceded by a long process of composition and redaction starting before the onset of Christianity.⁷⁷ Furthermore, *T. Dan* interprets Gen 49:16-17 in a way much more akin to the early Christian interpretations of the passage than to the Second Temple or Rabbinic ones.⁷⁸ *T. Dan*, just like other testaments in the collection, is an account of the last words of a patriarch on his deathbed to his children. After expressing remorse about being complicit in selling Joseph away (1:2-9) and admonishing his offspring against deceit and anger (2:1-5:3), Dan prophesies that his descendants will apostatise and unsuccessfully challenge Levi and Judah (5:4) as well as commit abominable acts (5:5). In vv. 6-7, Dan's children are said to be ruled by Satan, as supposedly attested by Enoch, and, surprisingly, to join in with Levi and Judah in their sinfulness.⁷⁹ Then, after the expected exile (v. 8), Dan's progeny is promised return as well as Lord's mercy and peace (v. 9) whereas Beliar (certainly to be identified with Satan) will be defeated by a salvific figure (v. 10). The text does not quote or undoubtedly allude to Gen 49:16-17, nor does it mention Antichrist by name. Nevertheless, it clearly echoes the idea current in Irenaeus and other Christian exegetes that Dan represents an evil force ruled by an antimessianic agent. Interestingly, however, the tribe is later forgiven and brought into God's fold.

⁷⁷ The *Testaments* have long been treated as a Jewish document interpolated by later Christian redactors; this is the opinion of Grabe 1698; Schnapp 1884; Charles 1908: xv–xviii; Jervell 1969: 30–61; Kee 1983: 1.775–8. This has been repeatedly countered by Jonge 1953: 117–28; idem 1991: 233–43; Hollander, de Joinge 1985: 82–5.

⁷⁸ One should note that, among the Second Temple authors, Philo is one of the few to engage the blessing of Dan. He does so twice, in *Agric.* 94–111 and *Leg. all.* 2.94–108. In both cases, Dan receives a positive interpretation, as he is seen to allegorically represent reason.

⁷⁹ 5:6–7 are usually treated as an interpolation; see Charles 1908: 128; Jonge 1953: 91–2; Becker 1970: 347–56.

Dan's blessing was subject to repeated investigation by Hippolytus.⁸⁰ In *De Antichristo* 14-15, having interpreted Gen 49:8-12 with reference to Christ, he builds on the exchange of blessings between Judah and Dan in that passage and Deut 33:22 and shows that the Antichrist appears as a lion, just like Christ does, and comes from Dan, just as Christ comes from Judah (see also *De antichr.* 6). Hippolytus then naturally refers to Gen 49:17, identifying the snake representing Dan with the paradisiac serpent of Genesis 3. Noting Dan's judicial role, he acknowledges that Jacob's prophecy found some fulfilment in Samson, but will be completely realised only in the Antichrist. A very similar treatment is offered in Hippolytus' *De benedictione Isaaci et Jacobi* 22 where he also sees the horsemen's expectation of salvation as realised in Christ correcting the errors of Adam.⁸¹

The origin of the Antichrist from Dan is also argued for by Ambrose (ca. 340-397) in *De patriarchis* 7.32-34 who rejects the claim that Gen 49:16-17 can be applied to Samson. Ambrose likens Judas to the heel-biting snake, implicitly referring to Ps 41:10, yet then argues that the entire tribe will be forgiven when it turns to Christ (just as in *T. Dan* 5:9). Understanding Jacob's blessing of Dan with regard to Samson is also considered but ultimately rejected by Theodoret (ca. 393-458/466) in *Quaestiones in Octateuchum* 1.112.5, and goes completely unmentioned by Gregory (540-604) in *Moralia in Iob* 6.31.24. They both include reflection on the fact that in Gen 49:17 the rider falls backwards which, according to them, may signify death due to the Antichrist's temptation. The tradition about the Danite Antichrist is referred to in the ancient commentaries on Revelation—Primasius (*In Apoc.* 4 on Rev 16:2), Andrew (*Comm. Apoc.* 7.19 on Rev 7:4-8; 17.51 on Rev 16:12), and Beatus (*Tract. Apoc.* 1.5.1 on Rev 1:17). Of

⁸⁰ See below, pp. 254–61, on the antimessianism of Hippolytus.

⁸¹ Edited and translated by Brière, Mariés, Mercier 1954. On the relationship between this work and the *Testaments of Twelve Patriarchs*, see Jonge 1991: 204–19.

these, only Beatus as well as some recensions of Andrew mention Gen 49:16-17, and it appears that at this stage this claim was already traditional and less in need of Scriptural proof. The Antichrist from Dan is also known in the Syriac tradition, as testified to by the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 14.6-7 which includes an elaborate typological reading of Gen 49:16-17.

Although the majority of early Christian exegetes saw Gen 49:16-17 as referring to primarily or even solely the Antichrist, with decreasing regard for the interpretation linking it to the narratives of Judges, this was not a monolithic trend. Origen in *Comm. Joh.* 6.12, while discussing John 1:23, claims that the figures of the Old Testament were themselves worthy of being prophesied about and adduces, among others, the example of Samson who is supposedly described in Gen 49:16.

Interestingly, the first preserved commentary on Revelation, i.e. that of Victorinus of Petovium, does not mention the Danite descent of Antichrist. He does, however, refer to Gen 49:16 in 4.5 in a wholly different context, namely that both the apostles and the patriarchs will have judicial power in the Eschaton, the latter being suited for this purpose because of Dan's status as a judge.

A surprising treatment of Dan's blessing is offered by Ephrem (ca. 306-373) in *Comm. Gen.* 43.6. His short comment begins by stating that if someone from Dan is designated as judge (Gen 49:16), how much more is this description fitting for one from the tribe of Judah, i.e. Christ. Ephrem then argues that Christ became like a snake to the first snake, i.e. the paradisiac serpent, and like a viper to Satan, referencing also the bronze serpent of Numbers 21. The exegetical reasoning here is not explicit, but it is clear that Ephrem identifies Christ with Dan. He then changes the perspective yet again and explains 49:18 as Jacob yearning for divine redemption as opposed to a human one which is close to the Targumic interpretation of the verse.

Messianic interpretation of the blessing is also endorsed by Rufinus of Aquileia (345-411) in *De benedictionibus XII patriarcharum* 2.15-17. He finds the passage difficult and its interpretations pointing to either the Antichrist or Samson insufficient. With palpable caution, he interprets Dan's judicial role as referring to Christ, based on John 5:22. He pre-empts the potential criticism, that Dan is said to be a snake, by stating that Scripture often uses animal symbols to both good and evil things (see also Origen, *Hom. Ezech.* 11.3). Moreover, Rufinus offers yet another possible reading whereby Dan symbolises a person on the path of moral progress who becomes wise like a snake (see Matt 10:16) and, at the same time, falls from worldly honours into godly humility.

Finally, the seventh-century *Syriac Apocalypse of Daniel* 21 unusually states that the Antichrist will be born of a Levite woman, with no Scriptural support for this idea.⁸² This claim partially parallels the thoroughgoing criticism of Levi in *T. Dan* 5:6-7.

To recapitulate, Gen 49:16-19 became in the early Christian imagination a key Antichristological passage which helped locate the origin of the expected Antimessiah in a way not unlike Mic 5:1 helped locate the birthplace of Christ. This passage, through the variety of shared themes, enabled exegetes to reach back to the Fall narrative, as well as the Gospels. The Christian sources exhibit a gradual move away from seeing Samson as the subject of the Dan's blessing, which is a staple in the Targumic and Rabbinic exegesis. Several interpreters stray away from the standard interpretation and offer complex and imaginative readings which, however, failed to garner significant following.

2.2.4 Rabbinic literature

The approach of the Rabbinic exegetes to the blessing of Dan was markedly different from that evidenced by the early Christian authors, and, just like the Targumim,

⁸² See Henze 2001: 89 n. 121 for the discussion of the text and the mention of probably only other text about a Levite antimessianic opponent, i.e. the Muslim *Kitab al-Fitan*.

centred on connecting it with the figure of Samson. The Rabbinic interest in Dan is represented by writings originating from late antiquity (*Bereshit Rabbah*) onwards to the Middle Ages (*Bemidbar Rabbah*). In spite of the temporal distance from other sources I have just discussed, the midrashim definitely contain older traditions which can credibly illuminate ancient exegesis. *Bereshit R.*, which has interpreted the blessing of Judah with reference to a future Messiah (*Ber. R.* 98.13), understands the commendation of Dan as referring to Samson (98.8-9), and the midrashic author continues to use passages from Judges to illuminate the lemma. The comment on v. 17 contains the statement *זה מצוי בין הנשים*, “just as [the snake] is found among the women, so is Samson, son of Manoah, found among the women” which might be reasonably taken as a tacit allusion to the serpent and Eve in Genesis 3. The midrash, in harmony with the Targumim, takes v. 18 as Jacob’s cry of dissatisfaction with Samson and declaration of awaiting God’s salvation. This is restated in 99.11 where redemption is awaited not from Dan but from Gad who in Genesis 49 receives blessing right after Dan.

Bemidbar R. 10.5 on Num 6:2 still has Samson as a Danite in light of Gen 49:16 and Judg 13:2, but complicates this genealogy by identifying, by means of complex exegesis, Samson’s mother with Hazellelponi who is said to descend from Judah on 1 Chron 4:3; Samson is hence of twofold tribal origin. In 14.9, the midrash elaborates on Samson’s Danite origin and Nazirite status in its comment on the offering of Ahiezer, the leader of the Danites, in Num 7:66-71. In the Talmud, *b. Sotah* 10a explains some aspects of Samson’s persona based on the blessing of Dan, such as his judicial status in reference to Dan being a judge of his people in Gen 49:16 (so also in *b. Pes.* 4a), or his supposed lameness⁸³ in connection to Dan being likened to a snake.

⁸³ The etymological basis for this belief is stated explicitly in *b. Sanh.* 105a where R. Yoḥanan explains *שָׁפִיף* from Gen 49:17, by then customarily taken as describing Samson, as a plural of *שָׁפִי* in Num 23:3, understood incorrectly as “lame” (actually meaning a “bare height”).

In sum, the Samsonic interpretation of Dan's blessing from Genesis 49 is carefully elaborated on by the Rabbis. They evidently did not use this passage in their antimessianic speculation, but also decided, with a few exceptions, not to reproduce the Targumic dissatisfaction with Samson as a redeemer. While no explicit evidence is available, it might be conjectured that this trend was due to the Christian preoccupation with tracing the Jewish origins of the Antichrist to the tribe of Dan. The Rabbinic interpreters could have wanted to disengage from seeing this passage as eschatological and steer the discussion to the exegetically safer direction of linking it with the narrative of Judges.

2.2.5 *Summary*

In conclusion to this section, the reception history of Gen 49:16-17 is strongly influenced by other OT passages which in one way or the other relate to it, such as Gen 3:15; Deut 33:22; Jer 8:16-17; or Judges. Allusions and echoes of these passages inform the Jewish and Christian engagements of the blessing of Dan. Whereas the link to Samson is dominant in the Targumim and carried over into the Rabbinical writings, many Christian writers—but by no means all of them—draw both on the textual proximity of the blessing of Judah, which they saw as messianic, and the negative portrayal of Dan in the OT as idolatrous. Consequently, the blessing becomes a standard Christian text about the Antichrist, since Dan is identified as the tribe of the Antichrist's origin.

Two issues have to be raised. Firstly, the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Gen 49:16-17 demonstrates the importance of the passage's co-text, i.e. its immediate textual environment. Jewish and Christian interpreters are eager to read the blessing of Judah a couple of verses earlier as messianic proof text which made some of them eager to look for the Messiah's enemy in its vicinity. They found him in the blessing of Dan.

Secondly, it appears that, generally speaking, the Jewish and Christian ways of reading Gen 49:16-17 stem from the same sources but branch into different directions,

with the former focusing on Samson and the latter on the Antichrist. It appears that these interpretative decisions were correlated. Antichrist's Jewish origin helped some Christians authors to differentiate themselves from Judaism, whereas emphasizing the link between Dan and Samson helped the Rabbis steer the exegesis of this passage to safer ground. On the other hand, several authors, such as Origen and, on the other hand, the authors of the Targumic fragments from the Cairo Genizah, break the line and offer insights untypical for their coreligionists. Consequently, there are no singular and monolithic interpretations which could be seen as typical for only Christianity or Judaism, but each category encompasses a variety of distinct and sometimes contrary ways of reading.

2.3 **Isaiah 11:4**

2.3.1 *The verse in context*

The third OT passage is Isa 11:4, especially its second half.⁸⁴ The MT of the verse runs as follows: וְשָׁפַט בְּצֶדֶק דָּלִים וְהוֹכִיחַ בְּמִישׁוֹר לְעִנְיֵי־אָרֶץ וְהִכָּה־אֶרֶץ⁸⁵ בְּשֶׁבֶט פִּי וּבְרוּחַ שְׁפָתָיו יָמִית רָשָׁע, “and he will judge the poor justly, and adjudicate fairly for the humble of the earth. And he will strike the earth with the staff (or “the sceptre”) of his mouth, and kill the evil one with the breath of his lips”. In its wider context, this assertion belongs to a prophecy progressing from a judgment upon Assyria (10:5-11) and its king (10:12-19), through the eschatological regathering of the remnant of the people (10:20-32). 10:33-34 introduces the image of the Lord cutting down trees which immediately segues into the prophecy about the stump of Jesse (11:1).⁸⁶ Blenkinsopp persuasively identifies the historical

⁸⁴ The importance of this verse for the antimessianic tradition was underscored by Horbury 1998a: passim.

⁸⁵ It has been conjectured (see e.g. Blenkinsopp 2000: 263) that one should read עָרַץ, “harasser” instead of אָרֶץ. Such a reading would indeed complete the parallelism, but is unsupported by any of the ancient versions.

⁸⁶ On this oracle in the context of the Mesopotamian royal imagery associated with plants see Widengren 1951: 49–51.

context of the oracle as Hezekiah's rebellion after Sennacherib's accession (see 2 Kings 18:7b).⁸⁷ In this case, עֲשֵׂה of Isa 11:4b would be most easily identifiable with Sennacherib or Assyria in general; the tribute they have been exacting from Judah might thus stand behind the economic overtones of Isa 11:4a.

My investigation of this passage will concentrate on two aspects, namely whether the text itself envisages a messianic figure and its opponent and, secondly, whether such understanding is to be found in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the passage. As far as the first problem is concerned, there can be little doubt that Isa 10:34-11:10 hopes for a ruler of the Davidic pedigree who, being led by God (11:2a, 3), inaugurates a new, peaceful era (vv. 6-9). These characteristics have been recognised by many modern exegetes as indicative of a messianic ruler, thus making Isa 11:4 a part of an early messianic oracle.⁸⁸ This conclusion holds also in view of the fact that Isaiah might well have in mind Hezekiah specifically. In that case, the oracle would represent royal ideology and propaganda trying to portray Hezekiah as a just and victorious monarch and a favourite of God.

The following sections will discuss the various ways in which Isa 11:4b was treated as a messianic prooftext. Once the agent in the verse is understood as anointed, the "evil one" becomes, almost automatically, the messianic opponent. Once again, the Antichrist tradition will be shown to rely on the messianic interpretation and expectation.

2.3.2 *The ancient versions*

I will now move to the questions of effective history. It begins with the ancient translations of this text:

⁸⁷ Blenkinsopp 2000: 258. Cf. Motyer 1993: 130 who argues that, since the oracle is eschatological in tone, the conclusions about the historical context should not be pressed.

⁸⁸ Gray 1949: 211–8; Mowinckel 1956: 17; Klausner 1956: 56–7; Oswalt 1986: 276–83; Watts 2005: 211–3; Heskett 2007: 113–31.

- (1) LXX: καὶ πατάξει γῆν τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν πνεύματι διὰ χειλέων⁸⁹ ἀνελεῖ ἀσεβῆ, “and he will strike the earth with the word of his mouth, and by the breath through the lips he will remove the impious”;
- (2) *Targum Jonathan*: וְיַמְחִי חַיִּיבֵי אֶרֶצָא בְּמִימְרָא פּוּמְיָהּ וּבְמַמְלַל סְפוּתִיָּהּ יְהִי מְאִית רְשִׁיעָא, “he will strike the guilty ones of the earth by the word of his mouth, and with the speech of his lips he will kill the evil one”;
- (3) Vulgate: *percutiet terram virga oris sui et spiritu labiorum suorum interficiet impium*, “he will strike the earth by the rod his mouth, and by the breath of his lips he will kill the impious”;
- (4) Peshitta: וְיַמְחִי אֶרֶץ כְּסִפְתָּא דְּפֻמְיָהּ וּבְמַמְלַל סְפוּתִיָּהּ יְהִי מְאִית רְשִׁיעָא, “and he will strike the earth with the sceptre of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he will kill the evil one”.

The LXX inserts τῷ λόγῳ where the Hebrew has מִפִּי. *Targum Jonathan* shares in this tendency, as it reads מִימְרָא for מִפִּי and מַמְלַל for רוּחַ. Bearing in mind the possible traces of messianism in both the LXX and the Targum of Isaiah 11,⁹⁰ the usage of the terms λόγος, crucial for the later Christian messianism, and especial מִימְרָא⁹¹ can either hint at the messianic interest of the translators themselves, or at least partially explain the subsequent messianic interpretations of Isa 11:4. The Vulgate and the Peshitta, which are the later translations, both render the Hebrew faithfully and without noticeable interest in the messianic potential of the text.

⁸⁹ α', σ', and θ' read uniformly ἐν ῥάβδῳ...ἐν πνεύματι χειλέων αὐτοῦ.

⁹⁰ See, for instance, de Sousa 2010: 138–56; Ngunga 2013: 98–114 on the messianism of the LXX of Isaiah 11. *Tg. J.* Isa 11:1 references Messiah explicitly.

⁹¹ On the Memra see e.g. Boyarin 2001: 252–62.

2.3.3 *The Dead Sea Scrolls*

Messianic readings of Isa 11:4 emerge already in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The conclusion of the sectarian *Rule of Benedictions* (1QS^b) contains a set of blessings to be uttered by the instructor and addressed at נשיא העדה, “the prince of the congregation” (1QS^b V 20-29). The title, present also in 1QM V 1-2, CD VII 18-20, and 4Q285 fr. 4, 5, appears to be applied to a messianic actor who will renew the covenant (V 21a, 23a), enjoy God’s active support (V 23b, 27b), and achieve everlasting and universal dominion (V 21b, 27a, 28-29).⁹² Isaiah 11 figures prominently as the source text for many of the blessings.⁹³ V 25 implores that the spirit of counsel, strength, knowledge, and the fear of God be bestowed on the prince which overtly draws on the spiritual gifts in Isa 11:2. Most importantly for my present purpose, Isa 11:4b emerges as the clear background of one of the blessings: בשבטכה תחריב ארץ וברוח שפתיכה תמית רשע, “with his sceptre may you waste the earth, and with the breath of his lips may you kill the evil one”. The evil one, who is hardly identifiable in this context, is thus conflicted with the messianic agent of 1QS^b.

Isa 10:33-34; 11:1-5 is quoted and interpreted at length in the *Isaiah Pesher* (4QpIsa^a, frg. 8-10 III). The lemma containing Isa 11:4 is unfortunately lost, but would have most probably fit in lines 19-20. Although no exegesis devoted explicitly to this verse is included, one could argue for a presence of its echo in lines 25-26: בידו ובכול: ... כו]ל העמים תשפוט חרבו הג[ואי]ם ימשול ומגוג, “in his hand, and he will rule over all the nations, and Magog [...] he will judge all the peoples with his sword”. The reference to the nations and Magog, which I will discuss at greater length in the next section,⁹⁴ might resonate with the original Isaianic reference to Assyria. This claim is substantiated by the reference in III 7 to the Kittim who elsewhere (1QM I 2) are claimed to come from

⁹² Cf. Atkinson 2000: 120–1; Elledge 2007: 185–7.

⁹³ Collins 1995: 60–1.

⁹⁴ See below, pp. 100–1.

Assyria. Most importantly, judgement of the peoples with a sword draws Isa 49:2a: **יְשַׁמְּרֵנִי** **כְּחֶרֶב חֲדָה**, “he made my mouth like a sharp sword”, as well as 11:4. The author of the pesher introduces the weapon from the former verse, but preserves the forensic and combative context of the latter. The exact same Scriptural conflation will later be discussed in relation to Rev 2:16; 19:15a.

The DSS offer one of the first insights into how Isa 11:4 became appropriated into the antimessianic tradition, as the entire oracle was treated as foretelling a future ruling figure who will introduce justice and subdue his opponents.

2.3.4 *The Pseudepigrapha*

The prominent role of Isa 11:4 in ancient antimessianism is also attested in the Pseudepigrapha. The triumph of the stump of Jesse over the evil one is clearly picked up in *1 Enoch* 62:2. There, the Lord of the Spirits is depicted as sitting upon the throne of glory, receiving the spirit of righteousness, slaying the sinners with the word of his mouth, and banishing the unjust from his presence. The verse unmistakably echoes the beginning of Isaiah 11 but, should the reading of all MSS be followed, it would make the Lord of the Spirits, i.e. God, and not to the Messiah, referred to in the previous verse, the subject of all the actions. It is, however, quite plausible to emend the Ge'ez from **ወሰለ**, “and he sat” to **ወአሰለ** “and he seated him” (as in 61:8).⁹⁵ Such a reading would make the messianic Chosen One the one who slays the sinners and banishes the unjust. Therefore, these groups, indeterminate though they are, achieve antimessianic status.

Another allusion to the Isaianic prophecy occurs in *Psalms of Solomon* 17:35-36.⁹⁶ In the Solomonic Psalm, the speaker, having bemoaned the destruction of and the unrighteousness in Jerusalem (17:5-20), expresses a fervent hope in the coming of the

⁹⁵ For this view, see e.g. Dillmann 1853: 196; Charles 1906: 112; Nickelsburg, VanderKam 2012: 256.

⁹⁶ See the discussion of the antimessianism of *Ps. Sol.* 17 below, pp. 207–9.

descendant of David (v. 21; see v. 4), who is explicitly called χριστὸς κύριος, “Messiah, [the] Lord” (v. 32). The text is, therefore, self-consciously and explicitly messianic. The extended description of the Messiah’s activity includes a disjointed reference to Isa 11:4b: πατάξει γὰρ γῆν τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ εἰς αἰῶνα...ἐλέγξει ἄρχοντας καὶ ἐξῆραι ἁμαρτωλοὺς ἐν ἰσχύι λόγου, “for he will strike the earth with the word of his mouth for ever...he will reprove the rulers and get rid of the sinners with the power of [his] word” (17:35a, 36b). A clear echo of Isa 11:4b LXX is also present in 17:24b: ὀλεθρεῦσαι ἔθνη παράνομα ἐν λόγῳ στόματος αὐτοῦ, “he will destroy the lawless nations with the word of his mouth”. *Psalm of Solomon* 17 transforms the Isaianic oracle, as it envisages a foreign military onslaught on Jerusalem and the city’s pervasive sinfulness which are both to be terminated by the arrival of the Messiah.⁹⁷

Isa 11:4b appears to be in the background of the imagery used in *4 Ezra* 13:8-11.⁹⁸ The passage occurs in the context of Ezra’s second dream and sixth vision where “something like the figure of a man”⁹⁹ emerges from the sea, travels on the clouds through the air, and lands on a mountain (13:3, 6; it is identified as Mount Zion in vv. 35-36). He is confronted by an innumerable gathering—later presented as the nations of the earth (v. 33)—whom he does not fight with weapons, which he is explicitly stated not to have (v. 9; see Isa 31:8), but rather sends out “from his mouth as it were a stream of fire, and from his lips a flaming breath, and from his tongue...a storm of fiery coals” (v. 10; see Rev 9:17). The mixture of all these completely incinerates the assembly of nations (v. 11). The human-like figure, who is later named “he whom the Most High has been keeping for many ages, through whom he will deliver his creation; and he will direct those who are left” (v. 26) and also a “servant” (v. 37), should be understood as a part of the

⁹⁷ See also Lorein 2003: 89–106.

⁹⁸ See the discussion of the antimessianism of *4 Ezra* below, pp. 219–24.

⁹⁹ All the following translations of *4 Ezra* are taken from Stone 1990.

messianic expectation of the rest of the book.¹⁰⁰ The description of the fiery destruction of the nations is a composite of different Scriptural traditions. The combination of “mouth”, “lips”, and “breath” unmistakably points to Isa 11:4b, with 2 Sam 22:9//Ps 18:8b-c, and Jer 5:14 also possibly belonging in the background. Here, the messianic triumph over an evil agent is transformed into an eschatological military victory over a foreign army, similar to the language of *Psalm of Solomon* 17.

The Pseudepigraphic appropriations of the Isaianic oracle constitute an exegetical strategy which is similar to that discernible in the DSS. Isa 11:4b is read primarily as a messianic prophecy about a future military leader who will engage in a violent conflict with variously described antimessianic opponents. The passage should therefore be considered formative for one of the key motifs in ancient antimessianism, namely the militant confrontation between the Anointed One and his foes.

2.3.5 *The New Testament*

Within the NT, Isa 11:4 emerges clearly in two texts crucial for the Antichrist tradition. Of the two, it is only 2 Thess 2:8 that alludes to the Isaianic passage. The verse reads: καὶ τότε ἀποκαλυφθήσεται ὁ ἄνομος, ὃν ὁ κύριος [Ἰησοῦς] ἀνελεῖ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ καὶ καταργήσῃ τὴν ἐπιφανείαν τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ, “and then will the lawless one be revealed, whom the Lord [Jesus] will remove with the breath of his lips and abolish the appearance of his coming.” The phrase τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ and the verb ἀνελεῖ show the influence of Isa 11:4b LXX on this passage. While I reserve a fuller discussion of the letter for later,¹⁰¹ the author of 2 Thessalonians clearly envisages an end-time confrontation between Jesus and the Lawless One who will be defeated in the manner foretold by Isaiah.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 210–3.

¹⁰¹ See the discussion of 2 Thessalonians 2 below, pp. 163–72.

The other antimessianic use of Isa 11:4 are its echoes in Revelation. There, Jesus is portrayed several times as having a sword come out of his mouth (Rev 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21); in the latter three passages, the sword is used in warfare. In a fashion identical to that of 4QpIsa^a, Rev 2:16; 19:15, 21 combine Isa 49:2a LXX: καὶ ἔθηκεν τὸ στόμα μου ὥσεί μάχαιραν ὀξεῖαν, “and he made my mouth like a sharp sword”, with the striking of the earth and the evil one in Isa 11:4b.¹⁰² Importantly, 2:16 speaks about fighting the Nicolaitans, and 19:15a about striking the nations.¹⁰³ It is visible, therefore, that the author of Revelation interprets the passage from Isaiah to underscore Christ’s militaristic aspect and the continual opposition of the earthly forces.

2.3.6 *The Church Fathers*

Ancient Christian interpretations of Isaiah are numerous¹⁰⁴ and contributed significantly to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Isa 11:4. The relevant material comes from the fourth and fifth century and does not appear to change or develop with the passage of time. It is visible that the Fathers took due notice of the usage of this verse in 2 Thess 2:8. The Pauline insight surfaces in Jerome (347-420), *Comm. Isa.* 4.14, who does not elaborate on the passage, but rather cites Ps 9:5 and Matt 10:34 alongside the Pauline verse and simply claims Jesus slays the wicked one. This form of interpretation is taken further by John Chrysostom (c. 347-409) in his commentary on Isaiah as preserved in Armenian (11.5)¹⁰⁵, and by Theodoret, *Comm, Isa.* 4 *ad. loc.* Based on 2 Thess 2:8, they understand the Isaianic passage as speaking about the Antichrist. Interestingly, some authors, while unsurprisingly reading the whole oracle as referring to Christ, see the Messiah’s actions in 11:4 as targeted against demons and evil spirits, based on the Gospel

¹⁰² Charles 1920: 1.30; Beale 1999: 211; Koester 2015: 246–7, 757.

¹⁰³ Fekkes 1994: 119 persuasively argues that the exchange of γῆ, as in Isa 11:4 LXX, for τὰ ἔθνη in Rev 19:15 is due to the influence of Ps 2:8-9 LXX.

¹⁰⁴ For a study of the early Christian interpretations of Isaiah, see Sawyer 1996.

¹⁰⁵ See the 1887 Venice edition.

exorcism stories. This is the line of interpretation taken by Eusebius, *Comm. Isa.* 82 (written shortly before Eusebius' death in 339¹⁰⁶) who, like Jerome, also quotes Matt 10:34 in this context, and Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. Isa.* 2.1, dating from between 412 and 425.¹⁰⁷

2.3.7 Rabbinic literature

Isa 11:4 is referred to several times in the Rabbinic writings. Whilst Talmudic literature contains references to the verse in non-eschatological contexts (*b. San.* 93b; *y. Ber.* 17b; *y. Sot.* 8a), the mediaeval Midrashim use the prophecy primarily to fuel their end-time expectation. *Ruth Rabbah* on Ruth 2:14 offers a series of interpretations of Boaz's command for Naomi to approach, the fifth of which relates to the future Messiah who, having suffered and been deposed from the throne, will return to it, as Isa 11:4b supposedly testifies. *Midrash Tanḥuma* 7.7 (Buber's recension) understands the stone striking the statue in Dan 2:34 as the messianic king foretold in Isa 11:4b. The conflict with foreign powers is also the guiding thought of the application of this verse to the messianic Ephraim in *Pesikta Rabbati* 37.1 which foretells that he will be attacked by one hundred forty kingdoms. *Midrash Tehillim* 2.3 on Ps 2:2 portrays the future Anointed One as crushing rebellions in the lands under his rule with reference to Isa 11:4. Towards the end of a Byzantine Jewish apocalypse, the *Book of Zerubbabel* from the eight century CE, Armilus is killed by the Messiah who breathes in his face, echoing Isa 11:4 and reversing the life-giving breath of the Creator in Gen 2:7. In a very similar vein, mediaeval *Midrash vaYosha* (recension B), while commenting on Exod 15:18, narrates the end-time onslaught of the armies of Gog and Magog and the death of Messiah ben Joseph at hands

¹⁰⁶ Armstrong, Elowsky 2013: xxi–xxv.

¹⁰⁷ Russell 2000: 70.

of Armilus. He is then killed by Messiah ben David who arrives on the clouds (with an explicit reference to Dan 7:13). The action is seen as the fulfilment of Isa 11:4.

Although Isa 11:4 does not receive only messianic interpretation among the Rabbis, it repeatedly informed their eschatological imagination within the frame of which Messiah was an embattled figure.

2.3.8 *Summary*

The messianic overtones of Isaiah's oracle have permeated all of its reception history. The original reference to Assyria as the evil one and the hope that a ruler will defeat it was transformed as later interpreters began to see that ruler as the Messiah in conflict with foreign nations. This is the understanding to be found in the DSS, the pseudepigrapha, Revelation, and some Rabbinic authorities. On several occasions, however, in all of the exegetical traditions discussed above, the Isaianic evil opposes the Messiah as either the Antichrist or Armilus. Identification of that sort is shared by some of the Church Fathers and Rabbis.

It is especially important to notice that, unlike the passages from Genesis discussed previously, Isa 11:4b receives clearly antimessianic interpretation in the DSS, the Pseudepigrapha, and the Rabbinic literature. This fact provides evidence for one of the core claims of my thesis, namely that non-Christian Jewish sources envisage an end-time messianic opponent.

2.4 **Gog of Magog**

The next passage I would like to turn to is the Gog of Magog oracle in Ezekiel 38-39. The chapters recount the invasion of the prince Gog from the land of Magog on the land of Israel (38:1-16), God's judgement over him (38:17-23), Gog's defeat (39:1-10) and burial (39:11-20), and the restoration of the exiled Israel and Judah (39:20-29). These two chapters pose interesting questions on several fronts, some of which have a bearing

on their messianic and, consequently, antimessianic reception.¹⁰⁸ I will discuss those in the following order: the portrayal of Gog of Magog in the MT; the relationship between the oracle and Ezekiel 37, with special reference to פ⁹⁶⁷; the link with Num 24:7 in light of its ancient versions; and finally the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the oracle.

2.4.1 *The Gog oracle in its context*

Ezekiel 38-39 MT identifies the main antagonist of the story as גֹּג אֶרֶץ הַמָּגוּג נָשִׂיא ¹⁰⁹רֹאשׁ, “Gog of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshek and Tubal”. Unlike other language versions of Ezekiel 38-39, the MT makes clear that Gog is a proper name of a being, whereas Magog (mentioned only in 38:1 and 39:6; see also Gen 10:2) is surely a toponym or an ethnonym.¹¹⁰

The Ezekielic Gog might be related to an actual historical figure, with Gyges, the Lydian monarch from the seventh century BCE, or one of his successors as the preferred candidates. They held sway over much of Asia Minor and the adjacent regions not long before Ezekiel’s times and have been noted in the Assyrian sources.¹¹¹ Such historical referent, however, can be only speculated about. The proposal of Gyges is not historically unproblematic, and the oracle might be a literary production rather than a historical report.¹¹² Furthermore, in view of the eschatological tone of the oracle itself and its possible link with Num 24:7, the historicising approach warrants serious caution.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ On the role of Gog of/and Magog in the Antichrist tradition, see especially Rigaux 1932: 108–34; Ernst 1967: 198–205; Horbury 1998a: passim.

¹⁰⁹ נָשִׂיא רֹאשׁ is an unintuitive grammatical construction, literally meaning something like “the princely head”. Zimmerli 1983: 305 rightly notes several occasions in the OT where רֹאשׁ, despite being a *nomen rectum*, is adjectival in meaning (see 2 Kings 25:18; Ezra 7:5; 1 Chr 27:5; 2 Chr 19:11). The LXX translator is aware of the difficulty and decides to treat רֹאשׁ as a toponym, Πως.

¹¹⁰ Bøe 2001: 89–90; Buitenwerf 2007: 166; Tooman 2011: 146; Rösel 2012: 139–40.

¹¹¹ See *ibid.* 91–3. The legend about Gyges’ magical ring is also famously recounted in Herodotus, *Hist* 1.7-13, and Plato, *Resp.* 359a-360d. Cf. Zimmerli 1983: 302 who argues that Gog is merely a “cipher for a legendary ruler”.

¹¹² On the considerable similarities with the Cuthean legend of Naram-Sin see Astour 1976: 567–79.

¹¹³ Batto 1992: 159.

The defeat of Gog, narrated in 38:17-39:10, is attributed solely and explicitly to God. The section is prefaced with *כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה*, “thus says the Lord God” (38:17; 39:1), and it is God who punishes Israel’s opponents (38:21-22; 39:2-3, 4b, 6a). The demise of Gog serves as a proclamation of God’s glory (38:23; 39:6b-7). No messianic figure—the leader of God’s army or the like—is in sight. The MT of Ezekiel 38-39, when read on its own, precludes the possibility of seeing Gog of Magog as an antimessianic actor; he is the enemy of God himself.

2.4.2 *Relation to Ezekiel 37*

God’s exclusive involvement in the destruction of Gog is nuanced by the co-text of the oracle. In the received order of chapters, it is preceded by the vision of the valley of the dry bones (37:1-14), the prophecy about the reunification of the tribes of Israel (37:15-23), and, most importantly, the promise of an eternal Davidic king to rule over them (37:24-25; see v. 22b; 34:23-24). This figure reappears in the description of the *תרומה*, “the consecrated portion” of the renewed land of Israel in Ezekiel 48, as the prince is allotted two plots of land flanking the Temple and the city (48:21-22). Notably, the future ruler receives only a brief treatment, with no specific actions assigned to him. Ezekiel’s focus is firmly and continuously on the Temple, and his interest in the prince’s rule is passing. He is not mentioned in any way in the conflict with Gog in ch. 38-39.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the textual proximity of this messianic promise to the Gog oracle might have encouraged later interpreters to combine the two and cast Gog of/and Magog as Messiah’s opponents.

A different chapter order is unique to two MSS, namely $\mathfrak{P}^{967}$ from the late second or early third century CE, which preserves the oldest available Greek text of Ezekiel, as

¹¹⁴ Cf. Crane 2008: 125–6 who argues that “[the received] chapter order was motivated by a ‘call to arms’, which required a military Davidic leader”. Neither is the prince portrayed as a warring figure earlier in the prophecy, nor is he ever mentioned in the Gog oracle.

well the sixth-century CE Codex Wirceburgensis (*W*) which is a witness to the Vetus Latina (*VL*) of the book. Both, most probably independently of each other, place ch. 37 after the Gog oracle of ch. 38-39. This sequence aptly resolves some problems of the received order. In the latter, Ezek 37:22-25 announces the prince's reign, but it is God who fights with Gog in the next two chapters. In $\mathfrak{P}^{967}$ and *W*, the prince is introduced only after the war is won for Israel. The dry bones in ch. 37 are an unexpected image, but they could be understood as the remnants of the battle (39:17-20) by a reader of $\mathfrak{P}^{967}$ and *W*. The sequencing in these two MSS makes also for a seamless transition between the promise of the reunited Israel under the Davidic reign and the vision of the eschatological Temple.¹¹⁵ It would further remove the messianic prince from the war with Gog, as the former's reign would be inaugurated only after the latter's defeat.

The question of the originality of either of the chapter orderings is a contested one.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the divergent ordering of the material in these climactic chapters must have changed the audiences' experience and reception of Ezekiel's prophecy as a whole. While the narrative of $\mathfrak{P}^{967}$ and *W* precludes the possibility of the Ezekielic war being read as a messianic conflict, the received chapter order allows it. Should the latter be a redaction of the more original sequence of the former, the messianic frame of the Gog oracle would become a conscious transformation of the text. One should bear in mind that the sequence of the eschatological peace being interrupted by war and then restored, i.e. the sequence found in the MT of Ezekiel 37-48, might have influenced similar scenarios in 4Q246, Revelation 19-20, and *Sib. Or.* 3.635-730. Consequently, the early

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 216–20.

¹¹⁶ In favour of $\mathfrak{P}^{967}$ being a witness to a Hebrew text earlier than the MT, see *ibid.* 207–70; Lilly 2012: 301–4. For the contrary position, see Fitzpatrick 2004: *passim* who refers to the chaos myth to argue for the coherence of the received chapter order.

fluidity in the sequencing of the Gog oracle and the promise of the Davidic king might have influenced the messianic reading of the former by exegetes.

2.4.3 *Relation to Numbers 24:7*

The question of the messianic interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39, in which Gog of/and Magog would play the role of the Messiah's antagonist, is complicated even further by a significant textual variant of Num 24:7. The MT of the text runs יִלְמִים מִדְּלָיִי, "he shall pour water from his buckets, and his offspring [will be] in many waters, and he will rise higher than Agag, his king, and his kingdom shall be lifted up". This verse is a part of Balaam's third oracle, whose nature is matter of debate, but it is commonly assumed that Agag must be the Amalekite king of this name slain by Samuel in 1 Samuel 15. This claim is strengthened by the prophecy of the Amalekites' demise in 24:20.¹¹⁷

The LXX transmits a different version: ἐξελεύσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτοῦ καὶ κυριεύσει ἐθνῶν πολλῶν, καὶ ὑψωθήσεται ἡ Γωγ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ, καὶ αὐξηθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ, "a man will come out of its seed and lord over many nations, and his kingdom will be raised up above Gog, and his kingdom will be made to grow". This reading envisages a future powerful ruler, thus expressing messianic hope. Such a construal is unsurprising in view of the co-text which includes the standard messianic star prediction of v. 17.¹¹⁸ The reference to Gog in the LXX of this verse is striking, and raises questions about the possible relationship with the Ezekielic Gog oracle.¹¹⁹ This reading is present also attested in the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), VL, Theodotion (Θ'), whereas Agag, in agreement with the MT, is to be found in the Targumim,

¹¹⁷ Budd 1984: 269; Levine 2000: 197.

¹¹⁸ Horbury 1998b: 50 et passim; idem 2006: 121–4; Collins 2006: 142–4; cf. Lust 1995: 233–57 who thinks it is only the LXX reference to Gog that might have fuelled messianic interpretation of the passage.

¹¹⁹ Γωγ ὁ βασιλεύς, "Gog the king", appears also in the LXX and VL of Amos 7:1, the MT of which is difficult; see Bøe 2001: 61–71; Tooman 2011: 143–6.

Peshitta, and Vulgate; the textual tradition of Aquila (α') and Symmachus (σ') offers a mixed picture.¹²⁰ The reading of the SP is very significant, since Ezekiel, which is absent from the Samaritan canon, could not have influenced the text of Numbers.

The textual variation of Num 24:7 has two important consequences: firstly, it allows for a possibility of a pre-MT text that read “Gog” and that gave rise to the discrepancy;¹²¹ secondly, in the texts that have “Gog” it is possible to read the figure as a messianic opponent.

Whilst I will not put forward views on the putative original of Numbers, the question of Gog as an Antimesiah in Num 24:7 is worth touching upon briefly. The verse was interpreted in terms of Christian Messianism by Origen (*Hom. in Num.* 17.5.1-2) who sees Gog as the opponent to be finally vanquished by Christ and his growing kingdom, the Church, quoting 1 Cor 15:25-27 to that effect. While interpreting this verse in *Quaest. in Octa.* 4.44.2, Theodoret sees an incarnate being (most certainly Christ) as triumphing over Gog. Similarly, Gog is portrayed as a lawless, destructive force prior to the coming of the messianic Taheb in the second or third-century CE Samaritan *Asatir* (also known as “The Book of the Secrets of Moses”) XII, based on Numbers 24.¹²² It is clear that the appearance of Gog in some of the texts of Balaam’s prophecy, which is otherwise the messianic *locus classicus* due to the star prophecy in Num 24:7, made this figure the enemy of the Messiah in the readings of several interpreters.

¹²⁰ See Salvesen 1991: 134. Both Jastram 1994: 236 in the *edition princeps* of 4QNum^b XVII 19 and Ulrich 2010: 155 reconstruct the line as containing מִגּוֹג rather than מִגָּג. Horbury 2006: 121 accepts this reading, whilst Bøe 2001: 53 considers it purely conjectural. Interestingly, 4QNum^b is often viewed as close to the Samaritan form of the text which increases the likelihood that the reading “Gog” rather than “Agag” was present; see García Martínez 2013: 72.

¹²¹ This is argued for by Sellin 1912: 154; Bøe 2001: 50–8; Tooman 2011: 140–2 who thinks the original reading of Numbers influenced Ezekiel.

¹²² In a remarkable passage, Philo in *Praem.* 95 quotes Num 24:7 to engage in one of his few messianic reflections. His text, however, does not mention Gog; on this issue, see Hecht 1987: 139–68; Borgen 1992: 341–61.

2.4.4 *The Dead Sea Scrolls*

Within the larger framework of the nations' attack on Israel, Gog and Magog¹²³ are often opposed directly to a messianic agent, as is possibly the case in 4QpIsa^a, fr. 8, 10 (III 21), referred to already above.¹²⁴ The interpretation focuses on the Davidic successor's rule over the peoples. Line 21 runs: ...בידו ובכול הג[ואי]ם ימשול ומגוג..., "...in his hand and over all peoples he will rule and Magog...". Interestingly, the line most probably did not contain a reference to Gog which makes it one of the few references to Magog alone. Were the reference to Gog lost in the lacuna at the beginning of line 22, it would make for a very unusual name order.¹²⁵ Understanding to whom it may refer depends on the punctuation of the sentence. As noted by Buitenwerf, a new sentence might possibly start after ימשול, with ומגוג as the new subject.¹²⁶ This construal is preferable due to the position of ומגוג after the verb, which would be unusual, were it an object, and the redundant double mention of both the peoples and Magog in one sentence. The latter most probably referred to a nation, possible identifiable with the Kittim (III 7-8). Buitenwerf's suggestion, that Magog would suffer destruction at the hand of the Messiah, based on 11:4a, is unverifiable, but plausible.¹²⁷

The single time Gog and Magog are undoubtedly mentioned together in the DSS is 4Q523 fr. 1-2 which is unfortunately extremely fragmentary. The text seems to be speaking about war and looting, but it is impossible to state what the context and purpose of the mention of Gog and Magog is. Elsewhere in the DSS, Gog alone is mentioned in 1QM XI 16: ל]ו [ל]ים [ה]הנקהל ובכול קהלו שפטים בגוג ובכול קהלו הנקהל [ל]ים [ל]ו, "you carry out the judgement

¹²³ This form, rather than "Gog of Magog", becomes standard in the Second Temple period and later. Ezek 38:2 LXX reads: στήσιν τὸ πρόσωπόν σου ἐπὶ Γωγ καὶ τὴν γῆν τοῦ Μαγωγ, "set your face unto Gog and the land of Magog". As a pair, Gog and Magog appear in the *Sib. Or.* 3.319-322, 512-513, 4Q523, Rev 20:8, and frequently in the Targumim and Rabbinic literature. See Bøe 2001: 140–230.

¹²⁴ See above, pp. 88–9.

¹²⁵ Bøe 2001: 173.

¹²⁶ Buitenwerf 2007: 178.

¹²⁷ Ibid.; see Röcker 2009: 493 who argues in favour of this proposition and also reconstructs the text to include Gog.

on Gog and on all of his gathering gathered around him”, but there it is clearly God himself who judges him.¹²⁸ Magog as Japhet’s son is mentioned in relation to the table of the nations in Gen 10:2 in 1QapGen XII 12; XVII 16 and possibly 10.¹²⁹

2.4.5 *The New Testament and the Church Fathers*

Within the NT canon, Gog and Magog are mentioned only in Rev 20:8 where they quite clearly stand for the nations of the earth under satanic leadership. The conflict they engage in is not antimessianic, as Christ is not present at the confrontation that ensues (vv. 9-10). The fire that consumes them (see Ezek 38:22; 39:6) comes most probably from God himself. This was the intuition of many scribes, including the second corrector of Codex Sinaiticus, who amend the text to make the fire come ἀπὸ/ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. This also the case for the most important early Christian reader of the Gog oracle, i.e. Lactantius.¹³⁰ His description of the eschatological war (*Div. inst.* 7.26.1-4) includes palpable Ezekielic overtones, such as the detail about Israel using the nations’ weapons as firewood for seven years (7.26.4; Ezek 39:9-10).¹³¹ Lactantius, however, makes clear that it is, again, God’s anger that destroys the foreign invaders who therefore are not antimessianic.

Apart from Origen and Theodoret, who reference Gog in relation to Num 24:7, interest in the Gog oracle, incited by Rev 20:7-10, is also present in Tyconius.¹³² In his partially preserved commentary on this passage, he identifies Gog and Magog as the forces oppressing the church within every nation. A more elaborate understanding is offered in his *Liber regularum* 7.4.3 where he quotes Ezek 39:1-4 and combines it with 2 Thess 2:6-8, stating that the oppression of the Church by the foreign nations constitutes *mysterium facinoris*, “the mystery of lawlessness”. Tyconius thus equates Gog and

¹²⁸ Bøe 2001: 161–70.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 174–6.

¹³⁰ On the antimessianism of Lactantius see below, pp. 268–73.

¹³¹ The last detail is also known to the author of *Sib. Or.* 3.649-651, but this passage may be a later textual intrusion based on Lactantius who otherwise quotes *Sib. Or.* 3.652 in *Div. inst.* 7.18.7.

¹³² For the discussion of Tyconius and Augustine see below, pp. 275–81.

Magog with the crucial Antichristological actor.¹³³ Similar approach is taken by Augustine, *Civ.* 20.11, who comments on Rev 20:7-8 and interprets it as referring to all nations in which the devil hides and through which he persecutes the Church. Tyconius' and Augustine's reading of Gog and Magog as present and universal was most probably a reaction to other interpretations which identified them with specific nations hostile to the Roman or early Byzantine Empire.¹³⁴

2.4.6 *The Targumic and Rabbinic literature*

As opposed to the rare Patristic engagements with the Gog oracle, there is richness and variety of antimessianic references to Gog/Magog to be gleaned from the Targumim and Rabbinic literature. I cannot scrutinise each of them in detail; some general trajectories will be delineated instead. The pairing גוג ומגוג becomes standard, with the mentions of only one of them referring almost exclusively to Gog.¹³⁵ The pair most of the time signifies foreign nations. It does, however, occasionally denote a single figure, as in *b. Sanh.* 94a where the Assyrian Sennacherib is seen as Gog and Magog, with Hezekiah being the messianic figure under the influence of Isa 11:4b. Gog is sometimes closely associated with Rome (e.g. *Tg. J.* on Ezek 39:16; *Pes. R.* 17:8; *b. Meg.* 11a).¹³⁶ The timeframe for the invasion of the foreign nations is frequently said to coincide with the messianic era (*Tg. Song* 8:4, *Midr. vaYosha B* on Exod 15:18). Psalm 2, another OT text crucial for later messianism, is called פרשת גוג ומגוג, “the chapter about Gog and Magog” in *b. Ber.* 10a, whereas the Midrash on this psalm makes frequent mentions of Gog and Magog in relation to גוים, “Gentiles” (*Midr. Teh.* 2:1). The direct conflict between Gog and the Messiah is mentioned in the Targumim where Gog and Magog are defeated by

¹³³ Bøe 2001: 215.

¹³⁴ On these, see *ibid.* 216–7; van Donzel, Schmidt 2010: 12–4. Already Josephus, *Ant.* 1.6.1 §123 considers Magog the protoplast of the Scythians.

¹³⁵ Str-B 3.832.

¹³⁶ Levey 1974: 143; Bøe 2001: 192–3, 204.

Messiah ben Joseph (*Tg. Ps.-J.* on Ex 40:11) or Messiah ben David (*Tg. Neof.* and *Ps.-J.* on Num 11:26).¹³⁷ Whereas the ancient Targumim treat Gog and Magog as antimessianic, the later Rabbinic writings, on the other hand, are clear that God himself will defeat Gog (e.g. *Midr. Teh.* on Ps 17:8; *Pes. R.* 78b; *b. Meg.* 11a), in keeping with the Gog oracle itself. In general, the Targumic and Rabbinic reception of Ezek 38-39 treats Gog and Magog as symbolising foreign nations to be defeated by God and sometimes the Messiah in the very last phase of the eschatological tribulation.

2.4.7 Eastern literature

One should note that Gog and Magog became a staple of the Eastern versions of the *Alexander Romance*, a tradition about the deeds and journeys of Alexander the Great. They most often represent the barbaric nations separated from the rest of the world by Alexander's wall.¹³⁸ Most importantly for my argument, Gog and Magog emerge as eschatological antagonists in the Syriac *Sermon on the Last Days*, vv. 203, 307¹³⁹, *Apocalypse of Daniel* 14, and the highly influential *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* 8.10, all dating from the seventh century onwards. They are portrayed as gruesome and impure eschatological invaders withheld by Alexander's fortification which they storm at the beginning of the end-time, thus preparing the way for the Antichrist. The motif of Gog and Magog and the Alexandrine wall is present in the Qur'an (18:83-98; 21:95-96) and well-known in the later Muslim literature.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Str-B 3.837-838; Bøe 2001: 193–6. The midrashic insertions of the Targumim into Num 11:26 (the prophecy of Eldad and Medad) seem to betray knowledge of the different chapter sequences in this part of Ezekiel; see Crane 2008: 248–9.

¹³⁸ For a standard treatment of the topic, see Anderson 1932.

¹³⁹ The verse numbering is according to Beck's 1972 edition. The nations are later identified with Huns. Interestingly, Gog here becomes Agag, showing the assimilation of the Ezekielic text to the dominant Syriac reading of Num 24:7.

¹⁴⁰ See van Donzel, Schmidt 2010 for a full-scale study of this motif.

2.4.8 Summary

Friedländer and Klausner understand Gog of/and Magog as antimessianic figures.¹⁴¹ This statement, whilst not doing justice to the text of Ezekiel 38-39, resonates with some of its *Wirkungsgeschichte*. The oracle accumulated messianic overtones, perhaps due to the textual proximity of the Davidic prince in ch. 37, whose position was not originally fixed, and the appearance of Gog in some versions of Num 24:7. This fact again shows that the co-text of any given passage—Ezekiel 37 for the Gog oracle and the star prophecy in Num 24:17 for the mention of Agag/Gog in Num 24:7—encourages later readers to link the foreseen Messiah with his potential opponent. Gog of/and Magog become an idiomatic name for hostile foreign peoples who engage in violent conflict with God (so most of Jewish and Christian interpreters) or the Messiah (a minority interpretation represented in the DSS, the Targumim, and by Origen and Theodoret). As such, the Ezekielic Gog oracle, when understood in its complex textual and co-textual environment, joins the repertoire of the OT texts used to inform the speculation about the eschatological antimessianic actor.

2.5 The Psalms

The Book of Psalms seldom figures in the discussions about an Antimesiah or the Antichrist. Key texts of the Antichrist tradition make little use of the Psalms. Nevertheless, there are two important considerations which make it necessary to devote considerable attention to them. Firstly, due to their traditional ascription to David, they fuelled much of the messianic expectation in the various strands of the Second Temple Judaism. Within early Christian circles, the Psalms were clearly perceived not only as

¹⁴¹ Friedländer 1901: 171–3; Klausner 1956: 497.

proving Jesus' anointed status but also as his prayer book.¹⁴² Secondly, the psalmist is often depicted as faced with enemies. When these two propositions are taken together, an exegetical possibility arises where the speaker is interpreted as a messianic figure and, consequently, his opponents become the Antimessiahs. This section will first discuss how enmity is portrayed in the Psalms, and then offer a survey of the interpretations of this motif in later Jewish and Christian literature.

2.5.1 *The enmity in the psalms of lament*

The noun אוֹיֵב, “enemy”, whose appearances can be taken to delineate the scope of enmity in the Psalms, appears 74 times, 55 of which are in plural. References to multiple opponents are most common in the psalms of individual and communal lament, and can be considered a standard literary feature of those texts.¹⁴³ Two distinct categories of opposition emerge—one directed towards God himself (Ps 8:2; 74:3, 10; 74:18; 83:2; 89:51; 92:9), the other towards the speaker (e.g. 3:7; 5:8; 7:6; 9:3; etc.). It is only in the latter category that I will be interested, as God's enemies are not by themselves antimessianic. Importantly, enmity is not limited to the psalms of lament, but is also associated with the nations, as is the case in Psalm 2 to which I will repeatedly return.

The references to the lamenting speaker's enemies are always couched within the larger framework of a prayer directed to God. Dhanaraj characterises the speaker's relation to God as the most important cause for the enemies' hostility.¹⁴⁴ The opponents tend not to be specifically identified or extensively described. Their portrayal is mostly generic, as they are said to persecute and deride the speaker who in turn implores God to rescue him and proclaims his superiority over the adversaries. Scholarship has long

¹⁴² See Horbury 2006: 31–2 on the psalmist as a messianic prototype. For the idea that the Greek Psalter imbues its *Vorlage* with messianism and eschatology, see Schaper 1995; Pietersma 2006: 49–75; Hogeterp 2009: 119–20. For the early Christian Christological readings of the Psalms, see Hays 2005: 101–18.

¹⁴³ Dhanaraj 1992: 1 et passim.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 273–4.

debated the problem of who stands behind these antagonistic figures, with foreign nations, sorcerers, unfaithful Jews, or even chaos powers being proposed.¹⁴⁵ Whilst all these proposals can have some truth to them, the Psalms themselves are not eager to identify the enemies clearly. As noted by Van Rooy, Psalm 137, where the enemies of the people are clearly the Babylonians and the Edomites, is an exception.¹⁴⁶

2.5.2 *The ancient versions*

Turning now to the reception of the Psalms, first important data come from their ancient translations. The LXX can be said to add eschatological or messianic overtones to the psalms mentioning the opponents. Ps 58:14 (59:14 MT) places the proclamation of the enemies' deceit and their defeat ἐν ὀργῇ συντελείας, “in the wrath of the consummation”, with συντέλεια evoking eschatological connotations.¹⁴⁷ The possibly messianic title ἀγαπητός emerges without a direct Hebrew precedent in Ps 67:13 (68 MT) which repeatedly mentions the speaker's enemies (67:2, 22, 24; see 31).¹⁴⁸ At no point, however, do the Greek translators of the Psalms elaborate on the motif on enmity itself. As the messianic overtones emerge in some of the relevant psalms, the speaker's opponents could possibly function as antimessianic, but it does not seem to have occurred to the translator. Similarly, the Targum of the Psalms rarely departs from the MT when the latter speaks about enmity and is in general wary of messianic exegesis.¹⁴⁹ Occasionally, the enmity is associated with particular nations or figures, and so *Tg. Pss.* on Ps 9:6 reads אַתָּא רַבִּינָא דְּפִלְשְׁתִּינָא הוּבַדְתָּא גְלִית רַשִׁיעָא, “you rebuked the peoples of the Philistines and destroyed the evil Goliath”, reading the psalmist's enemies as foreign nations.

¹⁴⁵ Van Rooy 2009: 41–7.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 46.

¹⁴⁷ Schaper 1995: 66–8.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 85–93.

¹⁴⁹ Levey 1974: 141.

Steudel's reconstruction appear stronger.¹⁵⁴ Consequently, it appears that 4QFlor offers a reading the foreign nations in Psalm 2 as antimessianic and, at the same time, antagonistic towards the community itself.

2.5.4 *The Pseudepigrapha*

Among the Pseudepigrapha, *Psalm of Solomon* 17 makes frequent use of the psalmic motif of enmity in its conflict-driven ideology.¹⁵⁵ *Ps. Sol.* 17:21 introduces the figure of a future Davidic ruler who is supposed to put an end to the sinful rule of Gentiles in Jerusalem; a verse later, the speaker asks God *καὶ ὑπόζωσον αὐτὸν ἰσχὺν τοῦ θραῦσαι ἄρχοντας ἀδίκους*, “and undergird him with strength to break the unjust rulers”. This evokes the language of *Ps* 17:33a LXX: *ὁ θεὸς ὁ περιζωνύων με δύναμιν*, “God girding me with strength” (see 17:40). The psalm as a whole is the speaker's prayer for deliverance from his enemies (identified as foreigners in 17:44) which culminates with their destruction at his hand (17:38-43). *Ps. Sol.* 17:23c-24a: *ἐκτρίψαι ὑπερηφανίαν ἁματωλοῦς ὡς σκεῦη κεραμέως· ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ συντρίψαι πᾶσαν ὑπόστασιν αὐτῶν*, “he will crush the sinners' pride like a potter's vessel; with an iron rod will he shatter all their being”, unmistakably echoes the imagery of *Ps* 2:9 LXX. The application of the royal Psalm 2 and the prayer for redemption in Psalm 17 to the future messianic ruler in the *Psalm of Solomon* 17 allows for an exegetical move similar to that of 4QFlorilegium, namely the identification of the foreign nations as antimessianic.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Steudel 1994: 47 n. 6. She rightly notes that the foot of *ת* in *הכתיים* would have had to leave a mark under the first *י*; this is corroborated by such a mark in *ת* in I 7. On the other hand, she considers Brooke's reconstruction *והוסי* impossible, as the text clearly has *ה*. This is not self-evident, as the hand of 4Q174 differentiates between *ת* and *ה* in that in the former the second vertical stroke goes above the horizontal one, whereas in the latter the horizontal line extends slightly beyond the second vertical line. These distinctive features are lost to the lacuna.

¹⁵⁵ For the discussion of antimessianism in the *Psalm of Solomon* 17 see below, pp. 207–9. For the usage of *Isa* 11:4b in this work see above, p. 88. Echoes of Psalm 2 are also present in *Sib. Or.* 3.660-668; 8.248, but in both cases the defeat of the nations is the work of God alone.

¹⁵⁶ See Janse 2009: 64–6 for an argument that Psalm 2 constitutes a deeper undercurrent of the Solomonic psalm.

2.5.5 *The New Testament and the Church Fathers*

Psalm 2 emerges as the one most often quoted in the NT. Most notably, Ps 2:1-2 LXX is quoted verbatim in the speech by Peter and John in Acts 4:25b-26, where the double parallelism of ἔθνη-λαοὶ and οἱ βασιλεῖς-οἱ ἄρχοντες is interpreted as referring to Gentiles, Jews, Pilate, and Herod. This exegetical approach might have well influenced Luke's unparalleled eagerness to show Pilate and Herod as both interrogating Jesus (Luke 23:1-25) and as subsequent friends (Luke 23:13).¹⁵⁷ Luke-Acts thus interprets the motif of enmity in Psalm 2 by pointing to Jesus' passion and those who brought it about. Ps 2:9 LXX (in combination with Isa 11:4) is also clearly echoed in the Rev 19:15a where the rider on the white horse is said to shepherd the nations with the rod of iron.¹⁵⁸

With regard to the early Christian interpretations, Bouet's study of the Patristic exegesis of Ps 139 (138 LXX):21-22 evidences a wider tendency—the images of enemies in Psalms were most widely taken in polemical fashion as referring to heretics.¹⁵⁹ There are, however, occasions when the enmity towards the psalmist is understood in terms of Jesus' passion, similarly to the way Luke-Acts uses Psalm 2. The standard heading of that text in the Eastern Syrian psalters runs: "He prophesies about the things that were done by the Jews during the Passion of our Lord, and he reminds us of his human nature as well", with a very similar précis to be found in Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentary (*Commentary on Psalms 2*) who references Acts 4:25 in this context.¹⁶⁰

Latin Church Fathers begin to use the Psalms in developing the Antichrist tradition. It is visible in Ambrose's *Explanatio psalmorum XII* and Augustine's *Enarrationes in psalmos*. Ambrose's mentions are usually passing and not in relation to the lemma. It is nonetheless interesting that he links Ps 45:3a VL (46:3a MT): *sonuerunt*

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 89.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 95–6. He notes also the possible echoes in Rev 11:15; 17:18 which are, however, highly tenuous.

¹⁵⁹ Bouet 2011: 139–57.

¹⁶⁰ Van Rooy 2005: 543–4; idem 2009: 55–7.

et turbatae sunt aquae, “the waters roared and were troubled” to Ps 76:17c-18a VL (77:16c MT); *et conturbati sunt abyssi. Multitudo sonitus aquarum*, “and the depths were troubled. The great roar of the waters” and relates both to the sea beast of Rev 13:1-11 which he calls the Antichrist. Immediately after this identification, he moves on to a metaphorical reading of the waters and states that they trembled at Christ’s passion, too, quoting Ps 2:1 (*Expl. Ps.* 45.10-11). Augustine sees the Antichrist as the lawgiver over the peoples, mentioned in Ps 9:21 VL (9:20 MT), and links him with the man of sin of 2 Thessalonians 2.¹⁶¹

2.5.6 Summary

The evidence of the Jewish and Christian *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Psalter in relevant to the ancient antimessianic tradition is not as extensive as that arising from other OT texts, but is noteworthy nonetheless. Some Christian exegetes, such as Luke and Theodore of Mopsuestia, read the conflict in some of the psalms as referring to Jesus and his passion. The explicit usage of the Psalms in the framework of antimessianic expectation occurs only in the later Latin Church Fathers. On the other hand, the opponents of the psalmist are often historicised and cast as the foreign nations or religious dissenters by both Jewish and Christian interpreters. This exegetical strategy mirrors some of the readings of the Gog oracle in Ezekiel in reference to the barbaric nations. Interestingly, Psalm 2, a text of immense relevance to ancient messianism, is picked up several times in text that indulge in antimessianic speculation. It is seen as speaking about God’s Anointed and his antagonists in both Second Temple Jewish (*Psalm of Solomon*

¹⁶¹ Differently to the Christian interpreters, the Rabbinic authorities display visible caution in reading Psalms as messianic prooftexts and, consequently, seeing the psalmist’s enemies as antimessianic agents. A specifically messianic interpretation is offered only in the case of *Midrash Tehillim* on Ps 21:9 which, according to Rabbi Levi, is uttered to the messianic king and speaks about the ultimate defeat of his enemies. Christian messianic interpretation of the Psalms might have been the direct cause of the Rabbinic reticence. This has been extensively discussed in relation to Psalm 22 (21 LXX) which Christian understood as prefiguring Christ’s passion, whereas most of the Rabbinic authorities related it to Esther and Mordechai; see Cassuto 2002: 165–224; Dorival 2002: 225–315; Reuling 2010: 177–82.

17, 4QFlorilegium) and early Christian (Luke-Acts, Revelation, Theodore) interpretations.

2.6 Daniel

From among the canonical OT texts analysed in this chapter, the contribution of the Book of Daniel to the emergence and development of the antimessianic tradition is most patent and widely noted.¹⁶² The book is self-consciously eschatological and has been received as such in later times. While the influence of Daniel on later apocalypticism was pervasive and multidirectional, my primary focus will be the passages that refer to a future figure of an evil ruler. I will inquire whether there are antimessianic overtones to it in the text of Daniel itself and its *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Quite apart from the redaction-critical concerns about the unity of the book, I shall treat it as a single entity, as only in that form that it had an impact on later religious literature.

2.6.1 *The end-time enemy in Daniel*

The Danielic eschatological opponent first appears in the vision of the four beasts in Dan 7:1-8. The first three beasts look like a lion, a bear, and a leopard, respectively, whereas the fourth one (vv. 7-8) is described vaguely as different to all others and especially monstrous and destructive. The image of a tyrant is primarily to be found in ch. 7, 8, and 11. 7:8b, 11a, 20, 24b-26 speaks about קַרְנֵן זְעִירָה, “a little horn” that sprouts among the ten horns of the fourth beast. It speaks arrogantly and oppresses God’s people, but is eventually destroyed. A similar vision is contained in Dan 8:9-14, 23-25 where the little horn—this time sported by a male goat—practices deceit and cunning, rebels against the holy ones, and terminates the sacrifices (see also 9:27). A lengthy description of the

¹⁶² Rigaux 1932: 151–73; Ernst 1967: 182–97; Jenks 1991: 42–3, 155–61; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 224–38; Bădiliță 2005: 33–47.

rule of a נִבְזָה, “a despised one”, in 11:21-45 recounts his military endeavours, self-exaltation, rejection of the ancestral religion, and his ultimate demise.

The above references are now universally understood as pointing to Antiochus IV Epiphanes.¹⁶³ While the text of Daniel invites forms of messianic expectation, primarily through the famous reference to “the one like the son of man” (7:14), it is difficult to see the connection between that figure and the eschatological evil ruler. The latter is never seen as posing as or acting against any specific messianic figure but rather directly against God (7:25a; 8:11a, 25b¹⁶⁴; 11:36). Furthermore, the Messiah, however called, does not participate in his demise. Therefore, Jenks is quite right in stating that it “seems quite inappropriate to speak of the Antichrist tradition being represented in Daniel”.¹⁶⁵

Two considerations are, however, in order here. Firstly, the messianic actors in Dan 9:25-26; 10:21; 11:22—who probably did have concrete historical referents—participate in the end-time conflict, with the anointed one in 9:26 actually being cut off. Secondly, the passages about the Messiah and the eschatological tyrant occur in close textual proximity to one another, thus providing co-text to each other. Similar proximity is of exegetical consequence in the case of Gen 49:16-17 and Ezekiel 38-39. In sum, the presence of the eschatological opponent and, on the other hand, the Messiah’s participation in conflict can serve as an explanation for why Daniel was such an important source for later antimessianic speculation.

2.6.2 *The ancient versions*

The possible messianic (and, by consequence, antimessianic) overtones in Daniel were variously treated by the ancient versions of the book, with some of them

¹⁶³ See Hartman, DiLella 1978: 213–7; 235–6; 294–305; Collins, Yarbrow Collins 1993: 61–6. The connection between the latter chapters of Daniel and Antiochus is sensed already by Josephus (*Ant.* 10.11.7 §276) and Porphyry (third century CE), as reported by Jerome in *Commentariorum in Daniele* 2.7.7b.

¹⁶⁴ I follow Hartman, DiLella 1978: 236; Goldingay 1989: 218; Collins, Yarbrow Collins 1993: 333 in understanding שְׂרֵי־הַצָּבָא and שְׂרֵי־שָׂרִים as referring to God rather than to Michael or a priestly figure.

¹⁶⁵ Jenks 1991: 161; see McGinn 1994: 27.

emphasising them and others attenuating them. The LXX (OG) has been claimed to represent the latter approach.¹⁶⁶ It departs significantly from the MT in 9:25b by reading καὶ οἰκοδομήσεις Ἱερουσαλημ πόλιν κυρίῳ, “and you will build the city of Jerusalem for the Lord”, taking the original ܕܢܝܢ ܥܝܨܪܐ as κύριος. It also translates ܥܝܨܪܐ at the beginning of 9:26 as χρίσμα, “the anointment”.¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, however, the removal of the anointed one is clearly spoken of later in this verse: βασιλεία [ᾠ⁹⁶⁷: βασιλεύς] ἐθνῶν φθερεῖ τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὸ ἅγιον μετὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ, “the nations’ kingdom will corrupt the city and the sanctuary along with the Anointed One”. The anointment spoken of in 9:26 most probably refers to the priestly office, and so indirectly about the person holding it. It seems more correct to speak about the OG of Daniel as preserving the possible messianic aspect of this passage.¹⁶⁸

Theodotion (θ’), whilst also reading χρίσμα in 9:26, is more faithful to the Hebrew original in 9:25 where he translates ܕܢܝܢ ܥܝܨܪܐ ܥܕ as ἕως χριστοῦ ἡγουμένου, “until the anointed leader”. In 9:26, θ’ translates ܕܢܝܢ ܥܝܨܪܐ ܕܡܝܢ, “the people of the prince who is to come” as σὺν τῷ ἡγουμένῳ τῷ ἐρχομένῳ, “with (sc. ܡܝܢ) the leader who is to come”; similarly, ἡγούμενος διαθήκης is a correct translation of ܕܢܝܢ ܥܝܨܪܐ, “the prince of the covenant” in 11:23. Consequently, it is correct to state that θ’ faithfully reproduces the messianic capacity of the latter chapters of Daniel.

This potential is later explored by the Vulgate, which uses *Christus*, certainly in the Christian sense, in 9:25-26, and the Peshitta which identifies the Messiah with the Holy of Holies in 9:24 and states that he is killed in 9:26.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Jeansonne 1988: 126–7; Adler 1996: 207–8; Spangenberg 2006: 438–9.

¹⁶⁷ One could add ܕܢܝܢ ܥܝܨܪܐ, “the prince of the covenant” in 11:22 MT which is rendered μετὰ τῆς διαθήκης, “with the covenant” in 11:22 LXX, but here a simple misreading of ܕܢܝܢ as ܕܢܝܢ, “in front of, opposite to” must have occurred; see Collins, Yarbrow Collins 1993: 366 n. 81.

¹⁶⁸ Bodenmann 1986: 117–8; 385–6; Ulrich 2014: 1063–4.

¹⁶⁹ See the discussions in Taylor 1994: 9, 244, 248. Cf. Jenner 2001: 633–5 notes several Syriac lectionaries which identify the little horn in the rubrics on 7:8, 21 with Antiochus. This historicising tendency would oppose the attempt to read the horn as an end-time opponent.

It is visible therefore that the ancient versions of Daniel preserve its original potential to be taken as speaking about the end-time messianic conflict. Again, however, the Antimessiah is not spoken of directly, but rather remains an exegetical possibility.

2.6.3 *The Pseudepigrapha*

Several instances of the use of Daniel in the antimessianic speculation are to be found among the OT Pseudepigrapha. The Son of Man spoken of in *1 Enoch* 46-48 is clearly an expansion of Daniel 7 and quite possibly a messianic figure,¹⁷⁰ with the Enochic author emphasising the active opposition of between that figure and the earthly rulers (*1 Enoch* 46:4-6).¹⁷¹ Furthermore, in the so-called *Animal Apocalypse* in *1 Enoch* (89:59-90:19)—a source almost contemporaneous with the Danielic visions—the raven attack the newborn sheep (90:8). The text as it stands then introduces a great horn emerging from the sheep (90:9b)¹⁷² whom the ravens and other preying birds unsuccessfully try to destroy (90:12-16) but are themselves defeated by God's intervention (90:17-19). The passage is usually judged to be referring to Judas Maccabaeus, with the sheep being the faithful Israel.¹⁷³ This is a radical departure from the original Danielic context where the horn is an unambiguously evil figure. The Enochic author appropriates Danielic imagery in an ironic way and for his own purposes.

A very similar exegetical move is to be found in the Armenian version of the *Testament of Joseph* (19:6) where a horn grows between two other horns of the fourth bull. In 19:8, which is definitely a Christian interpolation, a virgin begets a lamb among the horns. It is exegetically plausible to identify the lamb from *T. Jos.* 19:8 with the horn

¹⁷⁰ See above, pp. 57–8.

¹⁷¹ Beale 1984: 96–106.

¹⁷² See *ibid.* 68 n. 99 on the textual difficulty of the verse.

¹⁷³ Nickelsburg 2001: 400.

two verses earlier which would bestow messianic significance on the latter. Here, as in the Enochic *Animal Apocalypse*, the imagery of Daniel 7-8 is used almost ironically.¹⁷⁴

Finally, an echo of the Danielic portrayal of the Antiochus-like tyrant is also palpable in *4 Ezra* 11-12. There, Ezra receives a vision of a multi-headed and multi-winged eagle arising from the sea (11:1) which is certainly a mix of the Danielic first and third beasts.¹⁷⁵ This figure is vigorously opposed and indicted by lion-like creature (11:37-45), that is later explicitly identified as the Messiah (12:31-34).¹⁷⁶

The Pseudepigrapha present two different readings of the eschatological conflict in Daniel. On the one hand, *4 Ezra* uses its imagery to depict the Antimesiah. On the other, *1 Enoch* 90 and *Testament of Joseph* 19 depict their messianic actors (Judas Maccabeus and Christ, respectively) as the Danielic horns, subverting the original nefarious meaning of the image. Thus, Daniel emerges as a very rich source for later antimessianic speculation in the Pseudepigrapha, as both sides of the end-time messianic confrontation depend on its visionary motifs.

2.6.4 *The Dead Sea Scrolls*

Daniel is one of the most influential OT texts in the literary remains of the Qumran community, as evidenced by the number of the manuscripts of the book itself as well the proliferation of the compositions dependent on it. I will limit myself to pointing to the occasions where the eschatological opposition as depicted in Daniel reverberates in the DSS.

¹⁷⁴ Beale 1984: 89–95.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 113; Stone 1990: 348.

¹⁷⁶ *Sib. Or.* 3.388-400 uses the Danielic horn imagery to describe the infighting among the Diadochi but without any messianic overtones.

1QM I 1-7 certainly builds on the latter chapters of Daniel, especially on ch. 11.¹⁷⁷ A number of substantial points of contact are present.¹⁷⁸ The Kittim, mentioned in Dan 11:30, emerge as the chief eschatological antagonist of the *War Scroll* (1QM I 2, 4, 6 etc.). Dan 11:32 and 1QM I 2 use the same phrase, מרשיעי ברית, “the violators of the covenant” to describe those Jews who collaborate with the foreign powers. A close verbal parallel occurs also between Dan 11:42, which prophesies: וְאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא תִהְיֶה לְפָלִיטָה, “the land of Egypt shall not escape”, and 1QM I 6: פִּלְטָה לֹא תִהְיֶה, “there shall be no escape”. Dan 11:44 states that Antiochus וְיֵצֵא בְּחֵמָה גְּדֹלָה לְהַשְׁמִיד וְלִהְרֹס רַבִּים, “will go out, greatly enraged, to annihilate and to exterminate many”, which closely parallels 1QM I 4 where God יֵצֵא בְּחֵמָה גְּדֹלָה לְהִלָּחֵם בַּמְּלָכִי הַצָּפוֹן, “will go out, greatly enraged, to wage war against the kings of the north”. This verse concludes with God destroying קֶרֶן, “a horn”, which lacks any further designation as the beginning of the next line is lost. It is, however, certain that it must belong to the opponents of Israel and as such it recalls the Danielic portrayal of Antiochus and his predecessors as horns. Finally, both texts envisage that, at their enemies’ demise, there will be no-one to help them (Dan 11:45b; 1QM I 7). Some differences cannot be overlooked, e.g. Antiochus’ wrath in Dan 11:44 mirrors God’s anger in 1QM I 4, and Egypt, Antiochus’ enemy in Dan 11:42, is joined in with the evil forces in 1QM I 6.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the similarities between Daniel 11 and the opening of *War Scroll* on the level of both vocabulary and ideology are very close which shows that 1QM grounds its hostility to the foreign powers in the Danielic vision of the eschatological opponent.

¹⁷⁷ Carmignac 1956: 240–1; Bruce 1960: 71–4; Osten-Sacken 1969: 30–4; Mertens 1971: 79–83; Davies 1977: 116–9.

¹⁷⁸ On the *War Scroll* within the antimessianic tradition see below, pp. 125–34.

¹⁷⁹ Mertens 1971: 80.

General Danielic motifs are present in the Aramaic apocalyptic text, 4Q246, the so-called “Son of God text”.¹⁸⁰ This document has generated a great number of scholarly treatments and opinions which I will scrutinise in detail in CHAPTER III.¹⁸¹ For the time being, it suffices to list the probably points of contact between this composition and Daniel. 4Q246 I 6 mentions מלך אתורן ומצריין, “a king of Assyria and Egypt”, which probably envisages a scenario not unlike Dan 11:40-43 (see 8:8-9); this view is strengthened by I 8: ... וכלא ישמשון, “and all will serve”. The hotly debated line II 1, where an unidentified being is called the Son of God or of the Most High, might draw on Antiochus’ undue self-elevation (Dan 7:8b, 25; 11:36). This conclusion might also hold, should the being be a benign actor, as this would constitute a subversive exegetical move similar to that in *1 Enoch* 90 and *T. Jos.* 19:6-7. The limited time of reign, implied in 4Q246 II 1-2, might mirror the certainty with which Daniel foresees Antiochus’ downfall (Dan 7:25b; 11:35b). God’s eschatological intervention and the ensuing peace are the conclusion of the scenarios in both Daniel (7:26-27; 9:27d; 11:45b-12:3) and 4Q246 II 4-9.¹⁸²

Influence of the critique of the Seleucid rule is implicit in the Qumranic pesher on Habakkuk (1QpHab). While attacking the wicked priest (1QpHab VIII 8-13), his abandonment of God and his laws (10), his greed (11-12), and practicing impurity (13; see XII 7-9) are all emphasised. It is easy to perceive the conceptual affinity of this figure to the Danielic criticism of Antiochus and his followers. Antiochus actively tries to abolish the Jewish cult (Dan 11:36a, 37), bribes those who cooperate with him (11:30b, 32a, 39b), and defiles the Temple (11:31, 38). The persecution of the faithful Jews by

¹⁸⁰ See Justnes 2009: 89–95 for a detailed discussion of the Danielic echoes in 4Q246.

¹⁸¹ See below, pp. 141–7.

¹⁸² See a fuller survey of the parallels between 4Q246 and Daniel, *1 Enoch*, and *4 Ezra* in Buchanan 1996: 77–80.

Antiochus is thematic in both Daniel (11:32b-35) and the pesher (IX 9-10 etc.) which also frequently refers to the Kittim.

In sum, both 1QM and 1QpHab deploy Danielic imagery of the eschatological tyrant to the portrayals of those whom they themselves perceive as antagonistic. This is probably also the case in 4Q246 which appears to characterise both sides of the end-time conflict in terms taken from Daniel.

2.6.5 *The New Testament*

The influence of Daniel on the NT eschatology is well-known and scarcely in need of elaboration here. Mark 13:14//Matt 24:15 both reference τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως, “the desolating sacrilege”, pointing to Dan 8:13; 9:27; 12:11. The evangelists are not interested, however, in the person of the desolator.

2 Thessalonians 2—the key passage in the Antichrist tradition—is commonly assumed by commentators to rely on Daniel 11 for its image of the Man of Lawlessness. In 2 Thess 2:4, two details are emphasised, namely his self-elevation above any previous object of worship, reminiscent of Dan 11:36, and his session in the Temple, pointing to Antiochus’ assault on the Temple cult and the establishment of the altar of Zeus there. As the two texts speak about future evil rulers, it is more than probable that 2 Thessalonians echoes the Danielic scenario.

The Book of Revelation recycles the Danielic motif of horns in 12:3, 13:1 (referring to the First Beast which is itself a combination of the beasts from Dan 7:1-6), 11; 17:3b, 9-14.¹⁸³ In the latter passage, the horns are said to represent kings, i.e. Roman emperors, bringing to mind the interpretations Daniel receives from angels. The political critiques by Daniel and John share many further similarities, such the greed of the eschatological enemy and his followers (Dan 11:30b, 32a, 39b; Rev 17:2, 4; 18:3, 19),

¹⁸³ On the antimessianic opponents in Revelation see below, pp. 178–202.

his self-deification (Dan 7:8b, 25; 11:36; Rev 13:5-6, 12-15), and persecution of the faithful (Dan 11:32b-35; Rev 13:15b; 17:6; etc.).

The NT in general draws on a variety of Danielic images, especially those of the horned beasts representing political rulers and the desecration of the Temple. The authors of 2 Thessalonians and Revelation allude to Daniel repeatedly in their descriptions of the antimessianic opponents. To be sure, these sources do not engage in an exegesis of Daniel, as they do not quote the book directly or comment on it explicitly. Daniel functions much more as a treasury of eschatological motifs and images which the NT authors use in their own visions of the Eschaton. Nevertheless, Daniel's portrayal of the eschatological tyrant and, on the other hand, the Messiah are the kernel around which the earliest Christian texts build their prophecies of the eschatological battle.

2.6.6 *The Church Fathers*

The use of Daniel in 2 Thessalonians does not go unnoticed by the early Christian interpreters and sparks their interest in the former. The reign of the Man of Lawlessness in Justin, *Dial.* 32.4 is based on the "times, two times, and half a time", the timescale from Dan 9:27. This estimation follows from a Christological reading of Dan 7:9-28 (*Dial.* 31.1-7). In 110.1, Justin associates Christ's Second Coming with the presence of the Man of Lawlessness (2 Thess 2:3) who also speaks insolences against the Most High (Dan 11:36 LXX).

Irenaeus' systematic account of the Antichrist in Book V of *Adversus haereses* follows Justin's use of Daniel for eschatological speculation. In *Adv. haer.* 5.25.3, 2 Thessalonians 2 and Daniel 7 are combined, and the Man of Lawlessness is identified with the little horn. In 5.26.1, the dream vision of Daniel 2 is used to illuminate the issue of the ten kings of Revelation 17 who are understood as the toes of the statue seen by

Daniel. Irenaeus also mentions the four kingdom scheme, with Rome as the last kingdom, to justify deciphering 666 from Rev 13:18 as ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ.¹⁸⁴

Further Patristic engagements with the Antichrist continue to build on Daniel. In the early third century, Hippolytus writes a substantial commentary on Daniel which is also the earliest surviving Christian commentary on any Scriptural text. There, he identifies him with the little horn in *Comm. Dan.* 4.5.3 and later ascribes to him various details of the Danielic vision, such as the reign of three and half years (4.52.6) and even identifies him with the desolating sacrilege itself (4.35.3).¹⁸⁵ Daniel also functions as an authoritative figure in Hippolytus' *De Christo et Antichristo* where the identification of the Antichrist with the little horn is repeated (*Antichr.* 47). Importantly, Origen treats Daniel as the only OT source for the idea of the Antichrist, alongside Jesus' sayings and Pauline teachings, i.e. most probably 2 Thessalonians (*Cels.* 6.45). Antichrist, signified by the little horn, is also frequently adduced as an explanation in Jerome's *Commentarius in Daniele* in which he targets the historicising approach of Porphyry. Interestingly, Jerome accepts some relevance of Antiochus to the events supposedly prophesised by Daniel and, while commenting on 11:24, names Antiochus a type of Antichrist.¹⁸⁶

The richness and variety of Patristic references to Antiochus in Daniel as the Antichrist should be juxtaposed with the relative silence of the Rabbinic authors on this figure. Rabbinic writings appear to reference Antiochus only in their reflections on Hanukkah (so the pre-eighth century CE *Megillat Antiochus*) but without turning him into an eschatological actor.¹⁸⁷ It appears that the early Christian exploitation of Daniel to re-

¹⁸⁴ On this see below, p. 251.

¹⁸⁵ On the antimessianism of Hippolytus, see pp. 254–62.

¹⁸⁶ One should add here that the Antichrist is a standard trope of the Christian apocryphal Danielic literature; see García Martínez 1992: 137–61; DiTommaso 2005: passim.

¹⁸⁷ For this opinion and the few relevant Rabbinic passages, see Ilan, Noam 2015: 123 n. 24. Justin, *Dial.* 32.4, mentions the Jewish opinion that the Danielic “time, times, and half a time” stands for 350 years. This shows that Daniel was still a source for Jewish eschatology in mid-second century CE.

envisage the eschatological conflict is paralleled by an abandonment of such interpretations among the later Jewish exegetes. Although Second Temple Jewish writings, such as *1 Enoch*, *4 Ezra*, and some of the DSS mined the Danielic visions for images to use in their own eschatological scenarios, it is only the Christian interpreters and not their Jewish counterparts who explored the antimessianic potential of Daniel.

2.6.7 *Summary*

Although Daniel did not explicitly confront the figure of Antiochus Epiphanes with the messianic actors of his text, he placed them close to each other and in the context of eschatological conflict. As the subsequent translations preserved or even strengthened the messianic resonance of the Danielic text, multiple Second Temple and especially early Christian authors began to see the supposed prophecy about the Seleucid ruler as speaking about the opponent of the Messiah. The prophecy about desolating sacrilege in the Temple became the cornerstone of the eschatological teaching of Jesus as presented by the Synoptics. The Danielic portrayal of the eschatological enemies in 2 Thessalonians 2 and throughout Revelation fuelled much of the later Christian antimessianic speculation and exegetical engagement with Daniel. Again, as it was the case in the blessing of Dan and the Psalms, the number and the uniformity of Christian interpretations of Daniel might have made the Rabbinic authors reluctant to read this book in an eschatological or messianic fashion.

2.7 **Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to present how certain portions of the OT incited or were used in the antimessianic expectation of the later Jewish and Christian interpreters. This phenomenon has been evidenced for all the texts discussed above, albeit in varying degrees in different periods. The fact that Biblical exegesis and interpretation stands

behind so much of the material relevant to the study of the antimessianic actors proves a number of points relevant to my project.

Firstly, the OT cannot be excluded from the study of the Antichrist. Isa 11:4 and Daniel envisage messianic figures as having enemies and therefore they properly belong to the antimessianic tradition. Furthermore, severing the OT from that tradition would make many highly pertinent texts which are consciously and explicitly exegetical, such as 4QFlorilegium and Hippolytus' *Commentary on Daniel*, almost unintelligible. This chapter has shown just how much of the Antichrist discourse is performed on the basis and in the language of the Hebrew Bible.

Secondly, the antimessianic expectation developed as a traditionary process within which certain key texts were re-read and re-interpreted by successive reading communities. These attempts at exegesis are linked not only by their texts, but exhibit shared patterns, as in the case of the Satanic interpretations of Genesis 3 which emerges in the Second Temple, Christian, and Rabbinic sources alike. At times, as in the case of the messianic and antimessianic reading of Gen 49:16-17, Psalms, and Daniel, certain reading strategies become dominant in one community and abandoned in the other. This, however, is by no means a rule, as some texts were read in similar fashions by both Jews and Christians, such as Isa 11:4b and the Gog oracle.

Thirdly, my definition of the Antimessiah as a figure opposed to a messianic actor proves its suitability to the study at hand, as it allowed for engaging a plethora of relevant passages in a very diverse range of writings. This became especially important in the case of the reception history of Gen 3:15 which often identifies the serpent as Satan, but at the same time conflicts him with Christ.

Fourthly and finally, the above OT texts are either themselves received as messianic or are adjacent to such texts. It can be even reasonably claimed that together

they constitute a set of key messianic proofs from Scripture. It has been repeatedly shown that the messianic interpretation of passage incited interest in the Messiah's possible opponents, and hence fuelled further antimessianic speculation. My investigation of the OT sources of that speculation allowed me to establish that it drew on the same sources as, and was intimately connected with, the ancient Judeo-Christian messianism.

CHAPTER III

The Dead Sea Scrolls

CHAPTER II has evidenced the importance of the Hebrew Bible across the different strands of ancient antimessianism. This chapter will differ from the previous one in scope and method. It will be devoted to the antimessianic opposition within a single literary corpus, i.e. the Dead Sea Scrolls. This body of ancient Jewish writings has been studied repeatedly by the scholars interested in the Antichrist tradition for multiple reasons.¹ It offers access to a form of Second Temple Judaism unmediated by later transmission. Consequently, unlike CHAPTER II, my study of the DSS will not be a reception historical one, but will rather focus on the literary shape and ideological vision of each text. As the DSS are commonly understood to contain strong overtones of cosmic dualism and eschatological fervour, the presence of antimessianic enmity is all the more probable.

The study of the literary remains of the Qumran community in the context of the ancient antimessianism poses several methodological difficulties. As the definition of antimessianism deployed in this thesis requires a messianic agent to be detectable in any given text, much of the discussion of the particular documents will be devoted to deciding whether such agents are indeed present. Qumran messianism has long been subject to intense scholarly debate, and it appears that no single messianic ideology is represented across all the DSS. In what follows, I will employ a broad definition of messianism which I have discussed in CHAPTER I.² Beyond the figure's anointed status and Davidic progeny, a messianic actor can be indicated by his elevated status, dominion over other beings, enjoying divine favour, and helping humans. These qualities will be taken to characterise messianic actors broadly construed.

¹ Jenks 1991: 135–52; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 258–96; Lorein 2003: 147–218.

² See above, pp. 39–41.

Secondly, the cosmic dualism of Qumran is not presented in a uniform form across different texts and involves a varying set of actors, including Belial, Mastema, Melchiresha, the Kittim, etc. None of these figures can be treated as the antimessianic antagonist of the DSS *par excellence*, but some of them will be shown to be cast in that role in different writings.

Thirdly and finally, the overarching frameworks of cosmic dualism, apocalypticism, or messianism should not be used to flatten the individual differences between the texts. I will allow for the DSS as a collection to present different portrayals of the antimessianic opponents.

This part of my thesis will discuss the following writings: the *War Scroll* (1QM along with the cognate texts from Cave 4), the *Testimonia* (4Q175 and 4Q379), the Aramaic *Apocryphon of Daniel* (4Q246), the *Book of War* (4Q285, 11Q14), and the Melchizedek text from Cave 11 (11Q13). I will not treat again the exegetical texts discussed in CHAPTER II, but these findings have to be borne in mind and will be returned to in the concluding section.³

3.1 The War Scroll (1QM)

The first document to be discussed is the most extensive apocalyptic writing from Qumran, i.e. the so-called *War Scroll*. As it has been already stated, the scroll is dependent on Daniel, and hence must have been written after 164 BCE.⁴ The *terminus ad quem* can be established paleographically as sometime towards the end of the first century BCE.⁵ It belongs to a family of Qumran fragments concerned with eschatological war which includes also 4Q285, 4Q471, 4Q491-7, and 11Q14. It remains a matter of debate whether

³ For the occasions of antimessianic speculation in the DSS spawned by OT texts, see above, pp. 88–9 on Isa 11:4b in 1QS^b and 4QpIsa^a, pp. 100–1 on Ezekiel 38–39 in 4QpIsa^a, 4Q523, and 1QM, pp. 107–8 on Psalm 2 in 4QFlor, and pp. 115–8 on Daniel in 1QM, 4Q246, and 1QpHab.

⁴ See above, p. 116.

⁵ Duhaime 2004: 65; Schultz 2009: 31. Cf. Davies 1977: 124 who tentatively argues for the first decades of the common era.

these texts are copies/recensions of 1QM, or compositions independent of it. The *War Scroll* itself is usually understood as an end-product of a complex redaction history.⁶ This problem, however, is of little consequence to my investigation; I will treat the so-called *Book of War* texts (4Q285 and 11Q14) in a separate section later on.

1QM recounts the war between, on the one hand, בני אור, “the sons of light” and, on the other, בני חושך, “the sons of darkness”, בחיל בליעל, “the army of Belial”, (sic) כתיי בגדודי, “the bands of the Kittim”, among other designations (I 1-3).⁷ 1QM I offers an introductory description of the battle, whereas col. II-IX are preoccupied with the order of battle of the forces of the sons of light, recounted in meticulous detail. Col. X-XIV contain a series of prayers in preparation for and after the confrontation which is the subject of 1QM XV-XIX. The scroll concludes with a praise of God in thanks for the victory over the Kittim (XVIII 6-XIX 8) and the final visit to the battlefield (XIX 9-13).

The paramount concern of 1QM is with the eschatological conflict and the triumph of God and the sons of light. For this text to represent antimessianic expectation, one would need to detect a messianic figure within this framework. Should such a protagonist indeed be present, the enemy forces could be justifiably treated as antimessianic. The rest of my scrutiny of 1QM will be devoted to assessing the claim that a messianic figure is to be found in the *War Scroll*.

The first indirect piece of evidence to be adduced is the fact that the very name Kittim, which is a recurrent designation of a foreign power in the DSS, is most probably derived from Balaam’s oracle (Num 24:24). Schultz notes that 1QM, alongside 1 Maccabees, is ingenious in treating Kittim as eschatological enemies of Israel.⁸ As was noted before, Numbers 24 was received as a key messianic proof-text.⁹ This echo would

⁶ See the discussions in Duhaime 2004: 12–61; Schultz 2009: 10–41.

⁷ Unless otherwise stated, the text of the DSS is taken from García Martínez, Tigchelaar 1997-1998.

⁸ Schultz 2009: 139–58.

⁹ See above, pp. 98–100.

raise the probability that 1QM might display interest in the figure of a messiah, with the Kittim playing the role of the antimessianic opponents. Further investigation of particular passages is needed to confirm or deny this possibility.

The first passage meriting investigation is V 1-2: ¹⁰נשיא מ[גן] וְעַל שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹוִי וְאַהֲרֹן וְשִׁמּוֹת שְׁנַיִם עֶשְׂרֵי שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּתוּלְדוֹתָם וְשִׁמּוֹת שְׁנַיִם עֶשְׂרֵי שְׂרֵי שְׁבִטֵיהֶם [וְ] “and on sh[ield] of the prince of the entire congregation they will write his name [and] the name of Israel, and Levi, and Aaron, and the twelve names which are of the tribes of Israel according to the order of their birth, and the twelve names which are of the chiefs of the tribes”.

The noun נשיא, “prince, leader”¹¹ appears a couple of times in the *War Scroll*. In III 3, the trumpets for the gathering of the chiefs bear the inscription נשיאי אל, “the princes of God”; in lines 15-16, the title appears on the banners of the tribes and possibly those of the tens of thousands. נשיא is also the title of the leader of Merari (IV 1; see Num 3:17) and appears on its standard.¹² As the full title “Prince of the Congregation” appears only here in 1QM, the significance of this passage must be illuminated by other DSS. The Prince of the Congregation is mentioned in two fragments which are usually judged to be very close to the *War Scroll*, namely 4Q496 fr. 10 and 4Q285 fr. 4, 7. The former is part of an extremely fragmentary and illegible papyrus. Of the fragments that are possible to decipher, some agree with 1QM, whereas others, such as fr. 10, contain variants. Taken altogether, 4Q496 can be designated as a recension of the *War Scroll*.¹³ Line 3 of fr. 10, which corresponds to 1QM III 13-16, ascribes the banner to the Prince, while line 4

¹⁰ The lacuna in the second word is most probably to be reconstructed as מ[גן], “shield” which fits with the description of the infantry’s shields in V 4-6; so Ploeg 1959: 39, 86–7; Yadin 1962: 278–9.

¹¹ Evans 2000: 2.693 notes the prominence of the Davidic נשיא in Ezekiel. The use of this title in the DSS might be a function of the significance of that prophetic book for Second Temple messianism.

¹² Carmignac 1958: 62; Ploeg 1959: 83–4; Jongeling 1962: 128; Yadin 1962: 272–3. Cf. Dupont-Sommer 1955: 40 who rejects that reading, tentatively suggesting the hardly plausible Greek μῦθοι as the etymology.

¹³ Duhaime 2004: 22–3; Schultz 2009: 24–6.

contains a superliner addition which seems to add his name to those of Israel and Aaron on the banner; no additional information can be inferred. A more substantial picture is available in the *Book of War* (4Q285 fr. 4, 7) which reworks the eschatological war scenario of 1QM with what seems like more messianic mindset.¹⁴ In fr. 7, line 4 identifies the Prince of the Congregation with the Branch of David mentioned in Isa 11:1; fr. 4 recounts the Prince's conflict with and triumph over the Kittim. A very similar scenario is to be found in 4QapocrMoses^b (4Q376, fr. 1 III) which, although fragmentary beyond reconstruction, depicts the Prince of the Congregation as present with and probably leading Israel into the apocalyptic war. Apart from the scrolls interested in the eschatological war, this figure emerges in CD VII 20 where he is identified with the sceptre from Num 24:17. Furthermore, the blessing contained in 1QS^b V 20-29, discussed previously¹⁵, speaks about the Prince of the Congregation in clearly messianic terms, including an association with a sceptre (1QS^b V 27). Consequently, in the milieu, in which 1QM was written, the designation "Prince of the Congregation" clearly possessed messianic connotations.¹⁶

1QM V 1-2 itself, however, does little to explore this character. His name is the beginning of a lengthy sequence of names which includes Israel, Levi, Aaron, as well as the names of the tribes and their chiefs. The Prince is not portrayed as active in any way, as his name is inscribed by others (most probably the members of the congregation). The standard itself does not play any role in the ensuing conflict. In a very similar passage, III 13-14, האות הגדולה אשר בראש כול העם, "the great banner which is at the head of the whole people" does not contain the name of the Prince or, for that matter, of Levi or the tribal chiefs. Importantly, 4Q496 fr. 10, while correcting this fragment, does not seem to

¹⁴ Duhaime 2004: 33. Cf. the criticism of reading the notion of messianism into 4Q285 in Elledge 2007: 191-5.

¹⁵ See above, p. 88.

¹⁶ Evans 2000: 2.694; cf. Elledge 2007: 178-207.

envisage any further role for the Prince apart from being mentioned on the vexilla. However, this reading can only be conjectured due to the mutilation of the fragment. Therefore, while the Prince of the Congregation performs messianic functions in the DSS taken as a whole, 1QM V 1-2 by itself does not represent any developed messianism at all.¹⁷

The next fragment to be scrutinised is the opening of 1QM XI which quotes Num 24:17-19 with considerable modifications (XI 6-7). The preceding verses (XI 1-6) constitute an extended invocation to God, continuing from X 8 and belonging to a set of prayers to be recited before the battle. The quote from Numbers is introduced as the content of God's ancient teaching and is then followed by God instructing the community about warfare through משיחיה חוזי תעוד, "your anointed ones, seers of testimonies" (XI 7-8). Importantly, the instruction contains a precept להפיל גדודי בליעל, "to fell the band of Belial". Scholars disagree whether XI 6-7 introduces a messianic figure who would function as God's agent. Van der Woude and Collins argue in favour of that proposition, based mostly on external evidence, namely on 4Q285 and the double Messiah in CD VII 18-20; XII 23-XIII 1.¹⁸ On the other hand, some scholars note the lack of strong messianic overtones to the passage and the overall focus on God's salvific agency.¹⁹ The second interpretation appears to be more warranted. The speaker's focus is continually on God's rescuing Israel. Indeed, the quote from Num 24:17-19 serves exactly that purpose as an ancient attestation of his protection and does not introduce another actor. As regards "the anointed ones" in XI 7, the messianic evidence from CD and 4Q285 must be balanced by the occasions where this designation does not point to a Messiah (or Messiahs). Such a

¹⁷ Davies 1977: 35–6; cf. Woude 1957: 133–5; Ploeg 1959: 87; Zimmermann 1998: 53; Elledge 2007: 188; Mason 2008: 99–103 who argues that the high priest might to some extent fulfil this function.

¹⁸ Woude 1957: 116–8; Collins 1995: 65–6.

¹⁹ Fitzmyer 1971: 43; Davies 1977: 97; Zimmermann 1998: 318–9; Duhaime 2004: 110–1; Mason 2008: 101; Hogeterp 2009: 457.

non-messianic usage is the case in CD II 12; VI 1 (see also 4QApocrMoses^a I 9) where the “anointed ones” do not have eschatological connotations and seem to be priestly or didactic figures.²⁰ In sum, it appears unwarranted to see 1QM XI 6-7 as a messianic reference.

The last possibly messianic references in the War Scroll are the hymns contained in XII 10b-16; XIX 2b-8. These two appear to be versions of the same prayer, both beginning with an overt reference to God (XII 7; XIX 1b) but then calling on a גבור, “hero”, איש כבוד, “a glorious man”, and עושי חיל, “a performer of strength”. It should be asked whether the addressee of the prayer changes at this point from God to a messianic agent, as it has been tentatively suggested by Milik.²¹ Two features of the texts speak in favour of such an identification. Firstly, the description of the many horsemen in XII 9 and XIX 1 is surely derived from Ezek 38:9, 16²² and might point to an antimessianic reading of the war against Gog which has been shown to be present elsewhere in the DSS.²³ Furthermore, XII 11 and XIX 3-4 include a call to place “your foot on the piles of the slain” which curiously resonates with the image of the enemies as footstool in Ps 110:1, a messianic *locus classicus*. These arguments, however, are flawed. As it has already been stated, the Gog oracle in Ezekiel 38-39 is not by itself messianic and the DSS can make use of it without harbouring messianic notions, as it happens in 4Q523. At the same time, the similarity between Ps 110:1 and the passages at hand is remote and scant; Deut 33:29: וְאַתָּה עַל-בְּמוֹתֵימָו תִּדְרֹךְ, “you will tread upon their backs” offers a much more plausible explanation.²⁴ It is much more reasonable to agree with van der Woude and

²⁰ Zimmermann 1998: 318–9; Mason 2008: 102 argue that the anointed ones are the prophets of the Hebrew Bible.

²¹ Barthélemy, Milik 1955: 121–2.

²² Carmignac 1956: 256; Woude 1957: 137; Jongeling 1962: 285; Schultz 2009: 281.

²³ See above, pp. 100–1.

²⁴ Carmignac 1956: 257; Woude 1957: 137; Carmignac 1958: 181 where he admits the possibility of a reference to Israel personified; Yadin 1962: 317.

others who trace the places in the DSS and elsewhere where גבור is associated with God himself, and rejects the messianic interpretation of XII 10b-16 and XIX 2b-8.²⁵

In none of the passages discussed above does the author of 1QM indulge the messianic expectation; it might be read into the reference to the Prince of the Congregation in V 1-2 based on other DSS occurrences of the title, but the text itself does not develop it in any way.²⁶ There remains one more way in which the messianic expectation might show itself in the *War Scroll*, namely through ascribing messianic qualities to Michael. The angelology at Qumran has long been subject to scholarly interest,²⁷ and so was the place and role of Michael within it.²⁸ The *War Scroll* contains four out of ten occurrences of the name מיכאל in the DSS (IX 15, 16; XVII 6, 7; the remaining ones are found in 4Q201, 4Q202, 4Q285, 4Q470 *bis*, 4Q529). In IX 14-16, the names of Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Sariel²⁹ are inscribed on the shields of the towers³⁰ which recalls the Prince's inscription upon the standards. XVII 6-8 is lacunose and grammatically difficult. The text runs as follow: ³¹וּשְׁלַח עֶזֶר עוֹלָמִים לְגוֹרֵל [פְּדוּתוֹ]...6 בגבורת מלאך האדיר למשרת מיכאל באור עולמים 7 להאיר בשמחה בן [ישראל שלום וברכה לגורל אל להרים באלים משרת מיכאל וממשלת 8 ישראל בכול בשר]. The translation should most probably be: "6...And he will send eternal help to his redeemed lot by the might of his majestic

²⁵ Dupont-Sommer 1955: 163 n. 4; Woude 1957: 139; Schultz 2009: 138–9.

²⁶ Sanders 1992: 296–7; Schiffman 1992: 122–3; Xeravits 2003: 78.

²⁷ E.g. Yadin 1962: 229–42 with reference to 1QM; Davidson 1992; Mach 1992; Stuckenbruck 1995: 150–64; Frennesson 1999; Hannah 1999: 55–75.

²⁸ Osten-Sacken 1969: 96–100; Hannah 1999: 64–74; Larson 2000: 1.546–8.

²⁹ As a matter of scholarly consensus, the name "Michael" is to be reconstructed on the basis of the clearly visible initial מ and the remaining top vertical stroke of ל. "Gabriel" is fully lost to the lacuna, but ought to be read based on the mention in IX 16 and the external evidence for such grouping; see Yadin 1962: 238. In the Second Temple Jewish literature, when four angels are named, Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael are almost always accompanied by Uriel; Sariel joins them only in 1QM IX 15 and in the angelic septet in the Greek version of 1 *Enoch* 20.

³⁰ Dupont-Sommer 1955: 154–5 n. 7; Yadin 1962: 147–8, 187–90 persuasively identify the towers with a battle formation, Yadin precisely with a *testudo*; cf. Carmignac 1958: 135 who thinks they denote moveable fortifications.

³¹ So Dupont-Sommer 1955: 175; Woude 1957: 140; Ploeg 1959: 52; Yadin 1962: 340; Vermes 1962: 145–6; Bampfylde 1983: 132. בריתו is read by Jongeling 1962: 358; García Martínez & Tigchelaar 1997: 1.141. עדותו is read by Ploeg 1955: 391.

angel³² for the power of Michael, in order to illuminate 7 with eternal light the house (?) of Israel. Peace and blessing to God's lot in order to elevate the kingdom of Michael among the deities and the dominion 8 of Israel among all flesh." XVII 6-8 envisages an important, if only briefly mentioned, role for Michael. If he is to be identified with the majestic angel, which is probably the case,³³ he accompanies the community in the end-time, provides it with joy, peace, and blessing, and dominates other celestial beings which is mirrored by Israel's primacy over creation.

The picture of Michael in 1QM must be completed by XIII 10: ושר מאור מאז פקדתה, "and the Prince of Lights of old have you appointed to help us...and all the spirits of truth are in his rule". The text is, again, incomplete,³⁴ but its context and meaning are clear. It emerges as a part of one of the preparatory prayers and is immediately followed by an extended curse pronounced upon Beliar (XIII 10-12). The Prince appears to be contrasted with him—both are divine appointees, but whilst the Prince serves as the protective and truthful force, Beliar is associated with evil, destruction, and darkness. Notably, this figure emerges in two other texts preserved in Qumran: in 1QS III 20-22, where שר אורים, "the Prince of Lights" and Belial are responsible for the moral agency of people, and in CD V 17-19 where the Prince of Lights helps Moses and Aaron against Belial, Jannes, and Jambres who are cast as Israel's opponents.³⁵ The identification of the Prince from 1QM XIII 10 with Michael in XIII 10 is a scholarly commonplace.³⁶ This link is justified, as both passages envisage a divinely-

³² This or similar translation is offered by Dupont-Sommer 1955: 175; Jongeling 1962: 358; Bampfylde 1983: 132; Vermes 1962: 145–6; García Martínez & Tigchelaar 1997: 1.141. "He made majestic" is the translation of Ploeg 1955: 391; Ploeg 1959: 52; Yadin 1962: 340. "The angel of the majestic one" is understood by Woude 1957: 140.

³³ Jongeling 1962: 354; Yadin 1962: 236; Michalak 2012: 165–70. Cf. Bampfylde 1983: 131–3 who sharply distinguishes between them.

³⁴ For discussions of the possible ways to fill the gap, see Carmignac 1958: 193–4; Jongeling 1962: 298–9.

³⁵ Yadin 1962: 235; Hannah 1999: 62–3.

³⁶ Ploeg 1955: 413; idem 1959: 152; Woude 1957: 21, 142–3; Carmignac 1958: 193; Jongeling 1962: 298; Yadin 1962: 235–6, 322; Hannah 1999: 67–8.

appointed figure who dominates other celestial beings and has the explicit purpose of assisting Israel in the eschatological war.

To recapitulate, 1QM does not appear to envisage an independent messianic actor, with all the references possibly pointing in this direction more easily explicable as referring to God. The exception to that, i.e. the reference to the Prince of the Congregation in V 1-2, can be messianic in view of the broader trend among the DSS, but this passage does not offer any messianic insight of its own.

On the other hand, certain messianic qualities, e.g. divine appointment, primacy over other beings, support for Israel, are ascribed to Michael, especially in XIII 10; XVII 6-8. Michael might be treated as a messianic agent in the broad sense—something I have signalled in my discussion in CHAPTER I.³⁷ This conclusion, however, has to be placed within the larger picture of 1QM in its entirety, where it is primarily God to whom Israel's triumph should be ascribed. Michael plays a visible, yet minor part in the drama, so the significance of the angelic messianism of the text should not be overstated.

In view of the above conclusions, it is possible to find in the *War Scroll* traces—but nothing more—of antimessianic speculation. Michael's direct enemies are not specified at any point, but, in some respects, Belial is his evil counterpart. In XIII 10, 12 they are both said to have subordinate angels. In XVII 5-6, immediately preceding the promise of Michael's help, the defeat of ממשלת רשעה, “the prince of the realm of evil” is foretold, most probably referring to Belial who now bears the title שר, previously used for the Prince of Light in XIII 10. These few details hint at the beginnings of a larger motif within the antimessianic tradition, namely the mimetic rivalry between the messianic agents and their opponents. It is one of the core claims of my thesis that such a rivalry is one of the basic ways in which the eschatological messianic confrontation plays

³⁷ See above, pp. 39–41.

out. Importantly, it is in the DSS, partly in 1QM and more explicitly in 4Q175 to be discussed next, that this motif first takes root.

3.2 4QTestimonia (4Q175, 4Q379, fr. 22 II)

The next text to be discussed in the context of Qumran antimessianic expectation is 4Q175, commonly referred to as 4QTestimonia or *The Messianic Anthology*. The text is preserved almost in its entirety on a single leather sheet and consists of thirty lines in four paragraphs which are distinguishable based on indentations and horizontal parabolic markings on the right-hand margin. It is most probably a self-standing composition, as the sheet does not seem to have been stitched as a part of a larger scroll.³⁸ The script is dated to the first quarter of the first century BCE,³⁹ and the hand is commonly claimed to be the one to have penned the *Rule of the Community* (1QS).⁴⁰

The first three paragraphs are composed solely of briefly prefaced Biblical quotations. Lines 1-8 contain Deut 5:28-29; 18:18-19 which talks about God, who is the speaker here, hearing the voice of the people and promising to give them a prophet in the future. The combination of these two passages has been noted to mirror Exod 20:21 in the SP which incorporates both.⁴¹ The second paragraph (lines 9-13) reproduces Num 24:15-17, i.e. the crucial part of Balaam's prophecy foretelling the emergence of a future leader who will destroy Moab and "all the sons of Seth" (line 13). The third section (lines 14-20) contains a quote from Deut 33:8-11—Moses' final blessing of Levi which commends Levi for fulfilling his priestly functions and implores God to protect him.⁴²

³⁸ Allegro 1956: 182.

³⁹ Milik 1959: 61; Strugnell 1970: 225; Mazon 1988: 5 n. 10; Eshel 1992: 411; Zimmermann 1998: 429; Mitchell 2005: 545; Feldman 2014: 122; Atkinson 2016: 17 (125-75 BCE).

⁴⁰ Allegro 1956: 182; Eshel 1992: 411; Feldman 2014: 122; Atkinson 2016: 17.

⁴¹ Skehan 1957: 435, followed by Fitzmyer 1957: 533; Strugnell 1970: 227; Brooke 1985: 314; Lübke 1986: 193; Mazon 1988: 5 n. 9; Cross 1995: 114 n. 2; Thompson 1998: 264; Zimmermann 1998: 431; Berthelot 2009: 100 n. 2; Katzin 2013: 219; Jacobus 2017: 236–8.

⁴² For the comparison of the quotes in 4QTest and the MT, see the notes in Allegro 1956: 182–5.

The fourth paragraph incites the greatest amount of scholarly interest, and for a good reason so. The text is as follows:

vacat 21 בעת אשר כלה ישוע להלל ולהודות בתהלותיהו 22 ויאמר ארור היש אשר יבנה את העיר הזאת
בבכורו 23 ייסדנה ובצעירו יציב דלתיה ואנה ארור אחד בליעל 24 עומד להיות פ[ח] יקוש לעמו ומחתה
לכול שכניו ועמד 25 מ... [לה] יות שניהמה כלי חמס ושבו ובנו את 26 ... [העיר זאת ויצ] יבו לה חומה
ומגדלים לעשות לעוז רשע 27 בישראל ושערוריה באפרים וביהודה 28 ... [וע] שו חנופה בארץ ונצה גדולה
בבני 29 יעקב ושפכו ד[ם] כמים על חל בת ציון ובחוק 30 vacat ... ירושלם

21 vacat At the time when Joshua finished praising and thanking with his praises 22 he said, 'Cursed is the man who builds this city; with his firstborn 23 will he establish it, and with his youngest will he erect its gates. And look, a cursed man, one of Belial 24 will arise to be a fowler's snare for his people and terror to all his neighbours. And he will arise 25 ...m... [to] be both tools of violence. And they will return and build 26 [this city and se]t up for it a wall and towers to make into a stronghold of wickedness 27... in Israel and horror in Ephraim, and in Judah 28... and will cause] pollution in the land, and great strife among the sons 29 of Jacob. And they will spill blood like water on the rampart of the daughter of Sion and on the boundary of 30 vacat Jerusalem

The passage is much closer in its style to other Qumran pesharim rather than the bare citations in the first three sections. It overlaps with the text included in the second column of 4Q379 (*4QApocryphon of Joshua*^b, olim *4QPsalms of Joshua*), fr. 22. It is a matter of scholarly contention which document copies which in this case. Most of scholars argue in favour 4Q175 copying from 4Q379, fr. 22 II, which on the surface seems reasonable, given that the former is composed mostly of quotes, so the fourth section also being derived from elsewhere would complete the pattern.⁴³ However, some have argued

⁴³ Allegro 1956: 186–7; Skehan 1957: 436; Fitzmyer 1957: 532; Milik 1959: 61; Lübke 1986: 192; Mazor 1988: 5; Newsom 1989: 56; Burgmann 1990: 44; Cross 1995: 114; Zimmermann 1998: 432; Dimant 2005: 130–3; Mitchell 2005: 545; Berthelot 2009: 100–3; Feldman 2014: 121.

in favour of 4Q175 being the original⁴⁴ which is the position I am going to accept in what follows. Especially persuasive is Katzin's argument that the intricacy and depth of the links between the first three paragraphs and the last one of 4Q175 could not have arisen, had the final section been a quote from another document.⁴⁵

The first question is whether 4QTest envisages a messianic figure which is a prerequisite to there being an antimessianic actor. This is the opinion of many interpreters⁴⁶ who read the first three paragraphs as presenting three distinct aspects of the expected Messiah: as a prophet (lines 1-8), a king (lines 9-13), and a priest (lines 14-20). This interpretation is plausible on its surface, but suffers from a major shortcoming. 4QTest contains only bare citations of the Pentateuchal passages and does not offer any direct commentary on them. Scholars are accustomed to seeing Deut 5:28-29; 18:18-19; Num 24:15-17; and Deut 33:8-11 as referring to future leaders and can point to any number of occasions, when these texts were so understood in antiquity, even in the DSS themselves. These observations, however, are insufficient in proving that the writer of the 4QTest would see these Scriptural texts as messianic. It is certain, on the other hand, that he did not consider himself bound to offer an explicitly messianic commentary on these verses. First three paragraphs of the document might at best evoke the expectation of a future messianic prophet-ruler-priest, but by themselves cannot prove that expectation to be definitely there.

The key to understanding the Biblical quotations and of the entire text lies in the fourth paragraph. It begins with a quotation from Josh 6:26 which includes a curse against

⁴⁴ Eshel 1992: 412; 2008: 83–6; Katzin 2013: 234–5.

⁴⁵ It is unnecessary for me to enter the possible historical referents of any of the figures present in 4QTest, as I am instead focused on how they are depicted in the text itself and what the relationship between them is. For the discussions of the historical context, see Milik 1959: 61–4; Treves 1960: 569–71; Newsom 1989: 72–3; Burgmann 1986: 197–227; idem 1990: 42–53; idem 1992: 123–5; Eshel 1992: 412–7; idem 2008: 63–89; Cross 1995: 115; Berthelot 2009: 103–16; Feldman 2014: 123–5; Atkinson 2016: 16–27.

⁴⁶ Woude 1957: 121, 184; Brooke 1985: 315; Burgmann 1990: 45; Mitchell 2005: 546; tentatively also Zimmermann 1998: 434–6; Katzin 2013: *passim*; cf. Allegro 1956: 187; Lübke 1986: 195–6.

anyone rebuilding Jericho. In 4QTest, these words are said to come after Joshua's praise to God which is different to the original context in the MT where they follow the destruction of Jericho. The reading of the passage also differs; most importantly, 4QTest—just like the LXX—lacks את יריחו which is present in the MT.⁴⁷ The *Testimonia* thus leaves open the identification of the city whose reconstruction is prohibited.⁴⁸ The text then states that the restorer will be איש ארור, “a cursed man”, אחד בליעל, “one of Belial”, פנה, “the fow[ler's s]nare for his people” (see Hos 9:8), and ומחזה לכול שכניו, “terror/ruin for all his neighbours” (see Jer 48:23; Deut 1:7; lines 23-24). Line 25 mentions שניהמה, “the two of them”, thus introducing one or possibly two more actors, most probably sons, alongside the figure spoken of previously. They are later said to together reconstruct the city against Joshua's pronouncement (lines 25-26). This act ultimately leads to the increase of evil, widespread impurity, and bloodshed (lines 27-30).

It is crucial to note that the evil figures described in the fourth section of the *Testimonia* are presented as a contrast to the models evoked in the first three.⁴⁹ Each of the quotes ends with words that threaten the dissenters, hence foregrounding the possibility of conflict. The man of Belial and his son(s) are portrayed as radically at odds with the Scriptural paradigms of leadership in lines 1-20. The accursed one is a trap for his neighbours, unlike the priest who teaches the Law to Israel (lines 17-18). The antagonists set up a city which is “a stronghold of ungodliness in Israel” which contrasts the destruction of the temples of Moab pursued by the Messiah in Num 24:17 (lines 12-13). They also act as a family, contrary to the archetype of a priest who renounces his kin

⁴⁷ See Mazor 1988: 5-7 for a study of this issue.

⁴⁸ Whereas most commentators consider 4QTest to refer to Jerusalem, the allusion is still to Jericho according to Eshel 1992: 419; idem 2008: 75. Treves 1960: 170 implausibly proposes Sebastia.

⁴⁹ Woude 1957: 121; Thompson 1998: 264; Zimmermann 1998: 434-5; Berthelot 2009: 104; Katzin 2013: passim; cf. Dimant 2005: 132 who thinks that the Joshua quote is unconnected to the rest of the text; Mitchell 2005: 545-53 argues that 4QTest presents a fourfold messianic scheme, otherwise known from the Rabbinic sources, within which Messiah ben Joseph would be the subject of the fourth section; this is implausible as the that paragraph is not about Joshua but the evil rebuilders of the city.

(line 17). Finally, 4QTest sees loyalty to divine pronouncements as commendable (line 17), whereas the man of Belial and his accomplices breach Joshua's curse.

Katzin in his insightful study of the use of the Bible in the *Testimonia* proves persuasively that the contrast goes deeper still. He notes that all sections operate with the theme of arising, expressed through the repeated use of the derivatives of the roots קום and עמד, present in lines 5, 12, 19-20, 24 (bis).⁵⁰ This motif ties all of the figures described in 4QTest into a pattern of contrastive similarity. Furthermore, Katzin rightly observes that the mention of Joshua in line 21 can constitute a double entendre, on the one hand referencing Joshua, son of Nun, who is the speaker in Jos 6:26, and on the other hand Joshua, son of Kadmiel, a Levite, who in Neh 12:24 is among those who begin להלל להודות, “to praise, to thank”, which mirrors closely the phrase להלל ולהודות in line 21.⁵¹ As the words in Nehemiah 12 come immediately before the dedication of the city walls of Jerusalem (Neh 12:27-43), 4QTest 21 would thus bring to mind events which resemble the rebuilding of the city (most probably Jerusalem) by the cursed man and his son(s). The two events are, however, in direct contrast in terms of their consequences (joy in Neh 12:43, strife and destruction in 4QTest 26-30).

Another example of a Scriptural echo, which involves a tacit evocation of its context, is the phrase פ[ה י]קוש, “a fowler's snare” in line 24 which applies to the accursed man and is commonly recognised as echoing Hos 9:8 which is the only place in the OT where this collocation happens in this exact form.⁵² Its context in Hosea is the criticism of false prophecy (9:7-8), preceded by a negative comment on the invalidity of current sacrifices (9:4). These two points provide a counterpoint to the prophetic and priestly

⁵⁰ Katzin 2013: 222–30. He interestingly suggests that depicting the cursed man in the fourth paragraph is due the author's knowledge of the MT of Josh 6:26 which, unlike the LXX, uses the root קום.

⁵¹ Ibid. 210. Katzin notes that the same phrase occurs in 2 Chron 5:13 where the subject is the dedication of the Solomonic Temple.

⁵² Zimmermann 1998: 431; Eshel 2008: 80; Katzin 2013: 211.

archetypes described in the first and third paragraph of 4QTest. Furthermore, Hos 9:7-8 include the only two Scriptural occurrences of the word *מִשְׁטָמָה*, “hatred, enmity”—a common noun in Hosea, but a proper name for the chief evil angel in *Jubilees*, related to or even identifiable with Belial in the DSS. Katzin speculates that the presence of this word in the context of the allusion encouraged the author to introduce Belial into his own text.⁵³

Katzin is right in observing that the words *וּמַחֲתָה לְכֹל שְׁכֵנָיו*, “and terror to all his neighbours” in line 24 can be reasonably taken to hark back to Jer 48:39 which speaks of the destruction of Moab and it becoming *לְכָל-סְבִיבָיו*, “terror to all those around it”. The sorry lot of Moab is also mentioned in the quote from Num 24:17 in lines 12-13 and thus offers a further link between the second and the fourth section.⁵⁴

The description of the father with at least one of his sons as *כְּלֵי חַמָּס*, “tools of violence” was repeatedly identified as taken from Jacob’s blessing (or, rather, reproach) of Simeon and Levi in Gen 49:5 where they are accused of murder.⁵⁵ The same charge appears to stand in the background of the violent description of the cursed man and his son(s) in 4QTest 28-29.

Katzin and others have also correctly noted that word *שַׁעֲרֹרִיָּה*, “horror”, in line 27 must derive from the only use of this exact form in the OT which happens in Hos 6:10.⁵⁶ In its original context, the word describes what the prophet has seen in Israel which is then specified as *וְזָנוּת לְאֶפְרַיִם נִטְמָא יִשְׂרָאֵל*, “prostitution in Ephraim, Israel is impure” which harmonises with the mentions of Israel and Ephraim in line 27. Interestingly, in Hos 6:9, it is the priests who are branded as murderers. Therefore, in a way similar to the echo to Hos 9:8 in line 24, the Scriptural context of line 27 sheds further light on the antagonists

⁵³ Ibid. 211–3.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 213.

⁵⁵ Skehan 1959: 175; Newsom 1989: 59; Zimmermann 1998: 431; Katzin 2013: 213–4.

⁵⁶ Newsom 1989: 59; Katzin 2013: 216; cf. Eshel 2008: 82–3 who sees the reference to Jer 5:30-31 where, however, the orthography of the word is different (*שַׁעֲרֹרִיָּה*).

of the fourth paragraph of 4QTest who turn out to be directly opposed to the priestly ideal depicted in lines 14-20.

To recapitulate, 4QTest, overtly as well as through a complex web of Scriptural links, which spans the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, contrasts the accursed man and his son(s) with the prophet, the ruler, and the priest from the first three paragraphs. This observation leads to three significant conclusions. Firstly, whilst there is no direct commentary on the Biblical quotes in lines 1-20, they receive exegetical attention indirectly in the fourth section of the text. The accursed man and his accomplice(s) are likened to and, at the same time, contrasted with the three figures spoken of earlier. It therefore follows that the prophet, the king, and the priest are indeed treated as models and protagonists which in turn means that the author understood them as messianic.

Secondly and consequently, the “one of Belial” and his son(s) are in opposition to the messianic idea running through the text and can be reasonably understood as antimessianic. This has been a longstanding intuition of the scholarship.⁵⁷

Thirdly, 4QTest provides the very first instance of a literary motif which I will treat at length in subsequent parts of this thesis, i.e. the mimetic rivalry between the eschatological protagonists and antagonists. As has been shown above, the evil actors of 4QTest 21-30 resemble, but at the same time are contrasted with the messianic ideals espoused earlier in the text. This dual dynamic will be presented to be the case in multiple NT, extracanonical, and Patristic texts to which the *Testimonia* provides an important precedent.

⁵⁷ Woude 1957: 121; Carmignac 1961: 2.274; Meeks 1967: 51; Brooke 1985: 319; Burgmann 1986: 205–8; Vermes 1989: 190; Lorein 2003: 179–86; Berthelot 2009: 104. See also Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 281–5.

3.3 4QApocryphon of Daniel ar (4Q246)

The Aramaic apocalyptic fragment from Cave 4 (4Q246; *4QApocryphon of Daniel ar*; olim *4Qps-Dan^d ar*), frequently referred to as the “Son of God” text, has been a focus of scholarly attention and discussion since even before it was published by Puech in 1992.⁵⁸ The fragment contains two columns of nine lines each; the top and bottom margins are noticeably larger than the interlinear spaces and so all the columns of the fragment contained the maximum of nine lines. The right-hand half of the first column is torn away, whereas the second column is preserved entirely. The regular appearance of the left-hand margin suggests that the scroll finished here,⁵⁹ but as the last word of col. II is a construct, תְּהוֹמֵי, “the depths of”, more text must have followed.⁶⁰ In sum, the present text is probably far from the full extent of the original work. The fragment is paleographically dated to the end of the first century BCE.⁶¹ The text itself is most probably non-sectarian and dates back to the period of flourishing of Danielic traditions in mid-second century BCE.⁶²

Attempts at reconstruction of the first column of 4Q246 are numerous but necessarily based on conjectures and hence uncertain. The questions relevant to the present inquiry can be answered based my own reconstruction of the text which is as follows:

⁵⁸ Puech 1992: 98–131. The text was acquired in 1958 and discussed by Milik in his 1972 Harvard lecture; the report of the lecture and discussion of the text itself are found in Fitzmyer 1974: 391–4 (see 391 n. 2 for earlier references to the fragment). Before 1992, it was also discussed by Hengel 1976: 44–5; Milik 1976: 60, 213, 261; Flusser 1980: 31–7; García Martínez 1983: 229–44 (reprinted in English in idem 1992: 162–79); Kuhn 1984: 103–13.

⁵⁹ Puech 1992: 104.

⁶⁰ Collins 1995: 154; Puech 1996: 166; Justnes 2009: 31; Ferda 2014: 156.

⁶¹ This dating was reportedly argued for by Milik (so Fitzmyer 1993a: 156) and accepted by Puech 1992: 105; Mattila 1994: 523; Collins 1995: 154; Zimmermann 1998: 128; Fabry 1999: 95; Cross 2003: 152; Justnes 2009: 31; Segal 2014: 290; cf. García Martínez 1996: 25 who posits a slightly later date in the first half of the first century CE.

⁶² Mattila 1994: 537–8; Steudel 1996: 508 n. 4; Zimmermann 1998: 168; Cross 2003: 152; cf. García Martínez 1992: 179.

I 1 ...ע[לוהי שרת נפל קדם כרסיא 2 ...מ[לכא מ?עלמא⁶³ אתה רגז ושנוך⁶⁴ 3 ...א⁶⁵ חזור וכלא אתה עד עלמא
 4...ק[רבינ⁶⁶ עקה תתא על ארעא 5 ...ונחשירין רב במדינתא 6 ...מלך אתור[ומצירין 7 ... רב להוה על ארעא
 8 ...י[עבדון וכלא יש[מ[שון 9 ...ר[בא יתקרא ובשמה יתכנה

II 1 ברה די אל יתאמר ובר עליון יקרונה כזיקיא 2 די חזיתא⁶⁷ כן מלכותה תהוה שני[ן⁶⁸ ימלכון על 3 ארעא וכלא
 ידשון עם לעם ידוש ומדינה למדי[נה 4 vacat עד יקום⁶⁹ עם אל וכלא ינוח מן חרב vacat?⁷⁰ 5 מלכותה מלכות עלם
 וכל ארחתה בקשוט ידי[ן 6 ארעא בקשט וכלא יעבד שלם חרב מן ארעא יסף 7 וכל מדינתא לה יסגדון אל רבא באילה
 8 הוא יעבד⁷¹ לה קרב עממין יתן בידה וכלהן 9 ירמה קדמוהי שלטנה שלטן עלם וכל תהומי

⁶³ The text here is difficult to decipher. Most scholars complete לעלמא; see Fitzmyer 1993a: 155; Cook 1995: 44; Cross 1996: 5; idem 2003:154; Zimmermann 1998: 129; Ferda 2014: 151. Puech 1992: 106; 1994: 535; 1996: 171 includes the ל, but also takes notice of the sublinear circular marking which he reads as מ, thus resulting in למעלמא, “pour depuis toujours” (Segal 2014: 297 seems to read the marking implausibly as ב). The area between עלמא and לכא is lost to a lacuna, but is hardly enough for both the space and the ל. The argument of Cook 1995: 45 that the ל is clearly visible in front of the ע (so also Justnes 2009: 79), whereas the sublinear marking is unexpected, is not fully persuasive. Close inspection of PAM 42.601, 43.236 and Plate 209 Frag. 1 from the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library shows no remnants of the ל. On the other hand, sublinear corrections, while far rarer than the superlinear ones, do occur in the DSS; see e.g. 4QPhyl B 1 and 4QPhyl J 6.

⁶⁴ I follow Cross 1996: 8; idem 2003: 155 n. 9; García Martínez, Tigchelaar 1997: 1.492–3; Kuhn 2007: 25 in reading ושנוך, “and changed”, rather than ושינך, “your years” which is assumed or argued for by Puech 1992: 107; idem 1994: 535, 538; 1996: 171 n. 9; Fitzmyer 1993a: 157–9 (who follows Puech’s material reconstruction, but translates the word as “and changed” nonetheless); Cook 1995: 44–5; Zimmermann 1998: 129–131; Justnes 2009: 79; Ferda 2014: 151; Segal 2014: 297. The second to last letter is identical in shape to that in חזור where it must be a ו. If the subject is supplied as זיך, “your appearance”, the phrase has a parallel in Dan 5:6.

⁶⁵ As only the left upper speck of the preceding letter remains, I agree with Cook 1995: 45; Justnes 2009: 80 that no textual reconstruction can be made here with sufficient certainty.

⁶⁶ So Justnes 2009: 80 against all other reconstructions. The reading, though conjectural, is textually plausible and fits the context, whereas the dominant reading ר[ברבין, “the mighty ones” is only meaningful within the putative reconstructions. Cf. Ferda 2014: 151 n. 1.

⁶⁷ I follow Justnes in reading חזיתא rather than חזותא, “of a vision” which is supported by all other reconstructions.

⁶⁸ So almost all of reconstructions; cf. Justnes 2009: 84 for the reading שני[א, resulting in “their rule will be changing”. Neither possibility significantly alters the overall meaning of the text.

⁶⁹ Here and in ינוח that follows it is famously difficult to differentiate between the ו and the י. The verbs can therefore be taken as Pael (יקום, “[the people] will arise”; ינוח, “all will rest”) or Aphel (יקים, “he will raise”; יניח, “he will give all rest”); the second option leaves open who exactly the subject is—God or the Son of God? Although the two clauses can technically have two different subjects, most of commentators decide the both verbs to be Pael, with “the people of God” as their subject, which is the understanding to be followed here. Cf. Puech 1996: 175; Justnes 2009: 84–5 who opt for יקום and יניח; Ferda 2014: 151 who reads יקים and ינוח.

⁷⁰ Puech 1992: 107; idem 1994: 535; idem 1999: 547; Cross 1996: 6; idem 2003: 155; Dunn 1997: 203; Zimmermann 1998: 130; Kuhn 2007: 25; Justnes 2009: 84 indicate a second vacat at the end of line 4 (noted but rejected by Ferda 2014: 151 n. 4). The line is indeed shorter than any in this column, but this might be simply due to the length of the next word, מלכותה. It is also improbable that the second vacat would carry the same significance for the narrative arch of the text as the first does.

⁷¹ Again, the first letter can be both a ו and a י. יעבד is read by Collins 1995: 155; Cook 1995: 45; Cross 1996: 6; idem 2003: 155; Zimmermann 1998: 130; Kuhn 2007: 25; Justnes 2009: 85. Puech 1992: 106; 1994: 535; 1996: 177; Fitzmyer 1993a: 155; Buchanan 1996: 79; Dunn 1997: 203; Ferda 2014: 151; Segal

I 1 ...u]pon him rested; he fell down before the throne 2 ...k]ing [since?] forever; wrath is coming⁷² and changed 3 ...]a your vision and all will come upon the world 4 ...w]ars; trouble will come upon the earth 5...] and great carnage in the provinces 6 ...] king of Assyria [and E]gypt 7 ...] he will be great upon earth 8 ...will] do and all will se[r]ve 9 ...gr]eat he will be called and by his name he will be designated.

II 1 He will be styled “Son of God” and he will be called “Son of the Most High”. Like comets/sparks⁷³ 2 of a vision, so will their kingdom be. For years will they reign upon 3 earth. All will trample: nation upon nation, province will trample upon province. 4 *vacat* Until the people of God arises and all will rest from the sword. 5 His/their⁷⁴ kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his/their paths will be in truth, and he/they will jud[ge] 6 the earth with truth. And all will make peace, the sword will disappear from earth. 7 And all nations will bow down to him/them, and the great God will be his/their aid. 8 He himself will wage war for him/them, he will put peoples in his/their hand. All of them 9 he will cast down in front of him/them. His/their rule will be an eternal rule. And all the depths...

Issues surrounding this text are numerous and complex. The key discussion revolves around the identity of the being spoken of in I 9-II 1. Multiple views on the characteristics and identification of this figure have been proposed.⁷⁵ Among the positive interpretations, the one called “the Son of God” and “the son of the Most High” is seen

2014: 298, on the other hand, read ועבד which is possible, but syntactically awkward. There is little change in the overall meaning.

⁷² I follow Cook 1995: 49; Ferda 2014: 152; Justnes 2009: 101–2 in reading אתה not as a second person masculine singular pronoun—a form which would be otherwise unattested—but rather as a form of אתא, “to come”. This is in keeping with use of the verb in lines 4–5. Consequently, I treat רגז as a noun rather than a verbal form. Most of translations read something to the effect of “you are troubled”.

⁷³ See Zimmermann 1998: 133 n. aa on the different ways of translating זיקא. The overall image is that of brief flashes of light.

⁷⁴ Here and in the following lines, it is debatable to whom or to what the third-person singular masculine suffix: the people of God, God, or the one called “the Son of God”. As I will show in what follows, my argument does not require for this referent to be determined here.

⁷⁵ See Justnes 2009: 32–73; Ferda 2014: 153–6 for thorough summaries of the scholarly discussions on this point.

as representing God's people,⁷⁶ a future Jewish leader,⁷⁷ a future Messiah,⁷⁸ or a heavenly being.⁷⁹ While viewed negatively, the actor is interpreted as an unidentified malicious figure,⁸⁰ an evil historical ruler,⁸¹ or, indeed, the Antichrist.⁸² My discussion of 4Q246 does not aim at confirming any of these particular views; it will be argued, however, that the "Son of God/the Most High" must be read as a positive figure and, consequently, cannot be treated as an Antimesiah.

The scholarly opinions about the figure typically depend upon the interpretation of the titles present in I 9-II 1 and, on the other hand, of the overall structure of the preserved fragment, especially the supposed narrative transition marked by the *vacat* at the beginning of II 4. As for the titles, the proponents of the negative interpretation see them as an expression of undue exaltation, comparable to Dan 11:36 or 2 Thess 2:4. Meanwhile, the gap at the start of line 4 can, as it is common in the DSS, introduce a new paragraph; consequently, everything that follows would recount the eschatological peace, whereas the text before the *vacat*, including the mention of the "Son of God", would belong to the period of eschatological tribulation.

These two observations have to be problematised. While the blank space at the beginning of II 4 certainly changes the trajectory of the narrative, the text appears to be even more carefully structured.⁸³ A plausible fourfold division has been proposed whereby I 4-6 speaks about the wars of the earthly kings, I 7-II 1 introduces the positive

⁷⁶ Hengel 1976: 44–5.

⁷⁷ Fitzmyer 1993a: 173–4; 1994: 175; Dunn 1997: 209.

⁷⁸ Collins 1995: 163–7; Cross 1996: 4–5; idem 2003: 153–4; Zimmermann 1998: 166–8; Kuhn 2007: 30–2; Ferda 2014: 175.

⁷⁹ García Martínez 1992: 178; idem 1996: 29–30.

⁸⁰ Justnes 2009: 125–6.

⁸¹ Milik 1992: 383–4 argues for it representing Alexander Balas; Steudel 1996: 511; Cook 1995: 64; Fabry 1999: 97–8 point to Antiochus IV Epiphanes; so also, tentatively, Puech 1994: 555–6 and, more forcefully, idem 1999: 549. See also Segal 2014: 311–2 who identifies the figure with the representative of the fourth worldly empire in Daniel 7 (i.e. the Seleucid kingdom) in the heavenly courtroom.

⁸² Flusser 1980: 31–7.

⁸³ See Zimmermann 1998: 134–7, 161–4; Cross 2003: 151–8.

figure of the “Son of God”, II 1-4 returns to the violent monarchies, and, finally, II 4-9 recounts the triumph of God as well the “Son” and/or God’s people. Thus, the positive and negative visions of the future are interwoven. This way of structuring the text is only putative, as there is nothing undeniably positive about I 7-II 1, but it is as plausible as the readings which see I 1-II 4 as being only about eschatological tribulation. Whilst it might not be right to read Daniel 7 as a precedent to such an alternating eschatological sequence,⁸⁴ the received chapter order of Ezekiel 37-48 and the writings dependent on it, such as *Sib. Or.* 3.635-730 and Revelation 19-21, where the eschatological peace is interrupted by war, yet ultimately restored, provide an interesting conceptual parallel.

A stronger argument in favour of the positive interpretation of the “Son of God” was recently put forward by Ferda who argued cogently that the language of naming in I 9-II 1 is far closer to the rhetoric of God bestowing names on his favourites in the OT than to the hubristic boasting of eschatological opponents.⁸⁵ Ferda rightly notes that the examples of the latter leave no space for ambiguity, making it clear that the titles assumed are undue (so e.g. 2 Thess 2:4; *Ps. Sol* 2:28; *Asc. Isa.* 4:6; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 7.17.4); 4Q246, on the other hand, does not explicitly criticise the “Son of God”. This observation severely undercuts the possibility of reading this figure as negative, especially in the way advanced by Flusser who uses these texts—some of which undoubtedly belong to the antimessianic tradition—to interpret the *Apocryphon of Daniel*, but fails to take note of the important rhetorical differences between them.

Ferda’s points are valuable in assessing the probably most cogent argument in favour of the negative interpretation of the “Son of God”, i.e. that by Segal. He plausibly argues for 4Q246 as being conceptually dependent not only on Daniel 7 but also on the

⁸⁴ Suggested by Collins 1995: 158; Kuhn 2007: 28–30, but rightly criticised by Cook 1995: 60–1; Segal 2014: 303–4.

⁸⁵ Ferda 2014: 164–71.

dialogue in the heavenly courtroom in Psalm 82.⁸⁶ In view of the parallels between Ps 82:6: אֲנִי־אָמַרְתִּי אֱלֹהִים אַתֶּם וּבְנֵי עֲלִיוֹן כָּלְכֶם, “I have said, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High all of you...’” and 4Q246 II 1, Segal argues that the “Son of God” represents one of the divine beings, whose dominion is taken away and granted to YHWH who is portrayed as victorious in II 4-9. Furthermore, the “Son of God” would, under Segal’s interpretation, be identifiable with a representative of the fourth Danielic empire.

The allusion to Ps 82:6 is palpable, but it is difficult to see how the influence of the psalm extends further into 4Q246. Whilst Ps 82:7 makes the demise of the gods explicit (see Dan 7:26 for the deposition of the fourth beast), this point is absent from the scenario of the *Apocryphon of Daniel* in the preserved form. As noted by Ferda, the “Son of God” is not criticised nor is his downfall explicitly portrayed. The conflicts spoken of in II 3 can hardly refer to the unrest under the reign of the “Son of God” who is earlier said to be a universal ruler and to whom all pay obeisance (I 7-8). Segal’s claim that this figure is related to the representative of the fourth Danielic kingdom requires that the first column of 4Q246 contain other empires from that sequence. While Assyria and Egypt (if they are indeed ruled by two different monarchs) are mentioned in I 6, there are no obvious traces of another kingdom to complete the quartet. Segal notes also the verbal forms used in I 9-II 1 to designate the “Son of God” could possibly have negative connotations, and adduces several Targumic examples to that effect.⁸⁷ However, all the passages offered provide only for a partial parallel to the language of 4Q246 I 9-II 1, as they always specify why the given name is improper which is not the case in the *Apocryphon of Daniel*.

The fragmentary nature of the text, which was probably more extensive, makes any conclusions about the nature of the Son of God tentative. Nevertheless, the negative

⁸⁶ Segal 2014: 305–10.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 307–10 based on Mizrahi 2001.

reading of the “Son of God” is less plausible than the positive interpretation. It is unnecessary for me to determine the exact identity of this figure which is why I have preserved the ambiguity of possessive pronouns in my translation of II 4-9. Since the “Son of God” should not be seen as an end-time antagonist, 4Q246, although it displays some tantalising connections to Daniel and has been claimed to be an antimessianic text, cannot be a part of the antimessianic discourse. This is the answer one would expect, if the criterion for detecting the Antichrist I have been using up to this point had been applied. If 4Q246 speaks about a messianic figure at all, it does not portray it as engaged in conflict, as neither the “Son of God” nor the people of God⁸⁸ are portrayed as fighting, but only God is (II 8). Consequently, it cannot be, despite earlier scholarly claims, be treated as an antimessianic text.

3.4 The Book of War (4Q285 fr. 4, 5)

4Q285, also known as *4QSefer ha-Milhamah* or the *Book of War*, consists of a set of ten fragments in sixteen pieces of parchment. The script is typically dated to the early Herodian period.⁸⁹ The *Book of War* is famously related to two other Qumran scrolls, namely the *War Scroll* and 11Q14 (*11QBerakhot*). As for the former, although it has been initially claimed that the *Book of War* represents the lost conclusion to the *War Scroll*,⁹⁰ the dominant scholarly assumption is that it preserves fragments of a related but distinct eschatological work.⁹¹ Parts of the first and second column of 11Q14 overlap with 4Q285, fr. 7, 8,⁹² and the exact nature of the link between the two is a matter of contention.⁹³

⁸⁸ They are seen as a collective messianic actor by Steudel 1996: 519, criticised by Puech 1999: 549–51.

⁸⁹ Bockmuehl 1992: 158; Nitzan 1993: 79; Abegg 1994: 81; Lyons 1996: 136 n. 23; Zimmermann 1998: 72; Xeravits 2003: 64.

⁹⁰ Milik 1972: 143.

⁹¹ Nitzan 1992: 89–90; Zimmerman 1998: 95; Elledge 2007: 191; Schultz 2009: 29, 352–3; cf. Abegg 1994: 81–91.

⁹² I follow the numbering of fragments in the *editio princeps*, Alexander, Vermes 1998: 228–46.

⁹³ See Lyons 1999: 37–43; 1999: 37–43; Tigchelaar 2000: 49–56; Norton 2003: 3–27; Schultz 2012: 197–212.

However, as 11QBerakhot preserves almost none of the fragments of the *Book of War* containing features relevant to this study (only single letters remain of 11Q14 I which overlaps with 4Q285, fr. 7), this specific issue will be set aside.

Attention will be paid to two scraps of the text, i.e. fr. 4 and 7. Fr. 4 preserves little continuous text, but it is clear that it recounts a battle. Line 2 introduces the figure of נשיא העדה, “the Prince of the Congregation”, whose appearances in 1QM and elsewhere in the DSS I have described above and who is commonly understood to denote a messianic actor.⁹⁴ After introducing a Biblical quote in line 3, most probably a part of Isa 14:25 (lines 3-4),⁹⁵ the fragment recounts the flight of the Kittim⁹⁶ from Israel, their subsequent naval defeat at the hands of the Prince of the Congregation, and someone, who might well be the king of the Kittim (see also 1QM XV 2), being brought before the Prince (lines 5-10).

Fr. 7, which may continue the events described in fr. 4, begins with a quote from Isa 10:34-11:1 through which the author manages to identify the Prince with the Branch of David, thus providing him with Davidic pedigree (lines 1-4). He is probably accompanied by his allies and jointly with them initiates judgement over what must be a hostile figure, most probably the Kittite leader from fr. 4.⁹⁷ Line 4 contains the famous grammatical ambiguity of ותמיהו; if vocalised ותמיתו, it means “they will kill”, but if read ותמיתו, it would have to be understood “he will kill him”. The first alternative would speak about the Prince being—quite unexpectedly—killed, whereas the second one sees him as

⁹⁴ Collins 1995: 58–63; Zimmermann 1998: 125–7; Xeravits 2003: 146–50; cf. Elledge 2007: 191–5.

⁹⁵ I here side with Elledge 2007: 192 n. 60 against all other reconstructions which argue for Ezek 39:3-4. על הרי is followed by a minuscule speck of ink on the verge of the fragment which most interpreters see it as a remnant of a י from ישראל in Ezek 39:4. However, י would have left more ink since its vertical stroke is usually slightly protruded to the right. This difficulty does not arise if one reads אבוטנו from Isa 14:25. This verse speaks about the defeat of Assyrians who are otherwise associated with the Kittim (1QM I 2) whom 4Q285 references. Cf. Zimmermann 1998: 71–96 who notes the similarities between the *Book of War* and the Gog oracle in Ezekiel.

⁹⁶ Only יים can be read with certainty, but the reconstruction כת[יים, first proposed by Nitzan 1993: 87, is very probable. Cf. Zimmermann 1998: 88–9 who reads צהלים.

⁹⁷ Bockmuehl 1992: 164–5; Abegg 1994: 88.

executing the hostile king. While both options are grammatically possible and meaningful, the internal and external evidence has persuaded scholarship to accept the latter reading.⁹⁸ While the conclusion of the fragment, which mentions a priest in line 6, is too fragmentary to be reconstructed, it clearly depicts the sentencing and execution of a foreign ruler by the Prince and his acolytes.

In sum, the *Book of War* provides perhaps the most explicit example of the presence of antimessianic expectation in the DSS. The Prince of the Congregation is portrayed as a victorious military commander, as well as a descendant of David and the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies, and as such should be understood as a messianic actor. He also engages in direct conflict with the Kittim who become the Messiah's opponents. As a corporate eschatological actor, they represent a force comparable to Gog and Magog in the reception history of Ezekiel 38-39, since they both function as aggressive foreign nations attacking the Messiah. The *Book of War* thus mirrors the depictions of the Messiah and his enemies as engaged in warfare that are to be often found in other Second Temple Jewish and sometimes also early Christian literature.

3.5 11QMelchizedek (11Q13)

The last Qumran text to be discussed is 11Q13—an eschatological commentary⁹⁹ mentioning Melchizedek and hence often termed 11QMelchizedek. The text is highly fragmentary, consisting of fifteen scraps of parchment,¹⁰⁰ and most probably contained of three columns of which only the second is substantially preserved. The attempts to date

⁹⁸ Bockmuehl 1992: 165–6; Abegg 1994: 88–9; Collins 1995: 58–9; Zimmermann 1998: 86–7.

⁹⁹ For this general classification, see Woude 1965: 354; Yadin 1965: 152; Jonge, Woude 1966: 312; Fitzmyer 1967: 26; Osten-Sacken 1969: 207; Carmignac 1970: 360–2; Milik 1972: 112; Kobelski 1981: 3–4; Rainbow 1997: 187; Zimmermann 1998: 401; Xeravits 2003: 69. Earlier scholarship tended to see 11QMelch as a midrash (still used by Flowers 2016: 194), whereas the label of pesher has been dominant since it was first proposed by Carmignac.

¹⁰⁰ The count provided by Puech 1993: 522; accepted by Zimmermann 1998: 390; Xeravits 2003: 68.

11QMelch paleographically have rendered divergent results, but most of the estimations fall somewhere within the first century BCE.¹⁰¹

The document does not comment on subsequent parts of a single Biblical text, which is typically the case in other pesharim, but rather links passages from different books under the general heading of end-time liberation. This topic is introduced by the means of quotes from Lev 25:13; Deut 15:2 which contain financial regulations for the Jubilee year. These are interpreted eschatologically (II 4: פשרו לאח[רית הימים, “its interpretation [is] for the last days”) as referring to the tenth Jubilee during which those associated with Melchizedek¹⁰² (II 5: נחלת מלכי צדק, “the inheritance of Melchizedek”; II 8: ו[אנש]י [גורל מלכי] צדק, “and] the me[n] of the lot of Mel[chi]zedek”) receive the proclamation of liberty (II 4), atonement (II 8), and grace (II 9). II 10-11 introduces two quotations from the Psalms: Ps 82:1 and 7:8-9 which describe divine judgement that, as it is elucidated by a further citation from Ps 82:2, is directed against Belial and his evil companion spirits (II 12). At this point in the text, Melchizedek becomes an active protagonist as he visits God’s vengeance upon Belial (II 13), frees his captives (II 13, 24), and declares peace (II 15); his role is further illustrated by quotations from Isa 52:7 (II 15-16, 23); Dan 9:25 (II 18);¹⁰³ and Isa 61:2 (II 20).

As was the case with all previous DSS texts I have discussed, positioning 11QMelch within or beyond the antimessianic tradition requires firstly establishing

¹⁰¹ Milik 1972: 97 (75-50 BCE); Kobelski 1981: 3 (50-25 BCE); Puech 1987: 507-8 (first century BCE); Zimmerman 1998: 390 (first century BCE); Xeravits 2003: 68 (first century BCE); cf. Woude 1965: 356-7; Fitzmyer 1967: 25; Horton 1976: 73 (all first century CE).

¹⁰² This name appears as a compound of two words throughout 11QMelch, as well as in most of other Hebrew and Aramaic literature, and could therefore be possibly translated as a generic royal title. On its etymological background and possible translations, see Carmignac 1970: 368-9; Kobelski 1981: 55-6; Cockerill 1991: 305-12; Mason 2008: 188-90.

¹⁰³ This quote is fully lost to the lacuna, which was left unfilled by Woude 1965: 358; Jonge, Woude 1966: 302, but has been persuasively argued for by Fitzmyer 1967: 40 and since accepted by Carmignac 1970: 357; Milik 1972: 107; Kobelski 1981: 21; Flowers 2016: 197-202. Horton 1976: 68; Puech 1987: 499-500; Zimmermann 1998: 400; Xeravits 2003: 74 agree on the reconstruction דן[יאל] but are undecided about the precise passage that is being cited.

whether any of its protagonists can be understood as messianic. The document at hand, and specifically the figure of Melchizedek, have been long subject to scrutiny in this regard, but intratextual difficulties and the fragmentary state of the text prevented any consensus from being reached.

The first problem is the relationship between the titles אל and אלוהים. It is now commonly accepted the former throughout the text refers to God, as it is also the standard way to refer to God in the DSS in general.¹⁰⁴ This is made evident by the fact that the author of 11QMelch replaces the Tetragrammaton, present in the MT of Deut 15:2; Ps 7:9, with אל in II 4, 11 (cf. the plural construct אלי in II 14 to denote celestial beings). In view of the distinction between the two titles in the quote from Ps 82:1 in II 10, אלוהים must refer to another actor who is identifiable with Melchizedek in most of the occurrences in the text.¹⁰⁵ Thus, it is Melchizedek who stands in God's assembly in II 10 and who is proclaimed Zion's king in II 16, 23-24, based on Isaiah 52:7. The attribution of the name אלוהים to Melchizedek, though not in and of itself indicative of messianism, points to the figure's elevated status.

This conclusion is further confirmed by the fact that the author inserts Melchizedek into phrases otherwise associated with God. II 9 proclaims שנת הרצון למלכי, "the year of Melchizedek's favour", harking back to שנת־רצון ליהוה, "the year of God's favour" (Isa 61:2). Similarly, ומלכי צדק יקום נקם משפטי א[ל], "and Melchizedek will exact vengeance of G[od's] judgements" (II 13) echoes the same verse in Isaiah which later announces יום נקם לאלהינו, "the day of our God's vengeance".¹⁰⁶ It is also noteworthy

¹⁰⁴ Woude 1965: 367–8; Fitzmyer 1967: 37; Carmignac 1970: 366; Horton 1976: 76–7; Kobelski 1981: 59; Zimmermann 1998: 398–9; Mason 2008: 177–83.

¹⁰⁵ Woude 1965: 367–8; Jonge, Woude 1966: 304; Fitzmyer 1967: 37; Horton 1976: 75; Kobelski 1981: 59–62; Zimmermann 1998: 398; Xeravits 2003: 73–5; Maston 2008: 179–83. Cf. Carmignac 1970: 364–7 who rightly notes that the second use of אלוהים in II 10 (reproducing Ps 82:1b) must refer to an assembly of celestial beings and not to Melchizedek; his argument, however, that no distinction between the use of אל and אלוהים exists in 11QMelch is unsubstantiated.

¹⁰⁶ Kobelski 1981: 60; Puech 1987: 510–1; Zimmermann 1998: 403.

that within the phraseology of the DSS, גורל, “lot” (II 8) is linked only to God, Michael, or Belial.¹⁰⁷ Finally, the text appears to equivocate between the judicial actions of Melchizedek (II 10, quoting Ps 82:1b: *בְּקִרְבֵּי אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט*, “in the midst of deities will he judge”, with *אֱלֹהִים* as the subject) and those of God (II 11, quoting Ps 7:9: *אֵל יִדִּין עַמִּים*, “God will judge the nations”).¹⁰⁸ According to the author of 11Q13, Melchizedek is a heavenly being, elevated above other deities,¹⁰⁹ enjoying very close proximity to God,¹¹⁰ and enforcing his ordinances. Moreover, he is an agent benevolent to the section of humankind belonging to him, as he liberates them from the rule of Belial (II 13, 25) and their own transgressions (II 6).

In light of these characteristics it is in order to approach the second major problem posed by the text, i.e. the relationship between Melchizedek and *מְשִׁיחַ הָרוּחַ*, “the Anointed of the spirit”¹¹¹ (II 18). The latter appears within in an unfortunately mutilated line and is later identified with *הַמְבַּשֵּׁר*, “the messenger”, a term derived from Isa 52:7. This figure is supposedly foretold by Daniel (most probably Dan 9:25) and announces peace and salvation by saying *מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהִים*. Since the term *אֱלֹהִים*, including the suffixed form *אֱלֹהֵיךְ*, refers to Melchizedek, the messenger would therefore be proclaiming the rule of Melchizedek rather than of God, as it is presupposed in Isaiah. Therefore the Anointed One cannot be identified with the central protagonist of the text, but serves as his forerunner.¹¹² The precise identification of who the author had in mind while speaking

¹⁰⁷ Horton 1976: 78; Kobelski 1981: 60; Zimmermann 1998: 403.

¹⁰⁸ Horton 1976: 77; Puech 1987: 511.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Carmignac 1970: 366–7 who claims that in light of the help Melchizedek is said to receive from the deities in II 14 he must be judged an inferior being; this reading does not do justice to thrust of the citation of Ps 82:1 in II 10 which clearly envisages Melchizedek as superior.

¹¹⁰ See Milik 1972: 125 for an interesting claim that Melchizedek represents a hypostasis of God; cf. Maston 2008: 185–6. See also Manzi 1997: 94–6 who is definitely going too far in identifying one with the other.

¹¹¹ This reconstruction was first proposed by Yadin 1965: 152–3 and has been accepted ever since. Cf. Carmignac 1970: 357 who proposes *מְשִׁיחַ הָרוּחַ*, “the first anointed” which reads into the line the concept of a double Messiah, known from elsewhere in the DSS.

¹¹² Woude 1965: 367; Jonge, Woude 1966: 306–7; Horton 1976: 78; Kobelski 1981: 61–2; Zimmermann 1998: 410; Xeravits 2003: 74; Bock 2011: 73–6. Cf. tentatively Fitzmyer 1967: 40; Carmignac 1970: 369; Sacchi 1988: 208; Tantlevskij 2004: 23; Guglielmo 2011: 61–72. Rainbow 1997: 190; García Martínez

about the messenger is impossible due to the physical state of the text, but informed speculation can be entertained. Whilst this figure is often interpreted as prophetic (possibly under the influence of passages such as 1QM XI 7, discussed above),¹¹³ this assertion must be qualified by the statement in II 17: הַהָרִים... הַנְּבִיאִים, “the mountains... the prophets” which, though lacunose, seems to identify the mountains of Isa 52:7 with prophetic authorities.¹¹⁴ Hence, the messenger must occupy a position distinct from, although not necessarily unlike, that of the prophets. It can be conjectured that the Anointed of the spirit might have referred to one of the leaders within the Qumran community, possibly the Teacher of Righteousness (see e.g. 1QpHab VII 4-5).¹¹⁵

Due to the marked distinction between Melchizedek and the anointed messenger, the former cannot be treated as a messianic actor *sensu stricto*. However, just like in the case of Michael in 1QM,¹¹⁶ Melchizedek to some extent performs the role of the Messiah. Although he is a heavenly and not an anointed figure, he is depicted as fulfilling priestly, military, and redemptive tasks which echo what other messianic claimants are portrayed as doing across the literature of the Second Temple period.¹¹⁷ He clearly enjoys God’s favour, which is evidenced by the elevation above the other members of the divine council in II 10, and acts as a human benefactor. It would therefore be unduly restrictive not to perceive Melchizedek as a messianic agent in the broad sense, at the same time

2000: 78; Batsch 2007: 7; and, at greatest length, Flowers 2016 offer an interesting reading of II 18-19 as referring to two messengers: the anointed messenger and the messenger of good news. Neither of them, however, can be identified with Melchizedek.

¹¹³ Woude 1967: 367; Jonge, Woude 1966: 306–7; Zimmermann 1998: 410–1; Xeravits 2003: 74.

¹¹⁴ This understanding was first proposed by Carmignac 1970: 356 and has been, with small variations, accepted since.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Kobelski 1981: 61–2 who proposes the eschatological figures of 1QS IX 11 and, interestingly, 4QTest 5-8.

¹¹⁶ The identification of Melchizedek from 11QMelch with Michael, especially in view of the conjectural joint use of these names in 4QAmram^b fr. 2 3, is a standard scholarly view; see Woude 1965: 369–70; Jonge, Woude 1966: 305–6; Kobelski 1981: 71–4; Flowers 2016: 212; cf. the discussions in Fitzmyer 1967: 32; Horton 1976: 81–2; Zimmermann 1998: 405–6.

¹¹⁷ See Sacchi 1988: 208–9 whose justification for treating Melchizedek as a messianic figure, however, is underdeveloped.

remembering that he is accompanied by the literal anointed one, i.e. the messenger of II 18.

Having established the function and character of Melchizedek in 11Q13, the question of his opponents will now be treated. The text is helpfully explicit about the nature and impact of Belial who is first introduced through the pesher on Ps 82:2 (II 11). Belial and רוחי גורלו, “the spirits of his lot” are then accused of turning away from God’s commandments (II 12).¹¹⁸ Their confrontation with Melchizedek consists of him depriving them of the dominion over a section of humankind (II 13, 25). No actual combat or Belial’s demise is narrated in column II, perhaps due to its fragmentary state. That such a violent downfall takes place can be, however, inferred from the remnants of col. III of the text. III 7 says that בליעל באש [יתממנ], “they will consume Belial with fire”; III 8 records that בליעל ימרו, “(of?) Belial will rebel”.¹¹⁹

To recapitulate, Melchizedek in 11Q13 should be seen as a messianic agent *sensu lato* in light of the plethora of functions he fulfils. Belial and his helpers, who are directly conflicted with him, are therefore antimessianic. It is noteworthy that both figures, though opposed, display similarities—both belong to the divine council (II 10-12), both have subordinate beings at their disposal (Melchizedek: II 14; Belial: II 12, 13), and both at some point exercise dominion over humanity (Melchizedek: II 5, 13, 25; Belial: II 13, 25). In the dualistic scenario of 11QMelch, Melchizedek and Belial represent celestial beings of similar stature, yet markedly different moral characters. To some extent, therefore, the author of 11QMelch grounds his plot in mimetic rivalry between the protagonist and the antagonist. I have argued for the presence of this pattern of simultaneous similarity and contrast in 4QTest and, to a limited extent, in 1QM.

¹¹⁸ Such reading of this fragmentary line is argued for by Milik 1972: 105–6 and accepted since.

¹¹⁹ The versification is that of García Martínez, Tigchelaar 1997: 2.1208–9.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to ascertain the presence of antimessianic expectation in the DSS. All of the documents discussed above, save for 4Q246, do indeed envisage a messianic figure, variously construed, as having an opponent. Two texts, 1QM and 11QMelch, depict a celestial being who, while fulfilling its divine appointment and helping humanity, is faced by Belial's forces, thus engaging in a cosmic battle. Fragments of 4Q285, on the other hand, portray the militaristic Prince of the Congregation, clearly a Davidic figure, as waging war against the Kittim and triumphing over their leader. Finally, 4QTest presents a very complex picture. It does not operate with so much as messianic figures but rather messianic archetypes of whom the accursed one of Belial and his son(s) are mimetic rivals.

Several important points arise from these considerations. Firstly—and perhaps most importantly—the evidence of the DSS firmly points to the conclusion that antimessianic expectation was present in the Jewish sources of the Second Temple period. The presence of this belief in the Qumran documents, which could not have been influenced by later Christian interpolation (as was the case e.g. with the OT Pseudepigrapha to be discussed in CHAPTER V), substantiates one of my core claims that the Antimessiah is indeed known to non-Christian Jews of that era.

Secondly, whilst CHAPTER II has demonstrated how the DSS engages the core antimessianic texts of the OT, this chapter evidenced innovativeness with which the Qumran community envisaged the Antimessiah, introducing new themes and ideas. It is visible that Qumran antimessianism was not simply a point of exegetical interest but also a lively part of the community's eschatology. As such, the DSS manifest both continuity and change within the antimessianic tradition.

Thirdly, the DSS propose several ideas about the Messiah's enemy. Those range from an antagonist in a celestial battle (1QM and 11QMelch), through an earthly military leader (4Q285, fr. 4 and 7), to a sort of messianic usurper and imitator (4QTest). These models are related, but in the end represent an irreducible plurality. Consequently, no single model of the Qumran antimessianism can be distilled without doing injustice to particular texts. This conclusion constitutes an important lesson for studying the antimessianic expectation in other literary corpora. While seeking common themes and motifs in various writings is justified, those should not be readily transformed into overarching frameworks.

Fourthly, the results of my discussion of 4Q246 vindicate Horbury's definition of the Antichrist I have advanced in CHAPTER I. The "Son of God" of the *Apocryphon of Daniel* should most probably be understood as a positive actor due to the structure and rhetoric of the text. The same conclusion arises if one searches the text for actual antimessianic opposition which is the core of Horbury's definition. It is clear that "the Son of God" is not an embattled figure and no antagonists emerge to confront him. This controverted case shows that definition employed throughout this thesis is a sound methodological tool in the study of ancient antimessianism.

Fifthly and finally, 4QTest is the first text where the motif of mimesis and rivalry between the messianic archetypes and their opponents gains prominence. The evil group of the fourth paragraph is in some details similar to, and in others contrasted with, the prophet, king, and priest earlier in the document. This pattern is strengthened by the constellation of Biblical allusions that underpin the entire text and shed new light on the accursed one and his companion(s). The literary pattern of simultaneous similarity and contrast between antagonists—which I claim to be one of the cornerstones of the antimessianic tradition—will be shown to be a prominent feature in later Christian

literature. The pre-Christian Jewish origin of the antimessianic mimetic rivalry and its later presence in Christian apocalypticism show together that the Antichrist tradition permeates both ancient Judaism and Christianity.

CHAPTER IV

The New Testament

This chapter of the thesis will be devoted to the depictions of antimessianic opponents in the writings of the New Testament. Much of the ancient Christian Antichrist speculation comes from outside of the NT and will be discussed later on. It is nevertheless reasonable to devote a separate chapter to the writings that would later be included in the NT canon. As such, they received incomparably more attention from later Church interpreters interested in the antimessianic speculation than any pseudepigraphic or apocryphal text. Much of the Patristic engagement with the Antichrist was either propelled by or at least done in constant reference to texts such as 2 Thessalonians and 1-2 John. Based on their cultural prominence, the canonical NT writings deserve special attention.

This chapter will provide a sustained engagement with the earliest Christian texts relating to the Antichrist tradition: Jesus' eschatological discourse in the Synoptic Gospels; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 1-2 John; and Revelation.¹ Similarly to my investigation of the DSS in the previous chapter, I will focus primarily on the literary and ideological aspects of the texts to be discussed. Whilst I will discuss the possible historical occasions for each of them, their eschatology cannot be collapsed into description of any one political event in the first century CE. I will therefore eschew strong opinions on exact dating when the texts do not allow for such certainty.

¹ For the discussion of the antimessianic reception of the OT in the NT see above, pp. 59–62 on Genesis 3 in Rom 16:20; Luke 10:19; and Revelation 12, pp. 91–2 on Isa 11:4b in 2 Thess 2:8 and Revelation, p. 101 on Ezekiel 38-39 in Rev 20:8, p. 109 on Psalm 2 in Acts 4:25-25, and pp. 118–9 on Daniel in the Synoptic Apocalypse, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation.

4.1 Synoptic Gospels

I will first approach the material from the Synoptic Gospels, primarily from Jesus' apocalyptic discourse (Mark 13 and par.). The first three canonical Gospels did not garner as much attention in the history of the Antichrist research as other NT or even non-canonical Jewish and Christian texts. However, Jesus' sayings were seen as a crucial source of the Antichrist doctrine already by Origen, *Cels.* 6.45 and figure prominently in the relevant modern scholarship.²

Traces of opposition to and false imitation of Jesus are to be found in all of the Synoptic end-time discourses with varying frequency. They can be tabularised as follows:

Matt 24:5 πολλοὶ γὰρ ἐλεύσονται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου λέγοντες· ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ χριστός, καὶ πολλοὺς πλανήσουσιν. “For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah.’ And many will be deceived.”	Mark 13:6 πολλοὶ ἐλεύσονται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου λέγοντες ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι, καὶ πολλοὺς πλανήσουσιν. “For many will come in my name, saying ‘It is I.’ And many will be deceived.”	Luke 21:8 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· βλέπετε μὴ πλανηθῆτε· πολλοὶ γὰρ ἐλεύσονται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου λέγοντες· ἐγὼ εἰμι, καὶ ὁ καιρὸς ἤγγικεν. μὴ πορευθῆτε ὀπίσω αὐτῶν. But he said, “See that you not be deceived; for many will come in my name and say, ‘It is I’ and ‘The time has drawn near.’ Do not follow them.”
Matt 24:11 καὶ πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφῆται ἐγερθήσονται καὶ πλανήσουσιν πολλούς... “And many false prophets will arise and deceive many...”		
Matt 24:24 ...ἐγερθήσονται γὰρ ψευδόχριστοι καὶ ψευδοπροφῆται καὶ δώσουσιν σημεῖα μεγάλα καὶ τέρατα ὥστε πλανῆσαι, εἰ δυνατόν, καὶ τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς.	Mark 13:22 ...ἐγερθήσονται γὰρ ψευδόχριστοι καὶ ψευδοπροφῆται καὶ δώσουσιν σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα πρὸς τὸ ἀποπλανᾶν, εἰ δυνατόν, τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς.	

² Ernst 1967: 1–24; Jenks 1991: 199–207; McGinn 1994: 38–41; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 23–62.

“...for many false prophets and false messiahs will arise and produce great signs and wonders in order to deceive— if they can—even the elect.”	“...for many false prophets and false messiahs will arise and produce great signs and wonders to lead—if they can— even the elect astray.”
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Both Mark and Matthew, unlike Luke, use the terms ψευδόχριστοι καὶ ψευδοπροφήται, “false messiahs and false prophets”. Two questions related to this usage arise. Firstly, what do these designations mean and what traditions do they connote? Secondly, do the evangelists use them as synonyms? As for the first problem, ψευδόχριστος is, rather unsurprisingly, unattested in earlier Greek literature and is most probably the evangelists’ own coinage. This is not the case with ψευδοπροφήτης which appears already ten times in the LXX (Jer 6:13; 33:7, 8, 11, 16; 34:9; 35:1; 36:1, 8; Zech 12:2), always interpreting נביא.³ As noted by Reiling, the word might have been created *per analogiam* to the classical ψευδόμαντις which denotes a seer whose visions are false.⁴ This origin might explain why ψευδοπροφήτης was used in Jer 34:9; 36:8; Zech 12:2 (see also Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 4.8) which criticise divination.⁵ Jer 35:1, on the other hand, applies ψευδοπροφήτης to Jeremiah’s prophetic rival, Hananiah.⁶ Very similar sense of conflict is easy to detect in Mark 13//Matthew 24 where both Jesus and the false messiahs and prophets claim divine authorisation. Stepping beyond the lexical sphere, false prophecy is a concern throughout the OT (see e.g. Ezekiel 13). Deut 13:2-6 LXX, which warns against a prophet performing signs and wonders, has been recognised as the conceptual background to Matt 24:24//Mark 13:22.⁷

³ Reiling 1971: 154.

⁴ Ibid. 148.

⁵ Ibid. 150–1.

⁶ Ibid. 152–3; Reiling notes here that while the LXX is clear in identifying Hananiah as the imposter among the two, the MT of Jeremiah 28 impartially calls both him and Jeremiah נביא.

⁷ Beasley-Murray 1957: 83–4; Meeks 1967: 47–50; Yarbrow Collins 2007: 613. Evans 2001: 323 notes that *T. Neof.* of Deut 13:2 reads נביא שקר, “a lying prophet”.

What regards the supposed synonymity of ψευδόχριστος with ψευδοπροφήτης, they do not share a meaning any more than χριστός and προφήτης do. In Matthew and Mark, however, there is little to distinguish the two groups. Matt 24:24//Mark 13:22 speak about them both arising and practicing deception, something that in Matt 24:5 is attributed only to those who say ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ χριστός and so are identifiable with the false messiahs. The evangelists do not imply any actual semantic distinction in their usage of ψευδόχριστος and ψευδοπροφήτης. Interestingly, Jesus, who clearly is the Messiah for both Mark and Matthew (Matt 16:16; Mark 8:29), exercises prophetic authority throughout the apocalyptic discourse, as he foretells the future and announces God's will. In this particular context, therefore, the functions of χριστός and προφήτης go hand in hand, and so do ψευδόχριστος and ψευδοπροφήτης.

The dominant explanation for the Synoptic warning against false messiahs and prophets is the proliferation of the messianic and prophetic claimants throughout the first century CE and especially towards the year 70 CE which is attested by Flavius Josephus.⁸ There are important similarities between what Josephus tells about those claimants and how the false messiahs and prophets are characterised in the Gospels. Mark and Matthew pair false prophets with false messiahs whereas Josephus sees false prophets as dependent on tyrannical rulers (*Bell.* 6.5.2 §286). He describes an Egyptian prophet (*Bell.* 2.13.5 §261) and the man, at whose call people gathered in a portico of the besieged Temple and later died in flames (*Bell.* 6.5.2 §285), as ψευδοπροφήτης. In the latter case, the call involved a promise of τὰ σημεῖα τῆς σωτηρίας, “the signs of salvation” to come from God. This is not far removed from σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα to be performed by the impostors according to Mark and Matthew. The motif of being led astray by the false messiahs and prophets, present in the Gospels, is also known to Josephus. Theudas, claiming himself

⁸ Evans 2001: 306, 323; Yarbrough Collins 2007: 604–5, 612–4; Stein 2008: 598, 607.

to be a prophet, led people to the Jordan in an unsuccessful attempt to part its waters (*Ant.* 20.5.1 §97; see Acts 5:36), whereas certain *πλάνοι ... ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἀπατεῶνες*, “deceitful ... and cheating people” headed with a crowd to the desert, awaiting there *σημεῖα ἐλευθερίας*, “signs of freedom” (*Bell.* 2.13.4 §259; see Acts 21:38). Simon, son of Gorias, too, enjoyed sizable following during the war due to his messianic claims (*Bell.* 4.9.4 §510). It seems fully justified, therefore, to conclude that the warning in Matt 24:23-24//Mark 13:21-22 was caused by the popularity of messianic and prophetic usurpers towards 70 CE.⁹

The chief concern of all these passages is the danger that the eschatological future will be replete with malicious actors willing to claim status and power rightly associated only with Jesus.¹⁰ All three evangelists depict these actors as using the self-referential formula *ἐγὼ εἰμι* which, though characteristic of the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel, is used by the Synoptic Jesus, too (see Matt 14:27; Mark 14:60; Luke 24:39).¹¹ They might also hark back to the OT divine self-revelations (Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10; 52:6; see also Exod 3:14).¹² According to Matt 24:24//Mark 13:22 they perform “great signs and wonders” (see *σημεῖον ἢ τέρας*, “sign or wonder” in Deut 13:2 LXX) which deceptively mirror Jesus’ miracles throughout his ministry. On the other hand, the second sentence that Luke puts into the mouth of the messianic pretenders: “The time has drawn near”, echoes the eschatological immediacy of Jesus’ own pronouncements, e.g. Luke 10:9-11; 21:20. The false messiahs and prophets want to deceive people and make them their followers and they are able to do this because they imitate Jesus’ activity.

⁹ This is to some extent the opinion of ancient interpreters, too. See Origen, *Comm. ser. Matt.* 33 on Matt 24:4-5; John Chrysostom, *Hom. Matt.* 75.4 on Matt 24:7 (interestingly, Chrysostom mentions Josephus as a source for *Hom. Matt.* 75-76); *Hom. John* 14 on John 10:1, 5, 8.

¹⁰ Beasley-Murray 1957: 31.

¹¹ Ernst 1967: 6; Lietaert Peerbolte 1997: 31.

¹² Hartman 1966: 159–62 who sees the entirety of Mark 13 as a midrash on Daniel 7-12 and the reference to the pretenders’ exalted claims as echoing Dan 11:36.

This point is noteworthy. Neither the passages discussed, nor the eschatological discourse in general envisage a direct cosmic conflict. Consequently, the messianic pretenders of the Synoptic Apocalypse are not Christ's opponents in the sense that they violently confront him. There can be no doubt, however, that the "false messiahs and false prophets" are usurping Jesus' unique status and directly contravene his intentions by gathering their own followers.¹³ This pattern of similarity as a vehicle for usurpation and conflict is similar to the one present in 4QTestimonia and will come up more frequently in the antimessianic speculation of the rest of the NT, the Pseudepigrapha, and the Church Fathers in the chapters to follow.

In conclusion, the set of related logia in the Synoptic Apocalypse concerning the false Messiahs and prophets is clearly relevant for the Antichrist tradition. The messianic and prophetic pretenders openly contravene divine purpose revealed by Jesus in his speech and try to usurp his status and followers through imitating him. The use of the prefix *ψευδο-* is crucial, as it construes the usurpers not as violent opponents of Christ, but much more as his foils. This statement does nothing to deemphasise the conflict between Christ and the pretenders who can be rightly understood as antimessianic. The mimetic rivalry emerging between them and Christ substantiates my claim about the centrality of this motif to the ancient visions of the end-time messianic conflict. The Synoptics, and Mark and Matthew especially, enrich the Antichrist tradition through developing the idea of antagonistic similarity and imitation on the part of the eschatological opponents.

4.2 2 Thessalonians

2 Thess 2:3-12 is perhaps *the* Antichrist text in the whole of the NT. It has exercised a strong grip over the imaginations of later interpreters and exegetes, from Justin and

¹³ Jenks 1991: 202.

Irenaeus onwards.¹⁴ It is also universally noted in the scholarship on eschatological opposition¹⁵ and discussed in the commentaries on the letter, although with varying conclusions.¹⁶ The age-old consensus, that 2 Thess 2:3-12 was an important step in the development of the Antichrist tradition, can be striking, as the name itself is not used in the document. It will be shown, however, that the way ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας is depicted places him firmly within the Antichrist tradition.

I will firstly try to reconstruct the line of thought of the passage through a close reading. I will then move on to the question of the possible historical context of the text. Discussion of its occasion will not, however, make it necessary for me to adjudicate the question of the authorship of 2 Thessalonians or its relation to 1 Thessalonians.¹⁷ An answer on neither of these questions would significantly further my argument about the antimessianic tradition. 2 Thessalonians can be fruitfully understood as a first-century CE source of this tradition. Its value for my study would hold regardless of whether it had been written by Paul, whose other writings provide little antimessianic speculation, or not in which case it would be one of the many pseudonymous texts I discuss in this thesis. It suffices to assume that 2 Thessalonians 2 arrived at its present form between the 40s and 90s of the first century CE.

The overall framework of the eschatological section is a reaction to some form of confusion in the community about Christ's Second Coming (2:1-2). Paul implores them not to be deceived¹⁸ and argues that it can only take place after a succession of eschatological events, i.e. ἡ ἀποστασία, "the apostasy", and then the revelation of ὁ

¹⁴ Ernst 1967: 69–79; Trilling 1979: 251–71; Hughes 2005; Thiselton 2011: 211–31.

¹⁵ Ernst 1967: 24–68; Jenks 1991: 43–4, 206–27; McGinn 1994: 41–5; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 63–95.

¹⁶ Best 1972: 273–310; Bruce 1982: 159–88; Wanamaker 1990: 242–64; Malherbe 2000: 413–34.

¹⁷ On the question of authorship, see Malherbe 2000: 349–75; Röcker 2009: 223–9. On the temporal ordering of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, see Malherbe 2000: 361–4; Metzger 2005: 73–7.

¹⁸ As noted by Metzger 2005: 110 and Röcker 2009: 370, the use of ἐξαπατάω here might be related to the uses of this verb in reference to the temptation of Eve elsewhere in the Pauline corpus (2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:14).

ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας, “the Man of Lawlessness, the Son of Destruction” (vv. 3-4).¹⁹ Apostasy is most plausibly interpreted in religious terms, as a departure of the faithful from the correct beliefs and worship.²⁰ The genitival constructions describing the figure being revealed are probably Semitic in meaning, i.e. with the *nomen rectum* (τῆς ἀνομίας, τῆς ἀπωλείας) indicating the quality of the *nomen regens* (ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὁ υἱὸς). Hence, the figure can be understood as “the lawless man” and “the one to be destroyed”.²¹

He is characterised in v. 4 as ὁ ἀντικείμενος καὶ ὑπεραιρόμενος ἐπὶ πάντα λεγόμενον θεὸν ἢ σέβασμα, ὥστε αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καθίσαι ἀποδεικνύοντα ἑαυτὸν ὅτι ἐστὶν θεός, “the one who opposes and exalts himself over everything, that is called god or worthy of reverence, so that he seats himself in God’s Temple, presenting himself to be God”. These features are crucial to my investigation. The author depicts the Man of Lawlessness as opposing God and parading himself as divine, most notably by taking seat in the Temple which is certainly to be identified with the Temple of Jerusalem.²² Self-elevation above God is criticised throughout the OT (Gen 3:5; Isa 14:13-14; Ezek 28:2), but here an echo of Dan 11:36b LXX/θ’ comes to the fore: καὶ μεγαλυνθήσεται ἐπὶ πάντα θεὸν, “and he will be magnified above every god”.²³

Paul then refers to the Thessalonians’ knowledge of his own teaching (v. 5) and continues with an utterly perplexing passage which ought to be quoted *in extenso*: ⁶καὶ

¹⁹ Commentators recognise that v. 3 contains only a protasis, beginning with ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ ἔλθῃ, but lacks an explicit apodosis. I agree with Wanamaker 1990: 243–4; Malherbe 2000: 418; Metzger 2005: 100–11 in assuming that the missing clause amounts to something along the lines of “the day of the Lord will come no sooner than...”.

²⁰ Wanamaker 1990: 244; Malherbe 2000: 418; Metzger 2005: 111; Röcker 2009: 373–9.

²¹ Wanamaker 1990: 245; Malherbe 2000: 419; Röcker 2009: 380–7. See ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας in reference to Judas in John 17:12 with most probably the same meaning.

²² Pace Wanamaker 1990: 246–7; Malherbe 2000: 420–1; Röcker 2009: 402. Cf. Metzger 2005: 101 who thinks that ναός can refer to everything sacred, but such a universalising reading would be semantically unusual. Cf. also Giblin 1967: 76–80 who understands the reference as being to the Christian church, in light of 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21; the author’s concern here is not, however, with the lawless one dominating the church but only those “who are perishing” (2:10).

²³ Ernst 1967: 37; Trilling 1980: 87; Röcker 2009: 389.

νῦν τὸ κατέχον οἴδατε εἰς τὸ ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ καιρῷ. ⁷τὸ γὰρ μυστήριον ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται τῆς ἀνομίας· μόνον ὁ κατέχων ἄρτι ἕως ἐκ μέσου γένηται. Before offering a translation of this passage, several grammatical difficulties have to be resolved. In v. 6, the meaning of the neuter τὸ κατέχον, probably related to the masculine ὁ κατέχων that follows, is difficult to grasp and might be unknowable to anyone outside of the original context of the letter, modern critical scholars included. The verb κατέχω can be both transitive, meaning “to possess”, “to hold fast to”, “to control”, “to withhold”, as well as intransitive, in the sense of “to rule”, “to prevail”. Most of translations and commentators of 2 Thessalonians decide to render τὸ κατέχον as transitive, meaning “restraint” or the like. The problem with taking this path is that the neuter participle lacks a direct object which leaves unanswered the question of what is being restrained. The dominant response to that counterclaim is to construe the articular infinitive εἰς τὸ ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτὸν as an object which, if at all meaningful, would make revelation of the Man of Lawlessness the object of restraint.²⁴ The clause would thus be a purpose clause governed by the preceding neuter participle, meaning: “Now you know the restraint so that he is revealed at his own proper time”. This solution is problematic since nowhere in the Greek literature does κατέχω or its cognates followed by εἰς mean anything like purposeful restraint.

Wanamaker proposed reading τὸ κατέχον as intransitive which would eliminate the need for a direct object.²⁵ This reading also picks up the articular infinitive more easily. Consequently, the translation would be: “Now you know what prevails so that he is revealed at his own proper time”. Under this interpretation, the purpose of the

²⁴ I here assume, agreeing with Best 1972: 291–2; Wanamaker 1990: 254; Malherbe 2000: 422; Metzger 2005: 103, *contra* apparently Röcker 2009: 417, that αὐτὸν in 2:6b refers back to ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας in 2:3, its closest masculine antecedent.

²⁵ Wanamaker 1990: 262.

dominance—no matter to whom it actually belongs—is to withhold the revelation of the Man of Lawlessness until the opportune moment. This solution is preferable.

However, the question of the masculine participle ὁ κατέχων a verse later remains. The dominant way of construing its relationship with τὸ κατέχον, regardless of specific identifications, is to see the latter as a general, abstract force and the former as its concrete, individual instantiation.²⁶ There is no apparent reason to reject this line of thought, though the underlying rationale for the change from neuter to masculine participle is obscure. V. 7 can therefore be translated: “For the mystery of lawlessness has already been activated,²⁷ only until²⁸ the one who now prevails is removed²⁹”. If read this way, the verse follows from the previous one. While in 2:6 the revelation of the Man of Lawlessness is causally related to that who/which prevails, 2:7 shows that this revelation, i.e. the mystery of lawlessness, can continue only as long as that who/which prevails is present.

Moving on to the reminder of the passage, v. 8 foretells the slaying of the Man of Lawlessness by Jesus,³⁰ echoing Isa 11:4b LXX, as I have argued above.³¹ V. 9 relates the appearance of the Man of Lawlessness to the working of Satan and to the deceptive signs and wonders (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα; see Deut 13:2 LXX; Mark 13:22). The last three verses of the passage denounce those, who follow the Man of Lawlessness, as ἀπολλυμένοις, “those who are perishing” (v. 10) who lack the love of and confidence in truth.

²⁶ Metzger 2005: 131.

²⁷ ἐνεργεῖται, which I here translate as “has been activated”, can be either passive or middle. I agree with Wanamaker 1990: 255 that the first option is preferable due to 2:9 where the coming of the lawless one is κατ’ ἐνέργειαν τοῦ σατανᾶ, “according to the power of Satan”; admittedly the voice of the verb makes little actual difference to the tone of the sentence.

²⁸ The Greek of v. 7b is elliptical. I agree with Best 1972: 294; Wanamaker 1990: 256; Malherbe 2000: 423 that ἕως should be treated as a postpositive particle rather than a beginning of another clause.

²⁹ The phrase ἐκ μέσου γένηται, though rare, is now commonly interpreted to mean removal; see e.g. Röcker 2009: 473–6.

³⁰ I follow NA²⁸ and the majority of commentators in taking ὁ κύριος in v. 8 as referring to Jesus. Although the textual variant lacking the name Ἰησοῦς might be understood to be the *lectio difficilior*, not only is the inclusion strongly supported textually, but also ὁ κύριος in 2 Thessalonians usually refers clearly to Jesus, even when not followed by the name itself (see 2:13).

³¹ See above, p. 91. See also Giblin 1967: 89–95; Röcker 2009: 489–97.

Interestingly, v. 11 states that it is actually God who sends people ἐνέργειαν πλάνης, “the working of deceit”, thus in a sense mirroring Satan’s activity in v. 9 where ἐνέργεια is also mentioned.

Having offered a reading of 2 Thess 2:3-12, I would like to point to certain crucial features of the eschatological opposition as portrayed in the passage. The author distinguishes between the Man of Lawlessness and Satan, as the former appears to be the tool in the hands of the latter.³² It is the Man of Lawlessness, whose emergence is enabled by that who/which prevails, and who is slain by Jesus, and not Satan.

The confrontation described in the passage must be understood as antimessianic, as the Man of Lawlessness is killed by Jesus’ breath in v. 8.³³ A somewhat contrary suggestion was made by Malherbe who argues that the Man of Lawlessness is “more precisely, anti-god or anti-God.”³⁴ Lietaert Peerbolte goes further and argues that calling the Man of Lawlessness the Antichrist is “evidently wrong”,³⁵ whereas Jenks argues that “2 Thessalonians 2 neither taught nor alluded to a tradition about an Antichrist figure.”³⁶ These statements miss the point of the passage. V. 4 does certainly imply that the antagonist claimed the divine status for himself and blasphemed against God. 2:8, however, with its allusion to Isa 11:4b, constitutes the pivot at which Jesus becomes the defender of God’s sole claim to divinity. The nature of conflict is thus twofold. The Man of Lawlessness attacks God but is annihilated by Jesus and, as a messianic opponent, might be judged to be an Antichrist-type figure. There might be a hidden implication here, that a claim of the Man of Lawlessness to divine status is directed both at God and at Jesus, which would contribute to the Christology of the letter.

³² Ernst 1967: 46–8 is quite right to state that the lawless one and Satan are closely connected and share in certain features, but this similarity cannot be taken to mean that these two become fully conflated.

³³ Johnson 2014: 126.

³⁴ Malherbe 2000: 431; see also Ernst 1967: 35–40.

³⁵ Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 86.

³⁶ Jenks 1991: 44.

Paul makes deceitful imitation the most important characteristic of the Man of Lawlessness.³⁷ 2:4 states that he elevates himself above anything divine and worthy of reverence and assumes God's rightful place in the Temple, thus claiming to be a god himself. His coming in v. 9, which mimics the Parousia of Christ spoken of in v. 1, is accompanied by satanic "power, signs, and false wonders". They are meant to imitate the earthly activity of Jesus and thus to delude those who "hate the truth and revel in unrighteousness" (v. 12). The Man of Lawlessness opposes God and Christ primarily through being their mimetic rival, i.e. imitating them and thus claiming their status for himself. The notion of violent conflict, on the other hand, is exhausted by the allusion to Isa 11:4 in 2:8.

There are two outstanding questions that need to be mentioned in the conclusion of my discussion, namely the historical occasion of the passage and of the whole letter, and the identity of τὸ κατέχον/ὁ κατέχων.

The reference to the sacrilegious session in the Temple in 2 Thess 2:4 incited speculation about the historical figure the Man of Lawlessness might represent.³⁸ The first is of course Antiochus IV Epiphanes who is associated with the desolating sacrilege set up in the Temple, as noted in both Daniel and 1 Maccabees. The second one is Pompey the Great who, having captured Jerusalem in 63 BCE, entered the Holy of Holies (Josephus, *Bell.* 1.7.6 §152; *Ant.* 14.4.4 §72; see also Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.9). Thirdly, Gaius Caligula intended to have his statue erected in the Jerusalem Temple (see Philo, *Legat.* 203-346; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.8.2-8 §§261-301). Finally, some have posited that either Nero, whose post-mortem return from the East was long dreaded by both Jews and Christians, or the events of 70 CE are in view (see *Sib. Or.* 5.137-141, 361-396). This last possibility cannot be discounted on the grounds that the author of the epistle (who would have to be

³⁷ Ibid. 219–22; Johnson 2014.

³⁸ See a full discussion in Röcker 2009: 390–9.

pseudonymous, as Paul is commonly thought to have been martyred at some point in the 60s CE) would not speak about the Temple after its destruction. As evidenced by e.g. Matthew, Luke, and Hebrews, which are assumed to be post-70 documents, the absence of the Temple did not prevent their authors from speaking about it as still in operation.

Altogether, the letter itself does not offer any clear clues as to the memory of which crisis it tries evoke. Trying to tie 2 Thessalonians to one of these events cannot leave the realm of speculation and is perhaps altogether mistaken. The author might be referring to a continued historical and cultural sense of the Temple being imperilled by political developments including some or even all of the events above, without directly echoing any single one. This strategy allows him to expect yet another crisis in the future which would be similar, yet far more serious than the previous ones.³⁹ On the other hand, it prevents modern scholarship from pinpointing the time of composition of the letter which, however, as I have stated at the beginning of this section, is not required by my argument.

The question of the identity of τὸ κατέχον/ὁ κατέχων produced an enormous amount of literature across the centuries which even stepped out of the realm of Biblical exegesis, as evidenced by Tertullian's understanding of this term in reference to the Roman Empire (*Res.* 24.18) and Carl Schmitt's application of the term in political philosophy.⁴⁰ No full or even partial account of it can be given here.⁴¹ Few comments are in order, though. Firstly, the reference to τὸ κατέχον/ὁ κατέχων in 2:6-7 is deprived of any substantial detail or explanation. The entire passage repeatedly calls upon the audience's recollections of the previously received teaching (2:5, 15), so these names, their combination, and their referents would have been familiar to the hearers. Therefore,

³⁹ Ibid. 399; see also Trilling 1980: 87; Metzger 2005: 115.

⁴⁰ See especially Schmitt 2003: 59–60 and a recent discussion in Cacciari 2016: 145–55.

⁴¹ See Metzger 2005: 15–48; Röcker 2009: 422–73.

modern scholarship will probably do best by admitting its unsurmountable ignorance in that matter, as was done already by Augustine in *Civ.* 20.19.2.⁴² Secondly, the one which/who prevails is a force associated with evil. In 2:6 its/his rule prepares the coming of the Man of Lawlessness at the right time, while in 2:7 the two are stated to be dependent on each other, with one lasting only until the other one is present. τὸ κατέχον/ὁ κατέχων is therefore a negative figure which, though not actively persecuting the faithful or opposing God or Christ, enables such activity on the part of the Man of Lawlessness and Satan.⁴³ Thirdly, though a negative character, the one which/who prevails is not directly conflicted with God or Christ, as the mention of its/his removal in 2:7 lacks an indication of an agent. Therefore, it/he cannot be understood as antimessianic. Importantly, τὸ κατέχον/ὁ κατέχων functions within divinely ordained timespan and thus downplays the sense of confrontation between it/him and God.

In keeping with much of the reception history of the passage but against some recent readings, 2 Thess 2:3-12 falls within the boundaries of ancient antimessianic discourse and contributes to it significantly. In spite of several issues remaining unresolved, or even unresolvable, this passage presents one of the earliest (possibly the earliest) Christian retellings of the violent end-time messianic conflict. Furthermore, it portrays the Man of Lawlessness as trying to achieve divinity and pursuing deceitful imitation of God and Christ. This feature links 2 Thessalonians to the Danielic image of the little horn, as well as texts such as 4Q175 and the Synoptic Apocalypse. At the same time, this figure also plays the role of a false teacher, leading people astray and ultimately into destruction, as was also the case with false Christs in Mark and Matthew. The eschatological scenario of 2 Thessalonians 2 is in close contact with other antimessianic

⁴² This is, of course, under the assumption that the epistle is meant to convey or evoke such knowledge. Cf. Liettaert Peerbolte 1996: 83–4 who argues that the author of the letter himself did not know “what exactly was restraining the eschatological opponent from being revealed”. This claim is interesting but unprovable.

⁴³ Metzger 2005: 130–1; cf. Röcker 2009: 468–73.

texts of that period and represent an interesting combination of what I claim to be the two central motifs of the Antichrist tradition, namely violent conflict and mimetic rivalry.

4.3 The Johannine Epistles

The Johannine Letters constitute a crucial point in the history of the Antichrist tradition, as they are the first to use the word “Antichrist”. As such, they have incited much debate in the recent scholarship on the Antichrist which has been concerned with pinpointing the moment this tradition emerged.⁴⁴ In this section, I will analyse the relevant passages of the Epistles. Attention will also be given to the differences between them and other antimessianic texts already discussed.

The mutual relationship between the three letters attributed to John, their date, and their link to the Fourth Gospel have received different scholarly assessments.⁴⁵ Whereas it seems reasonable to date the three letters sometime in the last two decades of the first century CE,⁴⁶ the briefness of 2-3 John makes it difficult to establish whether all three share the same author.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it is justified to investigate the references to the Antichrist in 1-2 John together, as he is spoken of in sufficiently similar terms in both documents. I will note peculiar similarities between the Antichrist of the Epistles and the antagonists in the Fourth Gospel, but this observation does not commit me to the claim of joint authorship. I will continue referring to the author(s) of the letters as “John” for simplicity.

The Antichrist makes five appearances in the letters of John: in 1 John 2:18 (twice, once in singular and once in plural), 22; 4:3; 2 John 7. The first discussion of the figure appears in 1 John 2:18-25. John claims that his and his community’s times are ἐσχάτη

⁴⁴ Jenks 1991: 328–47; McGinn 1994: 54–6; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 96–113.

⁴⁵ For a survey of the recent studies on the connection between the Fourth Gospel and 1 John, see Culpepper 2014.

⁴⁶ Smalley 2007: xxix–xxx.

⁴⁷ Brown 1982: 14–19.

ῥα, “the final hour” as it can be recognised from the presence of many Antichrists, who will be followed by the Antichrist. The former purportedly come from the community, but are not of it (v. 19). After admonishing the audience (vv. 20-21), John goes on to offer a way of knowing who the Antichrist might be: Τίς ἐστὶν ὁ ψεύστης εἰ μὴ ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός; οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀντίχριστος, ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν, “who is the liar if not the one denying that Jesus is the Messiah? This one is the Antichrist—the one denying the Father and the Son” (v. 22). According to the author, the rejection of the Son has left the liar fatherless (v. 23), unlike the orthodox community which continues to enjoy communion with God and Jesus.

The Antichrist is referred to twice more, in 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7. The former is part of the warning, beginning in 4:1, against ungodly spirits whose emergence is associated with false prophets. V. 3 argues that all spirits denying Jesus do not come from God but rather belong to the Antichrist ὁ ἀκηκόατε ὅτι ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἐστὶν ἤδη, “who you have heard is coming, and is now already in the world” (4:3b). 2 John 7 follows a similar line, arguing that πολλοὶ πλάνοι, “many deceivers”, denying Christ’s incarnation, are in the world. V. 7b implies that they together constitute a corporate being, i.e. the deceiver and the Antichrist.⁴⁸

The picture of the Antichrist painted by the Johannine Epistles is unique in many respects. The most important way, in which 1-2 John depart from the earlier antimessianic traditions, is that they overtly posit a plurality of the Antichrists, but speak about a singular Antichrist, too.⁴⁹ The relationship between the Antichrist and the Antichrists has long perplexed the commentators. In 1 John 2:18, Antichrists are already present, whereas the Antichrist is yet to come. The discussion that follows from there raises the question,

⁴⁸ Brown 1982: 670; Smalley 2007: 317.

⁴⁹ Ernst 1967: 174 is right to notice the pluralisation of the Antichrist, but he does not mention that the title is used only once in plural and four times in singular throughout 1-2 John. The image of the singular Antichrist is preserved, if not dominant throughout the Epistles; see Frey 1997: 3.24.

which of the two is spoken of in singular again in v. 22. Is “the one denying the Father and the Son” a present Antichrist or the future one? In light of 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7 this should be judged a false dichotomy, as these two passages claim that the promoters of false doctrine, i.e. Antichrists, in a sense belong to the Antichrist. In 1 John 4:3, the spirit denying Jesus is τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου, “of the Antichrist” who is to come, whereas 2 John 7 subsumes all of the deceivers under the joint heading of “the deceiver and the Antichrist”. The author of the Johannine letters does not sever the plural present Antichrists from the singular future Antichrist who form a close-knit continuum.

There are two further questions connected to this conclusion. Firstly, whereas it is clear that the present Antichrists are human figures (1 John 2:19), what is the ontological status of the future deceiver? According to some interpreters, the author might still expect a distinct antimessianic opponent in the future⁵⁰; others claim, that the current deceivers exhaust the notion.⁵¹ It seems plausible, though far from certain, that the future Antichrist is indeed coming (1 John 2:18; 4:3). There are, however, no indications that anyone other than a doctrinal opponent, perhaps on a larger scale, is thought of.

Secondly, the image of the Antichrists in 1-2 John generated a great deal of scholarly debate about what it says about the Johannine community. Multiple identifications have been put forward, both by Patristic and modern exegetes, that try to connect the Antichrists spoken of in the letters to historically attested heterodox Christian groups, such as the Ebionites, the Gnostics, or the followers of Cerinthus.⁵² The argument made by Streett persuasively points to Jewish apostates as the possible referents of the Antichristological discourse of the Epistles, since John’s chief concern seems to be with

⁵⁰ Smalley 2007: 95.

⁵¹ Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 102. Cf. Brown 1982: 337 who claims John is not concerned with an eschatological scenario but rather redesigns the tradition to counter his opponents. On the other hand, Koester 2014b: 194–5 claims that the plurality of Antichrists is meant to admonish the community not to fall into the same errors as the deceivers did.

⁵² See Streett 2011: 5–111 for a comprehensive review of the different theories.

their denial of the basic early Christian belief in the messianic status of Jesus (1 John 2:2).⁵³ Crucially, all of the proposed identifications understand 1-2 John as speaking about false teachers and conflicts about matters of doctrine.

The historical context of the disputes in the Johannine community was not lost on the ancient Christian writers who used the Antichrist material from 1-2 John in antiheretical polemics, much more so than in eschatological speculation.⁵⁴ This kind of usage is present from late second century onwards in Clement, *Strom.* 3.6.45; Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.8; *Ieiun.* 11; *Praescr.* 3.12-4.5; Cyprian, *Ep.* 70.3; 75.1; *Unit. eccl.* 9; Ambrose, *Fid. Grat.* 2.15.135; Augustine, *Tract. ep. Jo.* 3.4. It is much rarer to find the Johannine Antichristological discourse applied to an end-time actor which is the case in Origen, *Cels.* 6.79 (but cf. *Comm. ser. Matt.* 33, 47 where it denotes both the future Antichrist and the heretics).

For John, the Antichrists' activity is very much a present reality, with his emphasis on the deceivers unprecedented even among the Qumran writings which at times actualise their eschatology.⁵⁵ To be sure, the present age is itself the eschatological reality, since 1 John 2:18 casts it as "the last hour". Nevertheless, unlike in the Synoptics and 2 Thessalonians, the eschatological development is not supposed to come in the even near future, but is happening already. Similar eschatologising of the present is the case for the last prominent expositors of ancient Christian antimessianism, namely Tyconius and Augustine whom I will discuss in CHAPTER VI.⁵⁶

⁵³ See *ibid.* 1-4; 110-1; 142-71; 358-60.

⁵⁴ Jenks 1991: 347. *Apocalypse of Elijah* offers a case in point. This fifth-century text displays a paramount concern in the future Antichrist and indeed does quote 1 John (*Ap. El.* 1:2). The citation, however, comes from 1 John 2:15a rather than from the discussion of the Antichrist that follows. On Patristic antimessianism in connection to heresy see below, pp. 252-4 (Tertullian), 275-81 (Tyconius and Augustine).

⁵⁵ Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 111; Koester 2014b: 193.

⁵⁶ See the discussion below, pp. 275-81.

Another difference from the other NT examples of the antimessianic tradition is the nature of the opposition espoused in 1-2 John. The Antichrist is marked out by his rejection of some key Christological tenets of the Johannine community and thus constitutes a religious rather than political opponent. This characteristic stands in contrast with other Antichristological depictions elsewhere in the NT which never espouse a doctrinal debate to be at the centre of the conflict. In Jesus' eschatological discourse in the Synoptic Gospels the false messiahs do not deny the tenets of messianic identity, but rather claim them for themselves. 2 Thessalonians and Revelation, on the other hand, depict Christ and his opponents as engaged in direct combat with one another.⁵⁷ Consequently, the idea of messianic conflict espoused in the Johannine Epistles is centred neither on violent conflict nor deceitful imitation.

Despite that, there are unmistakable points of contact between the Johannine idea of the Antichrist and the images of that figure elsewhere in the NT. Most importantly, the Johannine Epistles preserve the differentiation between Satan/the devil and the Antichrist, which is present in 2 Thessalonians and Revelation. 1 John 3:8, 10 mentions the sinful devil who is the father of all sinners. Interestingly, whereas the Antichrists and the Antichrist are present and future figures, the devil seems to be associated with the era preceding Christ's coming, as he ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἀμαρτάνει, "was sinning from the beginning" and his work was abolished by the Son of God (3:8).

Furthermore, 1-2 John still display some dependence on earlier antimessianic. One probable source of inspiration was the tradition about false prophets which I have already mentioned in relation to Jesus' eschatological speech. Although deceitful signs and wonders—a key theme in Deut 13:2-6 LXX, the Synoptic Apocalypse, and 2 Thessalonians alike—are absent from 1-2 John, the letters still display interest in falsehood

⁵⁷ Ernst 1967: 173; Strecker 1988: 253.

(1 John 2:21c, 22a; see 2 Thess 2:11) and leading astray (2 John 7; Matt 24:4-5, 11, 24; Mark 13:5-6, 22; 2 Thess 2:11).⁵⁸

The second strand of tradition that formed the image of the Antichrist in the Johannine Epistles emerges also in the Fourth Gospel. John's Gospel presents different sorts of evil figures or personifications of evil forces: ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου, "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), the evil one (17:15), the devil (6:70; 8:44; 13:2), and Satan (13:27). Whereas the latter two seem to be broadly synonymous, as they both enter Judas' heart (the devil in 13:2, Satan in 13:27), the worldly ruler and the evil one alike are best explained as standing for the hostile forces of the outside world. Very importantly, evil in John's Gospel, just as in the Epistles, is a present and active force. This is exemplified especially by Judas who not only is possessed by the devil/Satan (13:2, 27), but is the devil himself (6:70).⁵⁹ Furthermore, Jesus' Jewish opponents have the devil as their father (8:44) which somewhat corresponds to 1 John 2:18 and the plurality of the present Antichrists.

These traces of prior apocalyptic speculation in 1-2 John further strengthens the argument that the antimessianic concept in the Johannine Epistles is not the author's construct but rather a part of the received kerygma. Antichrist is not introduced as a new teaching, but rather a reinforcement of what is already known to the community.⁶⁰ John makes references to what the audience has supposedly already heard (ἠκούσατε in 2:18, ἀκηκόατε in 4:3). Furthermore, the best textual witnesses (e.g. $\aleph^*$, B, C) to 1 John 2:18, followed by NA²⁸, keep ἀντίχριστος anarthrous which might be interpreted that the term was already functioning as a proper name.⁶¹ The same might be concluded from Polycarp,

⁵⁸ See also Leonhardt-Balzer 2014: 196.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 188, offers an interesting claim that the mention of the worldly ruler in 14:30 refers to Judas. She argues that 14:31c: ἐγείρεσθε, ἄγωμεν ἐντεῦθεν, "get up, let us go from here", harks back to Mark 14:42, where ἐγείρεσθε ἄγωμεν is immediately followed by the announcement of Judas' arrival.

⁶⁰ Horbury 1998a: 117.

⁶¹ Smalley 2007: 87 contra Grayston 1984: 76 who is in turn followed by Jenks 1991: 340–1.

Phil 7:1a: Πᾶς γὰρ ὃς ἂν μὴ ὁμολογῇ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθέναι, ἀντιχριστός ἐστιν, “for everyone, who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in flesh, is an Antichrist”. This is the second time in all of the extant literature that the term appears, and the influence of 1 John 4:2-3 is undeniable. Not only is ἀντιχριστός anarthrous in the Greek (contrary to the definite τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου in 1 John 4:3), but is also introduced abruptly and hardly expounded.⁶² This makes it all the more probable that when the Johannine Epistles speak about the Antichrist, they speak about an already familiar concept.

The Johannine Epistles are clearly in some touch with the antimessianic tradition as it existed in the second half of the first century CE. On the other hand, they differ markedly from almost all of the texts my thesis discusses, since they envisage the messianic opponent neither as a violent foe, nor as a false imitator. 1-2 John, as well as their Patristic readers to be discussed later, see the Antichrist(s) as a doctrinal opponent. This conclusion makes antimessianic activity a very current concern, with little need for the community to wait for a future apocalyptic transformation. In spite of this central difference, the antimessianism of the Johannine Letters is no less dependent on messianism as the antimessianism of other ancient texts I have discussed previously. This is because the Antichrist in 1-2 John denies basic messianic statements about Jesus—statements that were fought over or usurped in other writings.

4.4 The Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation affords a wealth of evidence relevant to the study of the early Christian antichristological speculation. This fact should come as no surprise, since Revelation understands Christ to be a cosmic and indeed divine figure, thus being an important witness of early Christian Christology. On the other hand, Revelation is by far

⁶² See also Jenks 1991: 350–3; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 112.

the most substantial source for NT eschatology, elaborating on themes and motifs only hinted at in the much briefer Synoptic Apocalypse, 2 Thessalonians 2, or 1-2 John, especially on end-time conflict. This combination of high Christology and combat-focused apocalypticism primes Revelation to be one of the most significant sources for the study of the Antichrist.

Two major distinctive points will emerge from my exegesis of the book. Firstly, Revelation develops the notion of mimetic rivalry which I have argued to be very important for the ancient and especially Christian antimessianism. The author of the book—whom I will call John for brevity’s sake, without implying identity with the author(s) of the Fourth Gospel or 1-3 John—provides multiple points of contact and contrast in the depictions of the heavenly and evil sides of the end-time conflict. While mimetic rivalry has been demonstrated to be present in other apocalyptic sources, such as 4QTestimonia and 2 Thessalonians, in none of them is it so deliberately and extensively used as in Revelation.⁶³ Secondly, and consequently, the scenario of Revelation operates with several antimessianic actors, namely the Dragon, the two Beasts, and the Great Prostitute, all whom I will argue to directly combat and/or deceitfully imitate Christ.

Three periods have been proposed as the dates for the composition of Revelation. The late 60s, specifically 68/69 CE, which saw the turmoil associated with the death of Nero and the year of four emperors, are often argued for in this context. The temporal proximity to Nero would make the reference behind the wounded-yet-healed Beast (13:3) and its number (13:18) meaningful, as they would point to the *Nero redivivus* legend and the numeric value of Nero’s name in Hebrew characters. Additionally, anti-Jewish

⁶³ There is very little acknowledgement of this literary strategy in secondary literature which tends to note singular points of contact without seeing the larger pattern. The only substantial study of the motif is offered by Lunceford 2009 who lists and analyses multiple such connections, but fails to notice their function or the presence of the motif outside of Revelation. See also briefer treatments by Rissi 1966: 62–85; Beasley-Murray 1974: 207–8; Finamore 2009: 174–5.

sentiment might have been current in Asia Minor in the wake of the First Jewish-Roman War, thus providing the background to the tribulation of the believers spoken of in the book.⁶⁴

Multiple exegetes, ancient and modern alike, follow Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 5.30.3, in dating Revelation to the last year of emperor Domitian's reign, i.e. 95/96 CE which still seems to be the majority view today.⁶⁵ Not only does this date receive a very early Patristic attestation, but also seems to be supported by the claims made by ancient historians (which are contentious today) that Domitian was eager to deify himself, resonating with John's apparent criticism of the imperial cult.

Composition of Revelation in the latter years of Hadrian's reign (117-138 CE), perhaps during the Bar Kochba revolt was recently argued for by Witulski.⁶⁶ Criticising the shortcomings of the other two dating proposals, he shows that the Hadrianic cult in the province of Asia, his visits there, as well coinage that bears the name Τραιανός Ἀδριανός (= טרינוס אדרינוס = 666) offer a plausible context for the book.⁶⁷ I cannot go into a detailed discussion of this issue and, whilst I am sympathetic to Witulski's dating,⁶⁸ my argument does not require me to fall squarely behind one of the proposals. Indeed, all of them point to historical occasions that are broadly similar. Each of the three arguments for a specific date show an emperor to be the major opponent of Christ and the early Christian belief, be it through persecution or through claiming divine honours for himself. The *Nero redivivus* legend was sufficiently widespread many decades and even centuries after 68 CE to be meaningfully referred to under Domitian or Hadrian. Imperial cult in the

⁶⁴ Rowland 1982: 403–13, followed by Jenks 1991: 233–4.

⁶⁵ Ernst 1967: 96–7; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 118–9. For a comprehensive list of commentators who support the Domitianic dating, see Witetschek 2012: 117–8 n. 2.

⁶⁶ Witulski 2007; idem 2012: 79–118; idem 2016: 179–202.

⁶⁷ Witulski 2016 interprets the first mention of Revelation of John in Justin, *Dial.* 81.4, as hinting at it still being a relatively recent writing in Justin Martyr's time.

⁶⁸ See Koester 2014a: 79 for unpersuasive criticism of the Hadrianic date. It is more problematic that the transliteration of Hadrian's full name into Hebrew is never attested in that exact form, as he himself admits; see Witulski 2007: 236 n. 531.

province of Asia can be evidenced for all these periods. Consequently, the strength of my argument does not depend on the exact dating of the book.

4.4.1 *The Dragon*

I will begin my study of Revelation by discussing the narrative of the Woman and the Dragon in ch. 12 which constitutes the first instance when a concrete eschatological opponent is introduced. Some notion of enmity is hinted at earlier, as John praised the Ephesians' testing of the false apostles (2:2), their hate for the Nicolaitans (v. 5), the Smyrneans' and the Philadelphians' conflict with the "synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9), and chastised the community of Thyatirans for tolerating the self-proclaimed prophetess Jezebel. These frictions, however, are not presented as eschatological and seem centred on the matters of doctrine and conduct and thus broadly similar to those spoken of in 1-2 John. The author introduces a pronounced end-time conflict only after the conclusion of the cycle of the seven trumpets.

The section concerned with the woman and the Dragon begins in 11:19 when ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ὤφθη ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ ναῷ αὐτοῦ, "God's temple, which is in heaven, was opened and the ark of his covenant in his temple was seen". This verse is immediately followed by a vision (similarly introduced by ὤφθη) of the great heavenly sign, i.e. the pregnant woman adorned with celestial bodies. In 12:3, another sign is seen (ὤφθη again), identified as δράκων μέγας πυρρὸς ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ἑπτὰ διαδήματα, "a great fiery red Dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems on his heads". The confrontation between the woman and the Dragon begins in 12:5, as the latter awaits to consume the male child. While it is transported to heaven (v. 5b), the woman manages to go into hiding in the wilderness (v. 6). A heavenly battle is recounted in vv. 7-12, which sees the confrontation between the forces of the Dragon and those of Michael.

It results in the Dragon and his allies being cast out of heaven and onto the earth (v. 9) which is accompanied by a heavenly song of praise (vv. 10-12). The Dragon then continues to persecute the woman (vv. 13-17) by trying to drown her but when his plan is thwarted by a natural miracle, he departs ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ, “to wage war against the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the witness of Jesus” (v. 17). The Dragon reappears in 20:1-10 where he is locked up in a pit for a thousand years. He is then released and wages war alongside the nations of the world (described as Γῶγ καὶ Μαγῶγ) against the saints, but is ultimately consumed by fire and thrown into a burning lake for eternal torment.

Chapter 12 has attracted scholarly interest due to its palpable mythic background. It was first detected and investigated by Gunkel in his seminal *Schöpfung und Chaos* who argued that Revelation 12 is a thinly Christianised appropriation of the Babylonian combat myth.⁶⁹ Bousset in his commentary drew the scholarly attention to the parallels with the Egyptian mythic cycle about Isis, Osiris, Horus, and Typhon, as well as its *interpretatio Graeca*.⁷⁰ The mythic background of Revelation 12 has since then been investigated and affirmed, most notably by Yarbrow Collins.⁷¹

Although reading ch. 12 in the context of ancient mythology is undoubtedly invaluable, it has its limitations. Not only does this passage fail to map fully onto any specific mythological system,⁷² but also draws on a background far richer than just Ancient Near Eastern mythology. Koch has argued that the text fundamentally resists attempts to be given a singular meaning, as it combines different backgrounds—mythic,

⁶⁹ Gunkel 1921: 379–398.

⁷⁰ Bousset 1906: 352–5.

⁷¹ Yarbrow Collins 1976; see also Schreiber 2007: 450–1.

⁷² See Aune 1998a: 670–4 for the relevant criticism.

Jewish, Graeco-Roman—into a wholly novel narrative.⁷³ This point is taken further still by J. Doehhorn who argues for a reading strategy that would elucidate the hermeneutic within which the author intended the text to be read.⁷⁴ This view seems justified, as it tries to reconstruct the common horizon of the author and the intended audience. Although some mythical concepts and motifs might fall within that boundary, their explanatory power can only be subsidiary to the narrative logic of Revelation 12, as well as its links to the rest of the book and its dependence on the OT.⁷⁵

To substantiate the above claim, it will be argued that the portrayal of the Dragon is in dialogue with both the Bible and other parts of Revelation. The word δράκων itself serves as the LXX translation of לַוִּיתָן (four times, including Job 40:25 and Isa 27:1) and תַּנִּין (fifteen times, including Isa 27:1 but without Gen 1:21 where the LXX has κῆτος). Isa 27:1: בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִפְקֹד יְהוָה בְּסֶרְפוֹ הַקָּשָׁה וְהַגְדֹּלָה וְהַחֲזָקָה עַל לַוִּיתָן נָחָשׁ⁷⁶ בָּרָם וְעַל לַוִּיתָן נָחָשׁ עֶקְלָתוֹן 27:1: וְהָרַג אֶת־הַתַּנִּין אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּם, “On that day, the Lord will visit punishment with his sharp, great, and mighty sword upon Leviathan, a fleeing serpent, and upon Leviathan, a twisted serpent, and he will slay the sea monster” is a description of the *Chaoskampf* and was pointed to as the crucial background of Revelation 12.⁷⁷ Interestingly, the Isaianic passage speaks about three monsters, two Leviathans and a sea monster, which might possibly underpin the triad of evil figures, the Dragon and the two Beasts, in Revelation 12-13.⁷⁸

⁷³ Koch 2004: 316–8.

⁷⁴ Doehhorn 2010: 18.

⁷⁵ It is also possible that the chapter contains a veiled critique of the imperial cult. Omerzu 2006: 167–94 notes two types of coins issued under Domitian with the depictions of his wife, Domitia Longina, and their prematurely deceased son, who would together mirror the woman and the messianic child. As the coins were issued in Rome, however, it is difficult to see how they would become so widely known in Asia Minor as to become inspiration for Revelation 12.

⁷⁶ The use of נָחָשׁ might hark back to Gen 3:15 but the allusion is distant at best. It is not perceived by the LXX which uses ὄφις in Genesis 3 and δράκων here.

⁷⁷ Beale 1999: 633.

⁷⁸ That three separate beings, rather than a poetic repetition, are envisaged is argued for by Gray 1949: 450–2; Blenkinsopp 2000: 374–5; Watts 2005: 409–10; all of them consider the reptiles to stand for political powers. Cf. Burney 1910: 443–7 who argues for an astrological interpretation.

More probably however, the two Beasts are reminiscent of the Leviathan-Behemoth pairing, absent from Isa 27:1 but featured in Job 40-41.

The Danielic influence underpins Revelation 12. The Dragon is introduced as ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ἑπτὰ διαδήματα, “having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads” (12:3) which unmistakably harks back to the ten horns of the fourth beast in Dan 7:7, 24 (see Rev 13:1; 17:3). The famous Danielic time measure of “time, (two) times, and half a time” is used twice by John in this chapter, once recalculated as 1,260 days (12:6) and once in literal translation (v. 14) both in reference to the nourishment of the Woman. The figure of Michael, leading the war in heaven against the Dragon’s army (12:7-12) is referred to in Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1, too.⁷⁹

The Dragon is synonymous with “the devil” and “Satan” (12:9), the designations otherwise present also in 2 Thessalonians and the Fourth Gospel to describe the opponents of Jesus. It is also described as ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, “the one leading the entire inhabited world astray” (see 20:10) which is akin to the interest in leading astray present in the Synoptic Apocalypse, the Johannine Epistles, and 2 Thessalonians (also *Did.* 16:4).⁸⁰ Very importantly, the Dragon is explicitly identified as ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, “the ancient snake” (12:9) which constitutes an unmistakable echo of Genesis 3.⁸¹ The identification of the Dragon with the snake is thorough-going, as the former is named as the persecutor of the woman which fulfils the second clause of the prophecy in Gen 3:15. Finally, the notion of the Dragon’s war against the faithful (12:17) calls to mind the war-like imagery similar to that of the DSS, especially 1QM and 4Q285.

⁷⁹ See Aune 1998b: 692–6 for extensive ancient references to the figure of Michael.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 698; Beale 1999: 656; see below, pp. 244–6, for the discussion of the antimessianism in the *Didache*.

⁸¹ See above, pp. 61–2.

Revelation 12 thus draws on a rich Biblical and post-Biblical tradition and envisages the Dragon as antimessianic by attributing to him slander, deceit, and active persecution. I would like now to focus on some internal links between this figure as depicted by John and various other portrayals in the rest of the book. The vision of the Dragon is introduced by the phrase καὶ ὤφθη ἄλλο σημεῖον, which is the third in the sequence, preceded by 11:19: καὶ ὤφθη ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ, and 12:1: καὶ σημεῖον μέγα ὤφθη (cf. 15:1, where ἄλλο σημεῖον describes the angel holding the seven final plagues). Whilst the first two visions describe heavenly realities, the Dragon announced in 12:3 is undoubtedly evil; in spite of that, the visions are strung together in a quick succession. Furthermore, 12:3 describes the Dragon as πυρρὸς, “fiery red”, an adjective appearing only once more in the entire NT, i.e. in Rev 6:4 to describe the colour of the second horse released upon the breaking of the second seal.⁸² Hence, there are literary parallels between the Dragon and a divinely-ordained actor, i.e. the second horseman.⁸³

Another such link is the plethora of the Dragon’s heads, horns, and diadems (12:3b). As noted above, the image is a variation on the motif present already in Daniel 7 and is later reproduced and modified in 13:1. Whereas the Dragon has seven heads, ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads, the Beast of the sea has ten horns, seven heads, and ten diadems upon its horns (see also 17:3 where the Beast also has seven heads and ten horns). The numbers seven and ten, apart from their possible historical reference, might symbolise a claim to completeness and perfection. The horns of the Dragon and of the Beast exceed in their number those of the Lamb which has seven (5:6). The seven

⁸² Lunceford 2009: 23–4; cf. Acts 20:4 where πυρρὸς is used as a proper name.

⁸³ The identification of the horseman as God-sent is not uncontested, but he clearly acts at the behest of the Lamb who opens the seal in 6:3; see Poirier 1999: 257–62; Taeger 1999: 388. Cf. Bachmann 1998: 257–72 who claims that only the first horseman is a positive actor, being at the same time contrasted with the rest. See also the discussion in Koester 2014a: 394.

diadems donned by the Dragon, as well as the ones of the Beast, might be juxtaposed with the astral crown of the woman (12:1), but it is more justified to contrast them with the image of the Rider on the white horse from ch. 19 who has ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ διαδήματα πολλά, “many diadems on his head” (19:12). It has been pointed out that coming of the Rider represents Christ’s Parousia. Consequently, the imagery of horns and diadems is shared by the heavenly and demonic actors alike. The contrast is further strengthened by the difference in how many horns and headpieces they have. The Lamb is proven to have less horns than the evil figures from ch. 12-13. It then turns out, however, that, whilst the Dragon and the Beast both possess a symbolic but finite number of diadems, the Rider is said to have many. This difference should be probably taken to mean that he has more than his enemies.⁸⁴ In sum, this detail links the evil figures of ch. 12 and 13 with the visions of Christ in ch. 5 and 19; they seem initially to surpass his sovereignty, but are ultimately foiled in their attempt.

The final antagonistic similarity appears in 12:4a, where the Dragon’s tail casts down the third of the stars upon the earth, and 8:12, where, as the fourth angel blows the trumpet, darkness covers the third of all celestial bodies, including the third of the stars (see also 6:13).⁸⁵ Both passages build on the imagery of Dan 8:10 where the little horn throws down מִן־הַצִּבְּאָה וּמִן־הַכּוֹכָבִים וְתַרְמִסֵּם, “some of the hosts and some on the stars, and trampled on them”. The fourth angel’s action, being a part of the eschatological unravelling of Creation, is clearly in line with the divine plan, as the trumpets blown by the angels are explicitly given in the presence of God (8:2). The Dragon’s act, usually interpreted as the persecution of the Church and thus clearly evil,⁸⁶ imitates that of the angel, but at the same time heightens the tension and the contrast between them.

⁸⁴ Lunceford 2009: 181.

⁸⁵ Aune 1998b: 685–6.

⁸⁶ Beale 1999: 635–7.

The Dragon in Revelation 12, quite aside from its mythic background, has deep roots in the Biblical and post-Biblical traditions, being based on Daniel and showing some parallels to other depictions of the Antichrist in the NT. Furthermore, John portrays the Dragon by weaving in allusions to other parts of the book. These allusions use mimetic rivalry to strengthen the contrast between this *par excellence* evil figure and the God-ordained agents, including the Dragon's unsuccessful imitation of Christ's sovereignty.

Is the Dragon an antichristological actor? John describes him as the devil and Satan (12:9) who are distinct from the antimessianic agents in other writings (2 Thessalonians, 1-2 John). Furthermore, it is most probably by God's intervention that the Dragon is destroyed in 20:9-10. These facts made most of the ancient and modern interpreters see the Dragon as satanic rather than antichristological. On the other hand, however, 12:4b explicitly states that the Dragon intends to consume the child which must be understood as a hostile intention. Very importantly, the child is described in unmistakably messianic terms, as he μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, "is about to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod", recalling Ps 2:9 LXX (see also Rev 2:27; 19:15; *Ps. Sol.* 17:23-24).⁸⁷ Furthermore, the seven diadems on the Dragon's heads, alongside the ten belonging to the First Beast, are an imitation of Christ's own many diadems and a parody of his opponents' claim to authority. Charles comments that the Dragon "in many respects [is a] caricature of Christ".⁸⁸ The Dragon is thus engaged in both direct and indirect conflict with the messianic actor, and hence should be categorised as antimessianic. Jenks' suspicion that "the Dragon figure in Revelation provides little of relevance to the origins of the Antichrist myth" is ungrounded.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ For a discussion of the messianic meaning of 12:5, see Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 132–3; Busch 1996: 86–9; Aune 1998b: 688; Koch 2004: 227–37.

⁸⁸ Charles 1920: 1.347.

⁸⁹ Jenks 1991: 240.

4.4.2 *The First Beast*

The second eschatological enemy emerges on the scene immediately after the departure of the Dragon. The Beast is depicted as emerging from the sea (13:1a). An extensive physical description follows. The Beast has ten diademed horns, seven heads, and blasphemous name(s)⁹⁰ (13:1b), the appearance of a leopard,⁹¹ bear-like feet, and a lion's mouth (v. 2a). It receives its authority from the Dragon, whom it worships (vv. 2b, 4). V. 3a contains an important detail—one of the Beast's heads was wounded as if lethally but then healed miraculously. The Beast is later described as blaspheming against God and his allies (vv. 5-6), warring against the holy ones (v. 7a), and achieving worldwide dominion (vv. 3b, 8).

The appearance of this Beast is most probably briefly foreshadowed in 11:7 where ὁ θηρίον τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου, “the beast coming up from the abyss” attacks and kills the two witnesses. The three actions it undertakes against the witnesses—waging war, defeating, and killing—are exactly the same as those ascribed to the first beast (13:7, 10b).⁹² Its appearance in ch. 11 is brief and probably a result of authorial redaction.

The Beast of the sea comes back on stage in 17:3 where it carries the Great Prostitute. It is described as κόκκινος, “scarlet”, filled with blasphemous names, multi-headed and multi-horned, which clearly equates it with the figure introduced in 13:1-10. V. 8 begins an explanation of the significance of the beast. Vv. 8, 11 include three distinct strings of titles: v. 8a, ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ εἰς

⁹⁰ Aune 1998a: 716; Koester 2014a: 569 argue in favour of the plural ὀνόματα (so in 17:3), found e.g. in A and the Byzantine tradition. Beale 1999: 685 opts for ὄνομα, present in P⁴⁷, 8, and C, which was supposedly later pluralised to agree with 17:3. Bousset 1906: 360 and Charles 1920: 1.347–8 consider the textual evidence to be fairly balanced and do not decide either way, reasonably seeing both variants as pointing to the imperial cult.

⁹¹ Although reading πάρδαλις as referring to a leopard is most probable, this Greek word (unlike Aramaic ܡܢܝܐ in Dan 7:6), as noted in Liddell-Scott, can mean a whale-like sea creature. This meaning is attested in Oppian, *Halieutica* 1.368 (second century CE) and Aelian, *De natura animalium* 9.49 (third century CE). Speculatively, if seen as ambiguous, this word would fit the marine origin of the first Beast and its kinship with Leviathan.

⁹² On the two witnesses in cognate literature, see Bousset 1896: 203–11.

ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει, “was, and is not, and is about to get up out of the abyss, and departs for destruction”; v. 8b, ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ παρέσται, “was, and is not, and will be present”; v. 11, ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν...καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει, “was, and is not...and departs for destruction”. The seven heads are interpreted as the seven mountains, upon which the woman seats, as well as the seven kings (vv. 9-10). The horns, on the other hand, seem to represent a different royal grouping who will briefly gain power upon the ascension of the Beast (vv. 12-13), will be defeated by the Lamb (v. 14), and will hate and later violently kill the Prostitute (v. 16).

The Beast and the False Prophet come on stage for the last time in 19:17-21 where they, alongside their allied earthly authorities, suffer defeat and death at hand of the Rider on the white horse, and in 20:10, where they are joined by the Dragon in the fiery lake.

In trying to understand the background of the First Beast, I will first focus on its Biblical and extra-Biblical antecedents. The Beast’s marine origin places it within the Leviathan tradition which originates with Isa 27:1, Job 40:25-41:26 (MT; 41:1-34 in English translations); Ps 74:14; 104:26. The pairing of the Beasts of the sea and of the land makes Revelation 13 dependent in some way on Job 40-41 which brings together the marine Leviathan and the land-based Behemoth. On the other hand, while Job praises the animals as magnificent creations of God (see also Ps 104:24-26), John foresees their demise at the hand of God, thus reproducing a motif present in Isa 27:1; Ps 74:14.

The images of the First Beast in Revelation 13 and 17 contain abundant allusions to the Danielic visions. 13:1-2 is undoubtedly a pastiche of the four beasts emerging from the abyss in Dan 7:3-8. The Beast’s reign is set to last the Danielic forty-two months (13:5).⁹³ There are some very pronounced features of the Beast which link it to other accounts of ancient antimessianism. It receives worship (13:4b, 8), just like the Man of

⁹³ For these and further references, see Beale 1984: 229–48.

Lawlessness did in 2 Thessalonians 2, and just like him and the king in Dan 11:36 it repeatedly blasphemes God (13:1b, 5a, 6; 17:3b). It also wages war against the saints (13:7) and the Lamb (17:14) which recalls the messianic conflicts narrated in the *War Scroll* and 4Q285. Therefore, it can be stated that the image of the Beast in ch. 13 and 17 are akin the antimessianic speculation of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity.

The standard scholarly interpretation of Revelation 13 and 17, with some precedents in Patristic exegesis, sees them as a critique Roman imperial rule.⁹⁴ This reading is grounded primarily in seeing the number of the Beast, 666 (Rev 13:18), as a cipher for “the emperor Nero”, which is a standard scholarly explanation of the mysterious number.⁹⁵ The Neronic background of the First Beast is also hinted at by the references to the myth of *Nero redivivus* in 13:3a and 17:8-11.⁹⁶ Rev 13:3a speaks about the healing of a seemingly lethal wound to one of the Beast’s heads, with 17:8-11 envisaging the return of the Beast itself returning after the reign of the short-lived seventh king. The pattern of current absence and imminent re-emergence links to Nero who, having committed suicide in 68 CE, was widely believed to have escaped, perhaps to Parthia, and to be bound to return in the future. As it was stated earlier, that belief was held by Gentiles,⁹⁷ Jews,⁹⁸ and early Christians⁹⁹ alike and can be evidenced even a couple

⁹⁴ Bousset 1906: 374; Charles 1920: 1.333; Jenks 1991: 241; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 147; Aune 1998b: 779; Beale 1999: 685. For Patristic references to the Beast as Rome, see Victorinus, *In Apoc.* 13.2-3; 17.9-11; Andrew, *Comm. in Apoc.* 12.36; Bede, *Exp. Apoc.* on Rev 13:1.

⁹⁵ The number of the Beast is usually understood through the lens of gematria whereby the numerical value of the Hebrew for “emperor Nero”, נרון קסר, is 666; see Bauckham 1993: 384–452; Koester 1998a: 770–3; Koester 2014a: 596–601. The number is stated to be 616 in the textual variant present in Codex Alexandrinus and in Tyconius’ *Expositio Apocalypseos* 4.46 on Rev 13:18 (also known, but rejected by Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 5.30.1). It might have been the result of dropping the final נ from נרון and appears to be a defective reading. The number has perplexed the earliest readers of Revelation, including Irenaeus (see below, p. 251) and Hippolytus (p. 257).

⁹⁶ On *Nero redivivus* see Bishop 1964: 167–75; Collins 1974: 80–7; Yarbrow Collins 1976: 170–92; Jakob-Sonnabend 1990: 145–52; Bauckham 1993: 407–23; Aune 1998b: 737–40; Witulski 2007: 206–18.

⁹⁷ E.g. Suetonius, *Nero* 57; Dio Chrysostom, *Orat.* 21.10. On later Neronic impostors, see Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.8; Lucian, *Ind.* 20; Dio Cassius, *Rom. Hist.* 63.9.3; 66.19.3.

⁹⁸ *Sib. Or.* 4.138-139; 5. On the Talmudic legend (*b. Gittin* 56a) about Nero visiting Judea and converting to Judaism see Bastomsky 1969: 321–5.

⁹⁹ E.g. Asc. *Isa.* 4:2; Commodianus, *Instr.* 1.41.7-8.

of centuries after Nero's death.¹⁰⁰ Obviously, only some of the relevant sources explicitly mention Nero, and the *Nero redivivus* legend later took in the form of a generalised belief in the end-time emergence of an evil ruler.¹⁰¹ Increasing temporal distance from the original context made this expectation applicable to later rulers, with both Domitian (see Juvenal, *Sat.* 4.38) and Hadrian (*Sib. Or.* 8)¹⁰² being linked to the yet-to-return Nero. Whilst this fact precludes a precise dating of Revelation based on the use of the Neronic motif in ch. 13, it shows quite clearly that the First Beast is meant to represent Roman imperial rule.

A plethora of intratextual links with other parts of Revelation can be adduced that show the Beast of the sea to be a mimetic and deceitful rival of Christ. As it was already mentioned, its diademed horns are a parody of Christ's royal power in 19:11. It has a name (or names) written upon its horns; the same is the feature of the Great Prostitute (17:5) and of the Rider on the white horse (19:12b, 13b, 16b).¹⁰³ The Beast's leopard-like appearance and lion's mouth might hark back to the first creature "in the midst of and around" God's throne (4:6b, based on Ezek 1:10). As noted by Jenks, Lunceford, and Koester, the pattern of the injury, healing, and amazement on the part of the observers, which is ascribed to one of the Beasts' heads, is modelled after the death and resurrection of Jesus.¹⁰⁴ The Lamb is seen standing as if slain (5:6, 12) but, even earlier, is proclaimed to have defeated death (1:5, 18). The worship offered by the people to the first Beast: τίς ὅμοιος τῷ θηρίῳ καὶ τίς δύναται πολεμῆσαι μετ' αὐτοῦ; "who is like the beast and who could wage war against it?" is also imbued with irony. τίς ὅμοιος subtly recalls the figure of Michael, who has just expelled the Dragon from heaven and whose original Hebrew

¹⁰⁰ See Augustine, *Civ.* 20.19.3 who attests this belief as late as early fifth century.

¹⁰¹ Henten 2000: 3–17 with reference to the *Sibylline Oracles*.

¹⁰² Kreitzer 1988: 92–115; Witulski 2007: 212–4.

¹⁰³ Noticed by Primasius of Hadrumetum, *Comm. in Apoc.* on 13:1; 17:3.

¹⁰⁴ Jenks 1991: 244; Lunceford 2009: 89–97; Koester 2014a: 581.

name of course means “who is like God?”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, in 17:14, the Lamb wages war with the Beast and overcomes it, thus thwarting its followers’ hopes. The most vivid example of deceitful imitation on the part of the Beast is contained in the threefold designations in 17:8, 11 which generally proclaim that it was, is not, will reappear, and then be destroyed. These, quite apart from their probable reference to the future coming of Nero, are clearly intended to mock the divine titles in Revelation (1:4, 8; 4:8; see also 11:17; 16:5) which proclaim God’s eternity.¹⁰⁶

The Beast is similar, yet staunchly contrary to Christ. Not only does it enter into direct conflict with the Lamb and its followers, but also displays itself as a deceitful to Christ. The Antichristological aspect of the first beast was frequently noted by early commentators who would identify it with the Antichrist (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 5.28.2; 30.1-4; Tertullian, *Res.* 25.1; Victorinus, *In Apoc.* 13.1; Tyconius, *Exp. Apoc.* 6.11; Andrew, *Comm. in Apoc.* 13.37). The direct intertextual links between the images of the Beast and those of Christ are frequent and evident enough to see the Beast of the sea as the Antichrist. This, however, needs to be qualified by the fact that its three tripartite designations in 17:8, 11 are a parody aimed specifically at God, not at Christ. The Beast is therefore also God’s opponent, and not simply the “Christ of Satan”.¹⁰⁷

4.4.3 *The Second Beast/the False Prophet*

The third eschatological opponent introduced by John is another Beast, this time arising from the earth (13:11a). The description of its appearance is limited to the mention of its two horns like a lamb and Dragon-like speech (v. 11b). The authority of the Beast of the sea, which it received from the Dragon, is now transferred to the land Beast (v.

¹⁰⁵ Lunceford 2009: 182–90.

¹⁰⁶ Charles 1920: 2.68; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 160; Aune 1998b: 939; Beale 1999: 864–6; Lunceford 2009: 227–38; Koester 2014a: 676.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Beasley-Murray 1974: 207.

12a) who makes all the world worship the First Beast, just like it incited the worship of the Dragon. The Second Beast performs marvellous and deceitful signs (v. 13) through which it forces people to set up an image of the first Beast (v. 14) which later it is able to animate (v. 15a). The land Beast keeps track of the worshippers of the image by stamping them (v. 16; see 14:9-11; 16:2; 20:4) and killing the recusants (v. 15b).

Unlike the Beast of the sea, the second one does not re-emerge as a distinct figure later in Revelation. It is mentioned three times after 13:18, in 16:13; 19:20; 20:10. In each of these instances it is referred to as *ψευδοπροφήτης*, always accompanying the Beast. This identification is made patent in 19:20 where the False Prophet is said to perform signs in front of the Beast. This vision maps exactly onto the image from 13:13-17.

Providing the third eschatological opponent of Revelation with a specific historical counterpart has proven challenging to exegetes. Most interpretations agree that John could have been referring to the imperial rule and cult in Asia Minor and its concrete institutions¹⁰⁸ or, alternatively, to the false teachers within the Christian communities.¹⁰⁹ Some commentators stay out of the debate by claiming that the second Beast is not, at least on its own, a meaningful construct.¹¹⁰ Whilst the idea of false prophecy as arising from within the given community is common in the cultural milieu of Revelation (1-2 John being the prime example of it), 13:11-18 does not present the land Beast as arising from an early Christian context. In that respect, it is markedly different from the false teachers, such as Jezebel, from Revelation 2-3 who are not, unlike the Beasts, eschatological in the strict sense. The relation between the two Beasts, on the other hand,

¹⁰⁸ Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 153–6; Aune 1998a: 755–6; Koester 2014a: 589–90. Cf. Witulski 2007: 226–7 who argues for a concrete identification of the Beast with Marcus Antonius Polemon (c. 90–144 CE), a Sophist who accompanied Hadrian on his travels to Asia Minor.

¹⁰⁹ Beale 1999: 707–8; Duff 2001: 112–35.

¹¹⁰ Tyconius, *Exp. Apoc.* 4.38; Bede, *Exp. Apoc.* on 13:11; Beatus, *Tract. Apoc.* 4.1 all consider the second Beast to be essentially identical with the first one. Note Bousset 1906: 377: “Die Gestalt des zweiten Tieres blieb undeutbar”.

is very close and carries on throughout the second half of the book. This fact substantiates the general conclusion that the land Beast is a mediator of the Roman power, be it through cultic practice or political authority. Its portrayal and ultimate demise are hence a continuation of the anti-Roman attitude that permeates the entirety of the work.

Whilst the exact historical referent of the Second Beast remains largely elusive, its portrayal can be fruitfully discussed in relation to other Biblical and post-Biblical traditions. As noted above, the pairing of a land-based and a marine creature is based on the Leviathan-Behemoth tandem known from Job 40-41. It is the Danielic background, however, that plays a crucial role throughout Rev 13:11-18. The Beast's origin on land recalls the place where the four beasts, interpreted as the four kings, come from in Dan 7:17 MT. Its two horns call to mind the horns of the ram in Dan 8:3, whereas the idol of the wounded beast it sets up harks back to Nebuchadnezzar's statue erected on the plain of Dura in Daniel 3.¹¹¹

The identification of the Beast of the Land as the False Prophet provides a clear link with other antimessianic traditions.¹¹² It stands in line with Deut 13:2-6, 4QTest, the Synoptic Apocalypse, 2 Thessalonians, and, to a lesser extent, 1-2 John which present a figure that, while unduly performing prophetic or didactic functions, turns out to also oppose the Messiah. This is the case for the Second Beast of Revelation 13, too, which is said to perform great signs, including even bringing fire down from the sky (based on 1 Kings 18:24-35 where this is achieved by Elijah but not by the prophets of Baal). Thus the False Prophet leads people to worship the image of the first Beast which is even able to speak (contrary to what idols were usually thought to be able to do; see Ps 115:5; 135:16; Jer 10:5; 1 Cor 12:2). The punishment, which is exacted upon the False Prophet

¹¹¹ Beale 1984: 240-9.

¹¹² Cf. Jenks 1991: 246 who fails to see how being a false prophet can overlap with being an antimessianic agent.

in 19:20, is the same as that of the Beast and comes as a result of the final conflict with the Rider on the white horse. It must therefore be the case that, in the author's mind, they are both equally opposed to Christ and equally guilty.

This conclusion is further strengthened by the many resemblances that the Beast of the land shares with the God-ordained agents. The most vivid one appears at the very introduction of this figure in 13:11b where it is said to have two horns like a lamb. Apart from the ram in Dan 8:3, this unnatural physical feature immediately calls to mind the central figure of the entire work, namely Christ the Lamb. Whilst many commentators have noted the wolves in sheep's clothing saying in Matt 7:15 as a possible background to Rev 13:11b, few have explicitly noticed its clear similarity and at the same time contrast to the Lamb as pictured in 5:6 and later.¹¹³ Just as in the case of the differing number of horns and diadems of the Lamb, the Beasts, and the Rider, the fact that the Lamb in 5:6 has seven horns and the Beast of the land has only two is possibly significant. It might point to the incompleteness of the imitation on the part of the False Prophet and his inferior status to both Christ and the first Beast which has ten horns.

Another shared feature between the False Prophet and the divine side of the eschatological conflict is the ability to resuscitate or animate people and objects. Whereas 11:11, based on Ezek 37:5, 10 LXX, recounts that the two slain witnesses were raised by πνεῦμα ζωῆς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, "the spirit of life from God", the False Prophet uses the spirit to enliven the First Beast's statue in 13:15a. Following this understanding, the False Prophet would provide a counterpart to God himself. Both miracles result in worship and conversion of some people (11:11b-13; 13:15b).

¹¹³ Jenks 1991: 245; Beale 1999: 707; Lunceford 2009: 101. See also Caesarius of Arles, *Exp. de Apoc.* Homily 11; Bede, *Exp. Apoc.* on 13:11.

The final aspect of mimetic rivalry on the part of the land Beast is the practice of stamping the worshippers of the first Beast,¹¹⁴ which mimics the sealing of God's faithful in 7:2-3: 9:4; 14:1, possibly drawing on Ezek 9:4 LXX. The seal, containing the name of God and the Lamb, provides an ultimate protection to 144,000 of the sealed ones who, though martyred, are in the end triumphant (20:4). On the other hand, those sealed by the False Prophet initially escape death (13:15) but later share in their idols' fate (either in 19:21 or 20:15).

The Second Beast/the False Prophet is portrayed by John as contrasting and opposing Christ and even God. Just as the Dragon and the First Beast, this eschatological enemy combines in itself the two motifs I argue to be the cornerstones of ancient antimessianism, namely violent conflict and mimetic rivalry. The insight of some early interpreters and commentators, who identified the Beast of the land as the Antichrist (Hippolytus, *Antichr.* 49; Oecumenius, *Comm. in Apoc.* 7) is therefore confirmed.

4.4.4 *The Great Prostitute*

The last eschatological opponent to be discussed in this chapter is the Great Prostitute,¹¹⁵ depicted in ch. 17-18. She is introduced in 17:1 as sitting upon many waters and, according to v. 3b, on the Beast. The description of her appearance follows, as she is said to be clad in purple and scarlet and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls (v. 4a, b). She also holds a golden cup γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς, “full of abominations and the impurities of her adultery” (v. 4c). Her forehead bears the mysterious name Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς, “the great Babylon, the mother of prostitutes and of the earth's

¹¹⁴ Luncford 2009: 252–61.

¹¹⁵ On the first-century context of the use of πόρνη, see Glancy, Moore 2011: 551–69.

abominations”.¹¹⁶ The Prostitute is later seen to be drunk with the blood of the saints and Jesus’ witnesses (v. 6). The vision is interpreted in vv. 15-18. The many waters, by which the prostitute is seated, are said to represent the peoples, crowds, nations, and tongues (v. 15). The Beast’s horns symbolise the foreign kings, who, along with the Beast itself, hate the Prostitute and proceed to shame and violently kill her (v. 16), thus fulfilling God’s purpose (v. 17). Finally, the Woman itself is identified as the great city (see v. 9, where the Beast’s seven heads are identified as hills upon which the Prostitute sits).

Rev 18:1-19:4 constitutes a collection of songs celebrating the fall of Babylon (18:2-3, 4-8, 20, 21-24; 19:1-2, 3; see also the foreshadowing of these events in 14:8), as well as dirges lamenting it (18:10, 14, 16-17a, 19). The former come from an angel (18:2, 21), Christ (possibly 18:4), and the heavenly crowd (19:1), whilst the latter are uttered by the kings of the earth (18:9), the merchants (18:11, 15), and sailors (18:17b). There is thus a clear division between the sadness the demise of the great city causes on earth and the joy it elicits in heaven. Both the jubilations and the laments emphasise the city’s immense wealth which is destroyed instantaneously. While the inhabitants of the earth marvel at it, the heavenly perspective is, rather unsurprisingly, relentlessly critical, seeing the wealth as source of depravity, pride, and evil.

Revelation 17-18 has been usually understood to be the climax of John’s economic and moral critique of Rome with which Babylon/the Great Prostitute is surely to be identified. As commonly acknowledged, the name “Babylon” is frequently applied to Rome in ancient Jewish and Christian writings.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, 17:9 identifies the Beast’s seven heads with the seven hills on which the Prostitute sits, referencing the well-known

¹¹⁶ The name is preceded by the noun *μυστήριον* which can be construed as being in apposition to *ὄνομα* or as a part of the actual name. I follow Aune 1998b: 936 in opting for the latter, but this does not make much difference to my argument.

¹¹⁷ E.g. 1 Pet 5:13; 4 Ezra 3:2, 31; *Bemidbar R.* 7.10.

image of Rome built upon seven hills.¹¹⁸ Finally, the wealth and universal dominion of the Great Prostitute could hardly be meaningfully ascribed in the first or second century CE to any power centre other than Rome.

The Roman identification of John's Babylon, however, has been contested, with Jerusalem being put forward as an alternative referent.¹¹⁹ Both Babylon and Jerusalem are described by John as "the great city" (11:8; 17:18). What is more, the Beast and the kings represented by its horns, who in light of Revelation 13 and 17 are to be interpreted as manifesting Roman imperial power, are said to kill the woman and feast on her flesh. If Babylon is indeed Rome here, it is problematic to see how John could have imagined Roman rulers and their allies to destroy the city. On the other hand, it makes at least apparent sense to think of 17:16 as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, in 70 or 135 CE.

These objections to the standard identification of the Great Prostitute, however, fail to persuade. The use of the phrase "the great city" can be well read as a mark of imitative contrast between Rome and Jerusalem, just as the former's riches are similar to and yet incomparably smaller than the splendour of the New Jerusalem (21:9-21). The Prostitute's demise at the hands of its rulers and allies can be interpreted as a reference to Nero's suspected order to burn down Rome in 64 CE or the military assault accompanying his expected return (see *Sib. Or.* 8.69-215).¹²⁰ Consequently, the references to Babylon in Revelation 17-18 are the apex of John's critique of Rome, in this case going beyond its cultic and political aspect and foregrounding the economic injustice of the Roman dominance.

¹¹⁸ See Aune 1998b: 919–28; Koester 2014a: 673, 685 for literary and numismatic references to that image.

¹¹⁹ See Biguzzi 2006: 371–86 for a survey of the scholarly debate.

¹²⁰ Aune 1998b: 957.

Again, apart from the historical referentiality of this portion of the text, it functions within a web of Scriptural connections. The author uses the prophecy of the fall of Babylon from Jeremiah 50-51 MT (27-28 LXX) and reapplies it to Rome.¹²¹ Daniel, once again, figures prominently as the Scriptural background. The title Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη alludes to Dan 4:27 MT, θ' (30 LXX). The images of prostitution, most often related to Israel, are a commonplace in the OT (e.g. Jer 4:30; Ezek 6:9; 23:40; see also Isa 23:15-16 with reference to Tyre). Possibly, the war of the Lamb and its allies with the ten kings in 17:14 harks back to Dan 7:21 where the little horn wages war against the holy ones.¹²² The consistent association of the Great Prostitute with the kings of the earth (17:2, 18; 18:3, 9; see also 16:14; 19:19) might recall Ps 2:2 where מְלִי־אֲרָץ conspire against the Lord and his Messiah. Furthermore, the earthly observers of the demise of Babylon are three times said to watch it ἀπὸ μακρόθεν, “from a distance”. The phrase might hark back to Ps 37:12b LXX: καὶ οἱ ἔγγιστά μου ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἔστησαν, “and those closest to me stood at a distance”.¹²³

As a matter of speculation, the eucharistic theology of the Fourth Gospel might provide an interesting context for the cannibalistic practices associated with the great prostitute, who is drunk with the saints’ blood (17:6; 18:24) and ends up being consumed by the kings (17:16). In that perspective, these practices would prove to be a mocking travesty of the life-giving consumption of Jesus’ flesh and blood (John 6:54, 56).¹²⁴

The intratextual connections between the Great Prostitute and the rest of Revelation appear to perform the same function as in the case of the Dragon and the Beasts. The splendour of the Prostitute’s garments and jewellery, as well as the repeatedly

¹²¹ Ibid. 983.

¹²² Beale 1984: 249–67.

¹²³ See Matt 27:55//Mark 15:40//Luke 23:49 on the women witnessing Jesus’ crucifixion ἀπὸ μακρόθεν. Is it possible that John knew this detail of the Synoptic passion narrative and applied it ironically to the fall of Babylon?

¹²⁴ King 2004: 303–25.

emphasised wealth of the city she stands for, might call to mind the majesty of the New Jerusalem (21:9-22:4), as well as the lavish interiors of the divine throne room (4:3). The Prostitute is depicted as clothed in linen (18:12, 16) which is later argued to be only appropriate for the Lamb's bride (19:8b), the saints (v. 8c), and the allies of the Rider (v. 14c).¹²⁵ Just like the worshippers of the Beast and 144,000 of the sealed ones, she has her forehead marked with a distinctive stamp with her own name. It is this name that constitutes the most obvious example of mimetic rivalry on her part. 17:5 claims that the name is mysterious, but reveals it immediately in no uncertain terms. A very similar dialectic of veiling and disclosure is the case for the name of the Rider in ch. 19. He is called "faithful and true" in 19:11. His name is then said to be known only to himself (19:12), but is shortly thereafter revealed as "the word of God" (v. 13) and "king of kings and lord of lords" (v. 16). The images of blood and cup are also shared between the Great Prostitute and other actors. The saints' blood, with which the Prostitute intoxicates herself, contrasts with the redemptive blood offered by the Lamb (1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11). At the same time her golden cup containing the abominations and uncleanness of her adultery recalls the cup of God's wrath in 14:10 and especially in 16:19 where Babylon is explicitly mentioned.¹²⁶

Is it plausible to understand the Great Prostitute as Christ's opponent? As indicated by 17:16, it is not Christ himself who defeats her but rather the Beast and the kings allied with it. However, they are said explicitly to perform God's purpose (17:7),¹²⁷ and their action arouses jubilation in heaven. Babylon is therefore not only portrayed as evil but also as directly conflicted with God and his associates. Consequently, the figure

¹²⁵ Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 158 notes that linen is also mentioned in Exod 28:5, 33 as a part of the priestly garments, as well as a standard decoration of the statues of the Roman deities.

¹²⁶ Lunceford 2009: 210–13.

¹²⁷ See below, p. 236, on an antimessianic agent being destroyed by God's delegates in *Apocalypse of Elijah* 5:32–35.

is not read as antichristological by the early interpreters and is not usually treated as such by modern exegetes. There are, however, clear intratextual links which connect the portrayal of the Great Prostitute with the depictions of the God-ordained agents in Revelation, with the most striking one being her mysterious name in 17:5. This indicates that, just like the Dragon and the Beasts, she is stylised as a deceitful imitator of God, Christ, and their allies. Although just like in the case of the Dragon the case for her Antichristological status is not as strong as that of the two Beasts, it is nonetheless justified to see her as one of the antichristological agents of Revelation.

To recapitulate this section, Revelation should be seen as a very rich source for the study of the ancient antimessianism. As it is to be dated to the second half of the first century CE or even later, it most probably postdates much of the other NT and Pseudepigraphic antimessianic material, its author might be aware of the ideas and motifs already at play in the earlier sources. The work relies heavily on the OT for its depictions of evil actors, with Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Daniel figuring prominently in its repertoire of sources. This fact substantiates my core claim that the Antichrist tradition is essentially hermeneutical. John elaborates at length on the motifs only hinted at in other Jewish and Christian writings of that period, as he portrays the Antichristological opponents as spreading false teaching, exercising tyrannical authority, engaging in cosmic combat, and deceitfully imitating the heavenly agents.

Among these, the idea of mimetic rivalry achieves distinct prominence, as both sides of the heavenly conflict are repeatedly portrayed as sharing in attributes, features, and actions. Indeed, mimetic rivalry appears to be the primary way through which Revelation engages in the antimessianic speculation. This strategy finds some form of parallel only in the *Testimonia* from the DSS and Hippolytus' *De Antichristo* which also, albeit in different ways, portray the Antmessiahs as being in contrast to God's true agents.

At the same time, Revelation ascribes the antimessianic function not to a singular figure (as 2 Thessalonians 2 does) or to a undifferentiated group (so the Synoptic Apocalypse and 1-2 John), but to four clearly defined actors, each with a distinct historical referent. Consequently, the role of the Book of Revelation in the tracing of the Antichrist tradition cannot be overestimated, as it ties together different antimessianic motifs and sources and creatively reworks them.

4.5 Conclusion

The study of the Antichrist tradition in the canonical NT texts proves that they are indeed central to this tradition. Furthermore, they develop its constituent motifs into forms which are later picked up by the Church Fathers and the Apocrypha. The NT attests that antimessianism became inflected by Christology, with each of the writings discussed linking its eschatological opponents to Jesus. This conclusion derives from a phenomenon I have evidenced throughout this thesis, namely that antimessianism depends greatly on the ancient expectation of a messianic figure. The relation between Christ and his enemies is construed differently in each of the texts, without any model gaining dominance.

The Antichrist tradition as presented in the NT should not be read as uniform but rather as a set of different ideas about how the eschatological opposition to Jesus would function. At the same time, it participates in and transforms the antimessianic discourse of the other broadly contemporaneous Jewish and Christian writings by engaging very similar motifs. It is unjustified to read the NT as the beginning of the Antichrist story simply due to the first occurrence of this designation in 1-2 John.

The Antichrist's usurpation of Jesus' status is seen as particularly pressing and problematic in the Synoptic Apocalypse, as well as in Revelation 13. On the other hand, his claim to the divinity and direct conflict with Jesus comes to the fore in 2 Thessalonians 2 and throughout Revelation. False teaching and the denial of Jesus' messianic identity

are seen as the marks of the Antichrist(s) in 1-2 John. Revelation draws mostly on the first two themes, at the same time developing the idea of Jesus and his enemies as mimetic rivals. Some or all of these themes are represented among the DSS as well as the Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha.

On the other hand, 2 Thessalonians 2 and especially Revelation see Christ's ultimate victory as preceded by the violent destruction of his enemies. While the author of 2 Thessalonians does this primarily by alluding to Isa 11:4b (2 Thess 2:8), Revelation is unique in the NT canon and possibly in the early Christian literature in general by paying such a minute attention to the eschatological conflict. John recounts the demise of the Dragon, the Beasts, and the Great Prostitute at the hands of God or God-ordained agents. Violent conflict is therefore undeniably present in the NT depiction of the Antichrist.

A few further comments are in order. 2 Thessalonians and Revelation draw explicitly on the OT to develop their antimessianic portrayals, with the Scriptural themes also present in the deeper background of the Synoptic Apocalypse and 1-2 John. This fact shows that the continued engagement with the Scripture accompanied the development of the Antichrist tradition also in the earliest Christian documents. At the same time, historical developments of the second half of the first century CE and, in the case of Revelation, even the subsequent decades left their imprint on the Antichrist's image in the NT. The proliferation of messianic claimants in Palestine before and around the year 70 is echoed in the Synoptic Apocalypse, whereas Roman imperial rule, politics, and cult certainly underpin much of Revelation. At the same time, historical criticism has proven unable to retrieve that sort of concrete background for 2 Thessalonians, whose discourse remains largely cryptic, whilst 1-2 John seem to be focused exclusively on the religious life of the audience. My study of the NT shows that reading the Antichrist tradition through a historical lens is an attractive, though only partially effective approach.

Notably, passages in 2 Thessalonians and Revelation show the eschatological opponents as being conflicted with both God and Jesus in equal measure. This is the case for the Man of Lawlessness, who usurps God's status and is killed by Jesus, as well as the Dragon, who tries to kill the messianic child and is finally condemned by God to the lake of fire. It might be of Christological import to see that God and Jesus in both cases defend each other, perhaps due to their shared elevated status (see e.g. Rev 21:22; 22:1).

CHAPTER V

Jewish and Christian Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha

The New Testament material relevant to the Antichrist tradition, while central to its later development, is by no means exhaustive of its scope and character in Second Temple Judaism or early Christianity in general. Apocalypticism and messianism, at the intersection of which ancient antimessianic speculation thrived, both find ample attestation throughout Jewish and Christian literature that was not subsequently canonised. Furthermore, the pseudepigraphic and apocryphal literature affords at least as much relevant evidence as do the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, or the Dead Sea Scrolls. An investigation of these texts, which have been frequently referenced in modern Antichrist research, permits us to see both the diversity and the stability of the antimessianic opponent in ancient Judaism and Christianity.

This chapter has as its scope all of the ancient Jewish and Christian non-canonical texts, i.e. the sum of what are typically distinct scholarly categories—the OT Pseudepigrapha and the NT Apocrypha. This grouping contains a vast array of writings that differ greatly in terms of provenance, date, authorship, genre, and ideology. This fact makes any far-reaching comparisons very difficult. At the same time, separating the canonical writings (discussed in CHAPTERS II and IV) from the non-canonical ones is justified in view of the fact that the canonised texts were absolutely central to the later Patristic and Rabbinic interpreters and to Christianity and Judaism in general. On the other hand, the extracanonical texts, with some exceptions, exerted incomparably smaller influence on the later development of the antimessianic tradition. My categorisation of the material escapes the insurmountable difficulties which a division into the OT Pseudepigrapha and the NT Apocrypha would face. While the Apocrypha are safely

attributable to the Christian circles from the second century CE onwards, OT Pseudepigrapha contain both Jewish and Christian texts from across antiquity and whose single common denominator is the titular ascription to an OT figure (apart from the *Sibylline Oracles*).¹

In what follows I will scrutinise the instances when Jewish and Christian extracanonical texts envisage an opponent of a messianic figure. My discussion does not amount to tracing the traditions about eschatological adversaries in general in these texts, and so I will not discuss figures such as Mastema in *Jubilees* who clearly does not act against a Messiah. In each case, I will discuss the hypothetical milieu and date of each document, these decisions will mostly remain hypothetical. Furthermore, they cannot overcloud the fact that these texts very often did not achieve textual stability until much later and that the Jewish and Christian influences are often impossible to untangle in hindsight. Indeed, extracanonical pseudepigraphic writings are a category within which speaking about Jewish or Christian provenance is acutely anachronistic. At the time when many of these writings were being composed or transmitted, what later became two distinct religion was still an interconnected web of mutual influence and interdependence.

My discussion will proceed on a broadly chronological basis, and so I will study the following documents: *Psalm of Solomon 17*; *Sibylline Oracles*; *Second Apocalypse of Baruch*; *Fourth Book of Ezra*; *Apocalypse of Peter*; *Coptic Apocalypse of Elijah*; and *Testament of the Lord*.²

¹ For a relatively recent study of the question of Jewish and Christian authorship of the OT Pseudepigrapha, see Davila 2005, reviewed in Inowlocki 2006: 827–31; Bauckham 2008: 461–84.

² My survey does not include the *Assumption* (or the *Testament*) of *Moses*, a first-century CE Jewish text. It is related to studied in the context of antimessianism by Charles 1920: 2.83; Jenks 1991: 164–7; Horbury 1998a: 114, 119; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 297–302; Lorein 2003: 133–42. Nevertheless, the text does not portray a messianic figure as conflicted with a distinct antagonist.

5.1 Psalm of Solomon 17

One of the most important pieces of evidence for the pre-Christian Jewish messianic belief is present in a collection of psalms known under the title *Psalms of Solomon*.³ From among them, *Psalm of Solomon* 17 offers a vision of a militant Davidic figure, thus possibly making room of antimessianic opponents. This possibility deserves closer scrutiny, especially since *Psalms of Solomon* have rarely been referred to in the Antichrist scholarship.⁴

Psalm 17, which I accept to have been written around the year 30 BCE,⁵ opens with a fervent and hopeful invocation to God (17:1-4), followed by an account of the rise and collapse of ἁμαρτωλοί, “sinners”, undoubtedly criticising Hasmonean rulers (vv. 5-9). The disastrous rule of ὁ ἄνομος, “the lawless one”, identifiable with Herod, causes the demise of the sinners (17:11-14, 18b-20).⁶ He also forces οἱ ἀγαπῶντες συναγωγὰς ὁσίων, “those who love holy assemblies”, probably meaning the community from which the text or the entire collection stem,⁷ to go into the wilderness (vv. 16-18a). What follows is a plea to God for a messianic ruler who would defeat Israel’s enemies and restore it to its former purity and glory (vv. 21-46). The identification of this future monarch as a messianic figure is beyond doubt, as he is called “the king, son of David” (v. 21) and χριστὸς κύριος, “Lord Messiah”⁸ (v. 33c), he punishes sinners and Gentiles (vv. 22-23,

³ For this opinion see Atkinson 1998: 104; idem 2011: 9; Ábel 2016: 57.

⁴ Charles 1920: 2.78; Lorein 2003: 93–8; on the antimessianic reading of Isa 11:4 and Psalm 2 in *Ps. Sol.* 17 see above, pp. 90, 108–9.

⁵ So Caquot 1986: 213–8; Atkinson 1996: 313–22; idem 1998: 104–7; idem 1999: 440–4; idem 2000: 107–12; Rocca 2007: 324–7; Wright 2007: 6; Eckhardt 2015: 18–22 (in relation to parts of the *Psalm*); Ábel 2016: 35. See also Tromp 1993: 344–61 who dates *Psalm* 17 shortly before that, to the time of the Parthian invasion in 40 BCE. Most of the *Psalms of Solomon* are dated to the period between Pompey’s capture of Jerusalem in 63 BCE and his assassination in Egypt in 48 BCE. Atkinson in his later work reverted to the Pompeian dating of *Ps. Sol.* 17; see Atkinson 2004: 135–9; idem 2011: 9–11.

⁶ See Atkinson 1996: 320–2 on how this part of *Psalm* 17 relates to the events of the Herodian siege.

⁷ This community used to be typically referred to as Pharisaic; see Wright 2007: 7–10 for a review of scholarly opinions. A rigid ascription of the collection to one of the Second Temple communities known to us is unnecessary and probably impossible.

⁸ I here follow the reading of all the manuscripts and supported by Wright 2007: 48–9; Ábel 2016: 186. Most editions amend to χριστὸς κύριον, “the anointed of the Lord”, in line with standard Biblical idiom. Even if the emendation is accepted, the messianic status of the monarch is not significantly affected.

etc.), and governs righteously (v. 26, etc.). He is not only called a Messiah, but also clearly acts like one.

The Messiah of *Psalms* 17 fights multiple types of enemies: the unrighteous rulers (vv. 22a, 36b), Gentiles (vv. 22b, 24b, 25a), and sinners (vv. 23, 25b, 36b). The lawless one from vv. 11-18 is not mentioned explicitly among these groups, but it is quite clear that he, too, will be deposed and destroyed by the new Davidic ruler. In view of the identification of the lawless one in v. 11 with Herod the Great, the three groups named above appear to represent sections of society that thrived under Herod's rule. At the same time, they are at odds with the Messiah's—and most probably also the author's—two fundamental concerns: first, purity, threatened by the presence of foreigners in the land (v. 28b) and in the Temple (vv. 14, 30b), and then justice, previously thwarted (vv. 19b-20) but now reinstated (vv. 29, 43b-c). The claims would not have been difficult to form on the basis of events from Herod's early reign as related by Josephus, such as the pillaging of the city by the Roman forces (*Ant.* 14.16.2. §§470-481; *Bell.* 1.18.3 §§354-357), including the burning of the porticoes of the Temple (*Ant.* 14.16.2 §476) and the sacrilegious offering of a golden crown to God by Sosius (*Bell.* 1.18.3 §357). It is therefore historically plausible to state that the author of *Psalms of Solomon* 17 could have cast Herod as an unjust, cruel ruler propped up by Gentile military power.

The portrayal of the messianic Davidic king offers a general contrast to the presentation of the lawless one. Whereas the latter's reign is associated with violence (v. 11b), sacrilege (v. 14), expulsion of the faithful (vv. 16-18a), drought (v. 19), and universal sinfulness (v. 20), the rule of the expected Messiah is depicted as inaugurating eradication of unrighteousness (vv. 22-25, etc.), reconstitution of the nation (v. 26a), purification of Jerusalem (v. 30c), with the Messiah acting as a sinless shepherd of the people (v. 40b). Consequently, the antimessianic character of the Herodian lawless one

and his companions is developed in two ways. Not only are they to be defeated by the future anointed monarch, but also serve as a foil to him. The nature of Herod's rule is, in the mind of the author, opposite of what one should expect of the eschatological future.

In conclusion, *Psalm of Solomon* 17 offers a crucial piece of evidence in relation to pre-Christian Jewish belief about both the Messiah and his opponents. It presents Herod the Great as a contrast to and a direct enemy of the future Davidic Messiah. The psalm is therefore not only a crucial source for the study of ancient Jewish messianism, but also must inform the scholarly vision of the Antichrist tradition. The rulers and sinners, most probably including Herod himself, engage in a violent conflict with the Davidic Messiah and provide a contrast to—although not an imitation of—his rule. *Psalm of Solomon* 17 is thus an example of these two key antimessianic motifs being combined. Importantly, since this text comes from the latter half of the first century BCE, it would be the first clear occurrence of such a combination which I have observed in CHAPTER IV to be the case in 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation from the first century CE. *Psalm of Solomon* 17 is therefore an important text within of the antimessianic tradition, as it portrays the opponents of the Anointed One as both his violent opponents and, at the same time, as his evil reflection.

5.2 The Sibylline Oracles

The next pseudepigraphic text to be investigated in this chapter are the *Sibylline Oracles*. The entire Sibylline collection consists of God-inspired prophetic utterances of an originally pagan prophetess, Sibyl. The content of the *Oracles* varies greatly with regard to themes, but their eschatological trajectory is clear, as the Sibyl offers apocalyptic retellings of world history as well as end-time prophecies. The collection as a whole presents an interpreter with multiple problems related to its undeniably composite nature and, consequently, uncertain dating and origin.

One of the major motifs flowing through the *Oracles* is Sibyl's fear of the repeatedly prophesied return of Nero which is repeatedly prophesised (*Sib. Or.* 4.119-124, 137-139; 5.28-34, 93-107, 137-151, 214-227, 361-371; 8.68-72, 139-159). These texts have attracted considerable attention of the scholars interested in the Antichrist.⁹ Although Nero (or at least a Nero-like figure) is clearly portrayed as a negative actor in the Sibylline eschatological scenarios, he is nowhere portrayed as an opponent or a false imitator of a messianic figure. What is more, the *Oracles*, perhaps due to their composite nature, do not offer a vision of his demise. Therefore, these passages cannot be justifiably included in the Antichrist tradition and will not be discussed in detail in what follows.

Nonetheless, two Sibylline passages, namely *Sib. Or.* 2.165-173 and 3.63-74, deserve investigation. Both mention Beliar as performing deceptive signs and thus possibly assuming the role of the Antimesiah.¹⁰

5.2.1 *Sibylline Oracle* 2.165-173

Sib. Or. 2.165-173 constitutes a part of the second oracle which is now universally understood as continuous with the first Sibyl.¹¹ The entirety of the oracle displays a mixture of Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian influences, which are extremely difficult to untangle; this difficulty is particularly pronounced in the passage under investigation. *Sib. Or.* 2.165-173 is part of an oracle describing the signs of the end of the world (vv. 154-173). I quote the text in full:

¹⁶⁵ἡ δὲ συναίρεσις ἐγγύς, ὅταν τινὲς ἀντι προφητῶν ¹⁶⁶ψευδαπάται πελάσωσιν ἐπὶ χθονὶ φημίζοντες. ¹⁶⁷καὶ Βελίαρ θ' ἥξει καὶ σήματα πολλὰ ποιήσῃ ¹⁶⁸ἀνθρώποις. τότε δὴ ὁσίων ἀκαταστασί' ἀνδρῶν ¹⁶⁹ἐκλέκτων πιστῶν τε, λεηλασίῃ τε γένηται ¹⁷⁰τούτων ἡδ' Ἑβραίων. δεινὸς δ' αὐτοῖς χόλος ἥξει, ¹⁷¹ἡνίκα δὴ δεκάφυλος ἀπ' ἀντολῆς λαὸς ἥξει

⁹ See e.g. Jenks 1991: 259–67; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 331–5.

¹⁰ On the role of the Psalms in the *Sibylline Oracles* see above, pp. 108 n. 155.

¹¹ Geffcken 1902b: 47–53; Kurfess 1941: 151–65. See Lightfoot 2007: 443 on the lack of book division in the textual witnesses of *Sibylline Oracles* 1 and 2.

¹⁷²ζητήσων λαόν, ὃν ἀπώλεσεν Ἀσσύριας κλών, ¹⁷³συμφύλων Ἑβραίων· ἔθνη δ' ἐπὶ τοῖσιν ὀλοῦνται.¹²

¹⁶⁵But the gathering [is] near, when, instead of prophets, some ¹⁶⁶false deceivers will approach, speaking on earth. ¹⁶⁷And Beliar will also come and perform many signs ¹⁶⁸for the people. Then indeed [there will be] disorder of the holy men, ¹⁶⁹chosen and faithful, as well as pillaging ¹⁷⁰of those and of the Hebrews. And terrible wrath will come upon them ¹⁷¹at the time when the people of the ten tribes come from the East, ¹⁷²seeking the people—destroyed by the Assyrian twig—¹⁷³of their fellow Hebrew tribesmen. Thereafter the nations will perish.¹³

It is difficult to assess the provenance or the dating of the passage. Both the grammatical separation of the Hebrews from the holy, chosen, and faithful men in v. 170, as well as the manifold links with the Synoptic Apocalypse¹⁴ seem to point to a Christian origin. On the other hand, the oracle itself goes on to prophesy the eschatological dominion of the Hebrews (vv. 174-176) which could indicate Jewish authorship. Such an assertion, however, does not necessarily preclude Christian character of the passage, since a very similar view is expressed by the undeniably Christian Commodianus (*Carm. apol.* 972-978).¹⁵ It thus appears that the oracle, of which the passage at hand is part, should be understood as arising from a Christian milieu at some point in the second or early third century CE.¹⁶

This context has definite bearing on how *Sib. Or.* 2.165-173 relates to the antimessianic tradition. The passage mentions deceivers as well as Beliar (vv. 166-167), thus assembling a host of eschatological false prophets. Such a group is known from Jesus' eschatological discourse, where the false messiahs are first mentioned. Certainly, no messianic figure is explicitly or implicitly mentioned, and so the end-times deceivers are not overtly antimessianic. It is nevertheless difficult to escape the conclusion that,

¹² Text according to *ibid.* 296.

¹³ I agree with Collins 1983: 1.349 in his translation of the last sentence; cf. Lightfoot 2007: 317 who translates "Races shall fall to them".

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 472.

¹⁵ See Lightfoot 2007: 473 on the relationship between *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2 and Commodianus. On Commodianus himself see below, pp. 265-8.

¹⁶ For a similar conclusion about provenance and dating, see Lightfoot 2007: 143.

within the early Christian context, performing signs in order to lead people astray was a clear mark of usurping messianic status. Thus, both Beliar and the deceivers perform a sort of antimessianic function which, however, is mentioned only in passing and does not directly lead to their demise. Hence, the contribution of *Sib. Or.* 2.165-173 to the Antichrist tradition should be properly understood as secondary.

5.2.2 *Sibylline Oracle* 3.63-74

The second Sibylline text to be discussed is *Sib. Or.* 3.63-74. It belongs to a larger unit (vv. 1-92) of the current textual form of the third Oracle which is now commonly assumed not to be continuous with the reminder of the text.¹⁷ The text, which is frequently referenced in the Antichrist scholarship,¹⁸ is ripe with detail and deserves to be quoted in full:

⁶³ἐκ δὲ Σεβαστηνῶν ἥξει Βελίαρ μετόπισθεν ⁶⁴καὶ στήσει¹⁹ ὀρέων ὕψος, στήσει δὲ θάλασσαν, ⁶⁵ἡέλιον πυρόεντα μέγαν λαμπρὰν τε σελήνην ⁶⁶καὶ νέκυας στήσει καὶ σήματα πολλὰ ποιήσει ⁶⁷ἀνθρώποις· ἀλλ' οὐχὶ τελεσφόρα ἔσσει· ἐν αὐτῷ, ⁶⁸ἀλλὰ πλανᾷ καὶ δὴ μέροπας, πολλοὺς τε πλανήσει ⁶⁹πιστοὺς τ' ἐκλεκτοὺς θ' Ἑβραίους ἀνόμους τε καὶ ἄλλους ⁷⁰ἀνέρας, οἵτινες οὐπω θεοῦ λόγον εἰσήκουσαν. ⁷¹ἀλλ' ὁπότεν μέγαλοιο θεοῦ πελάσωσιν ἀπειλαί, ⁷²καὶ δύναμις φλογέουσα δι' οἴδατος εἰς γαῖαν ἥξει, ⁷³καὶ Βελίαρ φλέξει καὶ ὑπερφιάλους ἀνθρώπους ⁷⁴πάντας, ὅσοι τούτῳ πίστιν ἐνιποιήσαντο...²⁰

⁶³Out of the Sebastenes will then Beliar come ⁶⁴and he will elevate mountains, still the sea, ⁶⁵the great burning sun, and the shining moon, ⁶⁶and he will raise the dead and perform many signs ⁶⁷for people, but he will not be successful in it, ⁶⁸but he will still lead people astray, and indeed many ⁶⁹faithful and elect Hebrews, as well as the lawless ones and other ⁷⁰men who have not yet listened to the word of God. ⁷¹But when the threats of the great God come near ⁷²and the burning power comes through the swollen sea unto the land, ⁷³it will burn both Beliar and the arrogant people—⁷⁴all of those who trusted in him.

One should firstly note the peculiar similarities between *Sib. Or.* 2.165-173 and 3.63-74. The level of similarity between these two texts cannot be due to accident alone

¹⁷ Geffcken 1902b: 15; Bate 1918: 21–2; Collins 1974: 21–2; Gauger 1998: 440; Merkel 1998: 1059; Buitenwerf 2003: 65–72; Lightfoot 2007: 94–6. See also Nikiprowetzky 1970: 223–5 who, while arguing for the unity of the entire oracle, admits that 3.63-74 may be a later addition.

¹⁸ Bousset 1896: 96–7; Charles 1920: 2.84–5 (discussed critically in Lorein 2003: 13–5); Jenks 1991: 257–9; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 336–8; Horbury 1998a: 125–6.

¹⁹ Gauger 1998: 70 has σείσει, “he will shake up”, unsupported by the MSS or other editions.

²⁰ Text according to Geffcken 1902a: 50–1.

and indicates conscious borrowing of vocabulary and, to some extent, concepts. The direction of the borrowing is difficult to establish, as both passages appear to be inserted into their respective oracles and hence are difficult to date, and either contains details alien to the other. One tentative way of solving this problem is noticing that *Sib. Or.* 2.165-173 seems to resolve or eschew the difficulties present in 3.63-74, as it does not include the famously ambiguous reference to Beliar's origin ἐκ Σεβαστηνῶν and clarifies the complex grammar of 3.68-70 by making the elect faithful ones distinct from the Hebrews (2.168-170). It can be suggested—but nothing more—that *Sib. Or.* 2.165-173 draws on the elements of the Beliar passage from the third Oracle.²¹

Beliar's origin ἐκ Σεβαστηνῶν has long had scholars divided as to its historical importance. Some have argued that it derives from the Greek σεβαστός, a common translation of the Latin imperial title *augustus*.²² On the other hand, it has been claimed that it should be understood as a demonym arising from the name Σεβαστή, accorded to the city of Samaria upon its refoundation by Herod the Great' when he was confirmed as ruler by Octavian Augustus in 28/27 BCE.²³ The first possibility appears to be substantiated by the similarity of *Sib. Or.* 3.63-74 to the legend of Nero's return, as well as its suitability in the anti-Roman tone of the entire Sibylline collection, the third Oracle on its own, and even the passage's co-text (see 3.46-62 on Rome's universal rule and ultimate destruction).

The second possibility is also not without its strengths. Σεβαστηνός, unlike σεβαστός, is never attested with the meaning "member of the imperial family" or the like,

²¹ This conclusion is in line with Lightfoot's argument that *Sibylline Oracles* 1-2 are a reworking of the third Oracle; see Lightfoot 2007: 94-109.

²² Bousset 1896: 96-7; Charles 1920: 2.84; Collins 1974: 86-7; Yarbro Collins 1976: 181-2; Jenks 1991: 258; McGinn 1994: 292 n. 50; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 337-8; Lightfoot 2007: 472 n. 74.

²³ Alexandre 1869: 80-1; Geffcken 1902b: 15; Rigaux 1932: 200; Ernst 1967: 265; Nikiprowetzky 1970: 223-5; Gauger 1998: 490-1; Horbury 1998a: 125-6; Lorein 2003: 15. Cf. Bate 1918: 48-9; Merkel 1998: 1060 who do not decide either way.

but is always referencing an inhabitant of one of the many cities called Sebaste (see especially Josephus, *Ant.* 19.9.2 §361, §§364-365; *Bell.* 2.3.4 §52; 2.4.2 §59; etc., referring to Sebaste in Samaria).²⁴ Horbury rightly notices that 3.63-74 does not characterise Beliar as Neronic or returning; indeed, aside from the contested reference to Σεβαστῆνοι, nothing in this particular passage points to Rome.²⁵ On the other hand, locating the origin of the Sibylline Beliar in Sebaste in Samaria would harmonise with the ancient Jewish and Christian uneasiness about Samaritans in general and Samaritan false prophecy in particular. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.4.1 §§85-87, mentions a Samaritan who incited his fellow countrymen to assemble at Mount Gerizim to uncover the vessels allegedly hidden there by Moses, only to be prevented from doing so and violently repressed on Pilate's orders. *Asc. Isa.* 2:12; 3:1, 3 identifies the false prophet Belkira as Samaritan in origin. Very importantly, the place of the activity of Simon Magus is described in Acts 8:9-11 as "the city" and is surely identical with "[the] city of Samaria" in Acts 8:5.²⁶ Likewise, Simon was identified as Samaritan in later Christian antiheretical discourse.²⁷ Sebaste in Samaria issued coins bearing the word Σεβαστηνῶν—the same word form as that present in 3.64—under the reign of Domitian.²⁸ It is therefore very probable that *Sib. Or.* 3.63-74 reflects the ancient Jewish and Christian uneasiness about false prophecy emerging from Samaria, rather than about Nero's return.

²⁴ See the comparable use of the Latin *augustiani* in Pliny the Elder, *Hist.* 3.3.23 with reference to the inhabitants of the cities called Augusta.

²⁵ Horbury 1998a: 126.

²⁶ In favour of the identification, see Vincent 1936: 227–32; Lüdemann 1975: 20; Zangenberg 2000: 520–5; cf. Haar 2003: 160–6 who claims that any attempts at pinpointing the city in Acts 8:5, 9 rely on insufficient evidence.

²⁷ See Justin, *1 Apol.* 26.2; *Dial.* 120; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.23.1-2; Tertullian, *An.* 34; Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.2, 14, 15; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 21; *Ps-Clem. Hom.* 1.15; 2.14; 5.2. Justin, Hippolytus, and the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies identify Simon Magus as coming from a Samaritan village of Gitta (modern-day Jatt), halfway between Sebaste and Caesarea Maritima. Their insight seems to link with a textual variant of 8 in Acts 8:5 which reads της καίσαριας instead of της Σαμαρείας. This localisation might be due to the influence of the story of (most probably different) Simon the Magician, attested in Josephus, *Ant.* 20.7.2 §142, and active in Caesarea under the procuratorship of Felix (52-60 CE).

²⁸ See RPC II 2226-2230.

Having discussed the context of this passage at length, I can now consider its antimessianic potential. It is beyond doubt that the passage does not present a messianic figure conflicted with Beliar. Furthermore, it is explicitly God who brings about his and his followers' demise (vv. 71-74). The eschatological antagonist of *Sib. Or.* 3.63-74 is therefore not an antimessianic agent in the sense of being in direct conflict with an anointed figure. There is, however, another facet to Beliar's depiction in this passage, namely his performing signs that resemble those of the Messiah. The expectation of natural transformation (vv. 64-65), performing wonders, and raising the dead (vv. 66) are present in multiple Jewish and Christian messianic texts, such as 4Q521, the Synoptics, and Revelation. It is therefore quite plausible to think, whether this passage be Jewish or Christian in origin,²⁹ that the author saw Beliar as deceptively mimicking an ideal of a messianic figure.³⁰ This literary technique falls under the general category of mimetic rivalry. Since the Sibylline Beliar does not enter into combat with a Messiah, but is rather ironically modelled on a general messianic idea, *Sib. Or.* 3.63-74 appears to have a close conceptual relation to the Qumran *Testimonia* and several writings of the NT which also present antimessianic agents as imitating messianic paradigms rather than fighting their embodiments.

²⁹ The question of religious provenance of the passage cannot be decided due to its shortness. The positive reference to "faithful and elect Hebrews" might point to a Jewish milieu. On the other hand, the Hebrews are among those led astray by Beliar and, consequently, face future destruction. The positive predicates can thus be an ironic jibe, mostly likely coming from a Christian author.

³⁰ As noted by Geffcken 1902b: 50, two 15th-century MSS of the *Sibylline Oracles* insert a comment immediately before 3.63 that identify Beliar in this passage as the Antichrist. Codex Monacensis 351 (P) reads: μετὰ τὰδε προβαίνουσα τοῖς λόγοις περὶ τοῦ ἀπατεῶνος δαίμονος τοῦ ἀντιχρήστου φησὶν ὅδε πη. "After these come the words about the deceiving demon the Antichrist and it says this somewhere". Codex Vindobonensis hist. gr. XCVI 6 (A) inserts the following: μετὰ τὰδε προβαίνουσα τοῖς λόγοις περὶ τοῦ ἀπαταιῶνος φησὶν ἡγοῦν περὶ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου ὅδε, "After these come the words about the deceiver and it says namely this about the Antichrist". This shows that at least some readers sensed the antimessianic potential of the Sibylline Beliar.

5.3 Second Apocalypse of Baruch

The following section will be devoted to the antimessianic aspects of the Syriac *Apocalypse of Baruch*, commonly known as *2 Baruch*.³¹ The book centres on the figure of Baruch in the aftermath of the destruction of the First Jerusalem Temple when he receives a series of visions and their interpretations, as well as addresses the people admonishing them to obey the Torah.³² Since the narrative positions itself after the events of 587 BCE, it is a matter of scholarly consensus that the work itself was composed in the aftermath of the fall of the Second Temple in 70 CE and deliberately places itself in the distant, yet poignantly relevant past. *2 Baruch* is typically dated between 70 and 132 CE and researchers failed to decisively substantiate any more precise dating.³³

The text is most often identified as Jewish, primarily due to its focus on the Torah and lack of any obvious Christian influences. However, this conclusion has been recently challenged by Nir who, in line with the current attempt to link the Pseudepigrapha with Christian origins, sees it as a Christian work.³⁴ While her argument did not garner much support and is definitely in need of reconsidering some of the evidence,³⁵ it definitely underscores the overall difficulty (and sometimes even futility) of categorising texts as “Jewish” or “Christian” in the first and early second century CE. It is not inconceivable that *2 Baruch* was a product of a Jewish Christian community or that, its Christian origin notwithstanding, it was appealing to some Jewish readers. The text does not declare itself

³¹ The complete text is preserved in Syriac in one MS from the sixth or seventh century CE (edited in Dederling 1973: 1–50; Gurtner 2009) with two Greek fragments preserved among the Oxyrhynchus papyri (P. Oxy. 403 containing 2 Bar 12:1–13:2 on the recto and 13:11–14:3 on the verso), four further Syriac fragments found in mediaeval Jacobite lectionaries, as well as an Arabic translation preserved in a single MS from the late tenth/early eleventh century CE (published by Leemhuis, Klijn, Van Gelder 1986). 2 *Baruch* 78–87, which includes the letter of Baruch to the nine and a half tribes in the diaspora, often functioned separately from the rest of the apocalypse, with almost forty MSS of it known.

³² On the sevenfold structuring pattern of *2 Baruch* see esp. Murphy 1984: 11–29.

³³ See Lied 2011: 245 for a brief overview of the scholarly opinions.

³⁴ Nir 2003: 199–201.

³⁵ For instance, Nir, *ibid.* 200, claims that “[i]n the Bible, in the literature of the Second Temple, and in the early layers of talmudic literature there is no apocalyptic messianism”. Such a statement can only be grounded on a very peculiar reading of texts such as Daniel, *Psalms of Solomon* 17, and 4Q285.

to be either Jewish or Christian and it could have functioned successfully within either community (assuming such distinct communities indeed existed at that time) or indeed within both of them. Therefore, I will not opt for any specific provenance of the text, as it would do violence to it, while being of little consequence for my argument.

Moving onto the question of the significance of *2 Baruch* for ancient antimessianism, one should firstly note that the text explicitly mentions an anointed figure six times (29:3; 30:1; 39:7; 40:1; 70:9; 72:2; the Syriac always has ܡܫܚܐ, with 70:9 adding ܚܒܝܐ, “my servant”).³⁶ The appearance and actions of the Messiah are one of the driving forces of the end-time scenario of *2 Baruch* and make it possible for antimessianic expectation to arise as well.

The first occasion when such an expectation might be present is 29:3-4:

And it will happen that when all that which should come to pass in these parts has been accomplished, the Anointed One will begin to be revealed. And Behemoth will reveal itself from its place, and Leviathan will come from the sea, the two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation and which I shall have kept until that time. And they will be nourishment for all who are left.³⁷

2 Bar 29:3-4, being a part of the dialogue between God and Baruch in ch. 22-30, introduces the Anointed One for the first time. It contributes to the stream of intertestamental and later Rabbinic interpretations of הַתַּיִם הַגְּדֹלִים, “the great sea monsters”, in Gen 1:21, as well as of the extended description of Behemoth and Leviathan in Job 40-41. The passage from *2 Baruch* shows close conceptual affinity to *4 Ezra* 6:49-52, but differs from it in focus.³⁸ The latter concentrates on the account of creation,

³⁶ See Bogaert 1969: 1, 413–8; Nir 2003: 151–98; Henze 2011: 293–305 for extended discussions.

³⁷ Here and below I follow the translation of Klijn 1983: 621–53.

³⁸ *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra* are universally understood as closely related on multiple levels, as it was shown by Harnisch 1969; Berger 1992; Henze, Stone 2013. However, the question of direct or indirect dependence of one upon the other has not yet been successfully resolved. For a synoptic presentation of *2 Bar* 29:4-7 and *4 Ezra* 6:44-52 see Berger 1992: 188.

whereas the former envisages Leviathan and Behemoth as food for the messianic banquet.³⁹

It is beyond doubt that the passage is explicitly messianic and that Behemoth and Leviathan are slain to be served at the eschatological feast. It would be natural to see the Messiah and the monsters as opposed to each other.⁴⁰ Such a conflict, however, is not borne out by the text itself nor, indeed, by some of the later appropriations of this story. The passage does not show the Messiah actively slaughtering the monsters and does not even attempt to portray them as evil. There is no visible hostility or conflict between them, and there are no palpable overtones of Isa 27:1 where God slays Leviathan. It is worth noting that the motif of Behemoth and Leviathan being served at the Messiah's end-time banquet is wide-spread in Rabbinic literature. Still, no Rabbinic source argues that either Leviathan or Behemoth are active enemies of the Messiah.⁴¹ Therefore, it would be ungrounded to claim that Behemoth and Leviathan are Messiah's opponents in 2 *Bar* 29:3-4.

A real example of antimessianic opposition is present in the explanation of Baruch's forest vision in 2 *Baruch* 35-40.⁴² In 39:7, it is explained to Baruch that the fountain, whose waters submerge the forest in his dream (36:3-6), is the Messiah, with the trees representing the fourth kingdom (within the traditional Danielic sequence of four), almost certainly signifying Rome.⁴³ Although it is the figure represented by the

³⁹ Bogaert 1969: 2.63.

⁴⁰ See Beale 1999: 633 who sees this passage in such a way.

⁴¹ Str-B 4.1156-7; Whitney 2006: 93-154. The Beasts in Revelation 13 (see above, pp. 188-96) definitely hark back to Leviathan and Behemoth, whereas the birds feasting on the carcasses of the Beast and its allies in Rev 19:17-21 are a parody of the wedding banquet of the Lamb in 19:1-10. This rereading has had a profound influence on the Christian reception of Leviathan and Behemoth, as it is visible in Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Iob* 33-34 on Job 40-41 where the monsters are cast as explicitly and thoroughly evil, with Leviathan being equated to the Antichrist.

⁴² The core passage of this section (39:7-40:4) is strikingly similar to 4 *Ezra* 12:31-35.

⁴³ See Nir 2003: 173-6 for this identification.

cedar that is characterised as the most impious and evil (40:1-2),⁴⁴ it is also clearly distinct from “its hosts” who might be understood as the Roman occupiers in general and are dealt with separately (39:7b; 40:1a). Once they are destroyed, their leader is bound, brought to Mount Zion, convicted of the wrongdoings of his accomplices, and executed by the Messiah. There can be then little doubt that this short passage presents a group of foreign invaders whom the Anointed One combats and defeats.⁴⁵ An echo of this scenario is contained in 72:2 where the Messiah kills the nations who oppressed Israel.

In conclusion, 2 *Baruch* offers minor, yet explicit traces of antimessianic speculation which revolve around the Messiah engaged in a violent end-time confrontation with the Gentiles. This vision, which develops the motif of the antimessianic violence and is silent about deceitful imitation, is already present in 4Q285, which describes the fall of the Kittim and their king, and resembles the scenario present in *Psalms of Solomon* 17, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation, which all accentuate end-time conflict.

5.4 **Fourth Book of Ezra**

The investigation will now turn to *Fourth Book of Ezra*, also known as *Ezra Apocalypse* consisting of ch. 3-14 of 2 *Esdras*, which is a document closely related to 2 *Baruch*. The text constitutes a series of seven visions received by Ezra which make up a progressive revelation responding to the seer’s troubled inquiries about the nature of iniquity, fate, and salvation. Right at its very beginning (4 *Ezra* 3:1) the narrative places itself thirty years after the destruction of the Solomonic Temple, i.e. ca. 557 BCE, but it is, just as in the case of 2 *Baruch*, widely accepted to be a response to the events of 70

⁴⁴ Charles 1913: 2.501 on 2 *Bar* 40:1 argues that this figure represents Pompey the Great. Hadot 1965: 90–1; Bogaert 1969: 2.74, who see the text as having been written or composed post-70 CE, both allow for the possibility that the forest vision might have originated from an earlier source that had Pompey in mind.

⁴⁵ The antimessianic aspect of this passage is noticed by Bousset 1896: 122, 231; Jenks 1991: 290–1; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 320–3.

CE, and hence to have been written around the year 100.⁴⁶ The text does not contain any obviously Christian elements and is therefore commonly seen as a Jewish text. At the same time, the work is preserved as a part of 2 *Esdras*, a composite text including 5 *Ezra* (2 *Esdras* 1-2) and 6 *Ezra* (2 *Esdras* 15-16) which are both seen as Christian documents. Furthermore, its reception and transmission are exclusively Christian.⁴⁷ Consequently, like 2 *Baruch*, 4 *Ezra* should be understood as occupying a place in the broad, intermediary space between what we would now call “Judaism” and “Christianity”, which flourished in the late first and early second century CE. It is most plausible and fruitful to regard the text as a literary unity and a work of a single author, albeit probably drawing on pre-existent traditions.

The work clearly envisages an eschatological redemptive figure who emerges four times: in 7:28-29; in the vision of the eagle (11:37-12:1) and its interpretation (12:31-34); in the vision of the man (13:3-13) and its explanation (13:25-52); and in 14:9. Each passage portrays the Messiah in a different way which hints at lingering theological outlook of the sources of 4 *Ezra*.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the author apparently considered them coherent enough to be assembled together, and so it is justified to read all of these passages as presenting a unified (or at least intended as unified) view of messianism. I will scrutinise these passages in turn and discuss to what extent they expect the Messiah to face enemies.

The first explicit mention of an anointed figure (here also called “son”) occurs in 7:28-29 during Ezra’s dialogue with the angel after receiving the third vision. The passage

⁴⁶ The references to the three decades might be based on Ezek 1:1, but it is still usually understood as based in reality. This dating is accepted by Metzger 1983: 520; Willett 1989: 53; Hogan 2008: 1; Daschke 2010: 105; Grabbe 2013: 227; Najman 2014: 7. Stone 1990: 10 considers the book to have been written slightly earlier, during the reign of Domitian (81-96 CE). Box 1912: xxxii–xxxiii, representing an earlier redactional approach to 4 *Ezra*, assigns its final version to around 120 CE.

⁴⁷ 4 *Ezra* enjoyed a wide circulation in multiple ancient languages on which see Stone 1990: 1–9; no traces of a Greek or Hebrew version—the latter being often argued to be the original—are known. On the Christian reverberations of 4 *Ezra*, see *ibid.* 1, 43–7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 212–3.

runs as follows: “For my Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and he shall make rejoice those who remain for four hundred years. And after these years my son the Messiah shall die, and all who draw human breath.”⁴⁹ These events are followed by a week-long silence (v. 30), resurrection (vv. 31-32), and judgement (vv. 33-44), without the Messiah being mentioned again. His role in this passage is minimal, as it is limited to being revealed, bringing joy for 400 years,⁵⁰ and then dying along with all humans. While the mention of a dying Messiah in 4 *Ezra* 7:29 finds no parallel in contemporaneous literature outside of the NT, this event is not described as a killing and no culprits are identified. Much more probably, this death is meant to set a time limit to the Messiah’s earthly presence which is followed by the judgement and rule of God himself.⁵¹ The same point can be derived from 14:9 which promises Ezra the presence of God’s servant “until the times are ended”. Consequently, no antimessianic speculation is present in this passage.

The next appearance of a messianic figure happens in the fifth vision in which the dreaming Ezra is presented with a multi-winged, multi-headed eagle arising from the sea (11:1-35) which is subsequently reprimanded by a lion-like figure (vv. 36-45) and disappears (12:1-3). The vision is followed by an explanation offered by the *angelus interpretes* who overtly draws on Daniel 2 and 7 as the source of the images (12:11). The heavenly interpreter instructs Ezra that the eagle represents the fourth Danielic kingdom (Dan 2:40; 7:23-25), although none of the beasts in Dan 7:3-8 look exactly like it. The aquiline motif is therefore an authorial intervention and points undoubtedly to the Roman Empire—which used eagle as a religious and military symbol—as the actual fourth

⁴⁹ All translations are taken from Stone 1990.

⁵⁰ Box 1912: 115–6; Stone 1990: 215 suggest that the length of this period is arrived at by combining Gen 15:13 and Ps 90:15—an exegetical move known from Rabbinic literature (*b. Sanh.* 99a).

⁵¹ It is conceivable that the death of the disconsolate woman on his wedding night in 10:1 is supposed to hark to Messiah’s death in 7:29, but see the cogent criticism of this view by Sjöberg 1949: 134–9.

kingdom.⁵² The lion accuses it of oppressing the world, judging unrighteously, and persecuting the innocent ones (11:40-42), and pronounces judgement over it (vv. 43-44). The lion is interpreted as “the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days, who will arise from the posterity of David” (12:32a) which explains the leonine image as evoking the Davidic tribe of Judah. The actions of the lion in the vision are more restrained than those of the messianic actor in the angelic interpretation (12:31-34). Whereas the lion only accuses and indicts the eagle, who then disappears into thin air, the Messiah is also said to destroy the unrighteous rulers (v. 33c), as well as to deliver and to make joyful the remnant of the people (v. 34). Whilst the difference might be due to the vision being originally a separate source, it is clear that the author saw the Davidic Messiah as an active opponent, accuser, and executioner of Rome. Although the situation falls short of direct conflict, it would be implausible not to see the Messiah as opposed to Rome and, by translation, not to see Rome as an antimessianic force.

The end-time violence of *4 Ezra* climaxes in the seer’s sixth vision (13:1-13) which is also dream. Ezra sees a man who, like the eagle in 11:1, emerges from the depths of the sea and travels across the face of the earth on clouds, causing universal fear (13:3b-4). He is then met by a vast number of enemies from all corners of the world (v. 5) whom he completely incinerates with his fiery breath (vv. 9-11).⁵³ The enemies are then replaced by another group who approach the triumphant man in peace (vv. 12-13) and are later presented as the nine-and-a-half tribes taken into the Assyrian exile (vv. 39-45). The man from the sea is then interpreted as the Messiah and described as “he whom the Most High has been keeping for many ages” (v. 26), unmistakably echoing the title in 12:32a. Later, he is also identified as “son” or “servant” (depending on the version)—a title present in

⁵² Josephus, *Ant.* 10.11.7 §276, reads the Danielic visions in a very similar way. See Stone 1990: 363–5 on how the image of the eagle maps onto the Roman imperial succession in the first century CE.

⁵³ See above, pp. 91–2, on the echoes of Isa 11:4 in this passage.

7:28-29. Interestingly, his enemies are not identified with any particular nation or state (vv. 33-34) which makes it probable that they are supposed to represent the final attack of undifferentiated nations, similar to the war of Gog and Magog in Rev 20:8. The confrontation is construed as the Messiah punishing the nations for their evil (v. 38)—an interpretation which is not made obvious by the vision itself. Clearly, the conflict presented in the sixth vision of *4 Ezra* is an intensification of that presented in the vision of the eagle. The Messiah is no longer a primarily forensic figure, who executes judgements over the enemies of God, but engages in direct war with them. Again, therefore, the war depicted in 13:1-13 should be understood as antimessianic in character.

A brief mention should be made of another passage, namely *4 Ezra* 5:6a: “And one shall reign whom those who dwell on the earth do not expect.” This brief verse has been seen as relevant or even crucial to the Antichrist tradition,⁵⁴ but can be deemed related to it only if read in the retrospective light of the visions of the eagle and the man. The unexpected ruler is mentioned in the larger sequence of ill-boding eschatological signs (5:1-13) and might have indeed referred to an end-time tyrant. Nevertheless, the text itself—which might well be integrating an earlier source at this point—is not explicit about this. No explicitly evil traits are discernible, nor is his conflict with God/the Messiah or his demise foretold. It is only in the light of the events recounted in later chapters that this figure can be seen as evil. Therefore, 5:6a does not by itself present an antimessianic figure, but can only contribute to the overall picture of the Messiah’s opponents later in the text.

In conclusion, *4 Ezra*, similarly to *2 Baruch*, engages in antimessianic speculation by depicting the Messiah as accusing, executing, and combating hostile foreign powers, especially Rome. The text prioritises violent confrontation between the two and does not

⁵⁴ Bousset 1896: 123, 138; Jenks 1991: 281–2; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 304–5, 308–9; see also Box 1912: 45 n. n; Stone 1990: 111.

portray the antagonists as deceitful imitators of the Anointed One. Crucially, this document, which bears no distinctly Christian marks, originates after the year 70 CE and around the same time as the Revelation of John. It therefore testifies to the fact that antimessianic speculation continued into the post-Second Temple period and was not captured by Christianity alone, but rather remained alive in Jewish eschatological imagination.

5.5 Ascension of Isaiah

The next example of the pseudepigraphic and apocryphal writings to be scrutinised is the *Ascension of Isaiah*, a text of highly uncertain origins and complex transmission history.⁵⁵ The document in all of its extant forms bears distinctively Christian (possibly Jewish Christian) features, especially its knowledge of the Gospel-like narratives about Jesus (3:13-20; 11:1-33) and the repeated references to the Beloved (1:4, 5; 3:13, 17, etc.) which certainly mimic one of the Christological titles of the NT (see Matt 3:17//Mark 1:11//Luke 3:22; Matt 17:5//Mark 9:7; 2 Peter 1:17). At the same time, the work displays appreciation of the Hebrew prophecy (2:9-11; 4:21-22) and is certainly in contact with Jewish mystical traditions through its story of Isaiah's heavenly ascent. The text is usually dated to the late first or early second century CE,⁵⁶ making it a crucial witness to the early period of Christian eschatology and apocalypticism. Although an original Jewish source was posited as the kernel of *Ascension*, this view is no longer widely held.⁵⁷ *Ascension of Isaiah* used to be usually treated as a composite work, with ch. 1-5 termed "The Martyrdom of Isaiah" and ch. 6-11 "The Vision of Isaiah" or "The

⁵⁵ On the different versions and manuscripts of *Ascension*, see esp. Norelli 1995: 11–30.

⁵⁶ For the review of earlier scholarship, see Hall 1990: 300. Knight 1995: 21–3; idem 1996: 33–9 points to the period between 112 CE (letter exchange between Pliny and Trajan) and 138 CE (Hadrian's death). Bauckham 1998: 389 places the *Ascension* in the period of 70-80 CE.

⁵⁷ For ch. 1-5, such a source is argued for by e.g. Dillmann 1877: ix–xiii; Charles 1900: xxxvi–xlili; Tisserant 1909: 59; Caquot 1973: 65–93; cf. Pesce 1983: 13–28. For ch. 6-11, a Jewish source is posited by Culianu 1983: 109–11; cf. Hall 1994: 463–84.

Ascension of Isaiah”.⁵⁸ Although the composite nature of the text cannot be precluded, I will follow Bauckham’s argument in favour of the unity of the text in light of the mutual dependency of its both parts on each other.⁵⁹

Before I discuss the crucial antimessianic passage in *Asc. Isa.* 4:1-14, two observations are in order. Firstly, the text presents a plurality of evil supernatural agents and humans acting at their instigation. They are first introduced in 1:3 as “the prince of this world,”⁶⁰ and his angels, and his authorities, and his powers”,⁶¹ with the leader later called by multiple demonic names: Sammael (1:8, 11; 2:1; 3:13; 5:15-16; 7:9; 11:41), Beliar (1:8; 2:4; 3:11, 13; 4:2, 14, 16, 18; 5:1, 15), Satan (2:2, 7; 5:16; 7:9; 11:24, 41), and Matanbukus (2:4; see also 5:3). Apart from the indeterminate powers accompanying him (1:3; 2:2; 4:4; 5:9), he is also served by Belkira (spelt variously across the versions; 2:5, 12; 3:1, 6, 11; 5:2-5, 8, 12, 15), a Samaritan false prophet. Belkira conspires with Manasseh, himself possessed by Sammael (2:1), which leads to Isaiah’s martyrdom. The demonological universe of *Ascension of Isaiah*—especially its first half—is densely populated, but it is nonetheless an ordered one, with the satanic Sammael-Beliar acting primarily through his two agents, Belkira and Manasseh.⁶² This constellation is not unlike that encountered in ch. 12-13 of Revelation (a text contemporaneous with *Ascension*) where malicious eschatological power rests with the satanic Dragon, the imperial Beast of the Sea and the Beast of the Land *alias* the False Prophet.

⁵⁸ The division was first proposed by Gesenius 1821: 45–56.

⁵⁹ Bauckham 1998: 363–90. This is the working assumption of the first edition of the Ethiopic text by Laurence 1819: 141–80 and is also argued for by Burkitt 1913: 45–6; Burch 1918: 17–23;

⁶⁰ The Ge’ez reads uniformly ዘምኩናን ፡ ዘሰንሰም, “the eternal place of punishment” which should be emended to ዘመኬን ፡ ዘሰንሰማ, “the prince of this world”; so already Dillmann 1877: 62. This is confirmed by the Coptic which reads παρχων, “the ruler”.

⁶¹ Translation is that of Knibb 1983: 143–76.

⁶² This order might be blurred in 1:8 which begins “And Sammael Malkira will serve Manasseh”. This clause poses double difficulty—not only is Sammael identified by a name which replaces Belkira in some witnesses, but also serves Manasseh whom he later is said to control. I accept the solution proposed by Caquot 1973: 72–3; Norelli 1994: 79–80; idem 1995: 95–6 that Malkira here functions as a throne name of Sammael and that the proper translation of ይቸለክ, “he will serve” should be in this context closer to “he will serve his purpose”.

Secondly, rivalry between prophets and concern with false prophecy permeate the document. Isaiah and other prophets, who are specifically identified based on their belief in ascension (2:9), spend two years together in the wilderness, whilst Micaiah is persecuted and killed by Ahab and his son Ahaziah (2:12-16) and Belkira makes a career in Jerusalem (3:1-12). The explicit reasons for Isaiah's martyrdom are also related to prophecy, namely to his claim of having seen God (3:9) and prophesying the descent of the Beloved (3:13).

At the backdrop of his demonic and prophetic concerns, the author, in the course of the report of Isaiah's vision (3:13-4:22),⁶³ presents the scene of the arrival of Beliar (4:1-13). He is stated to be "the great angel", "the king of this world", "a king of iniquity", and, crucially, "a murder of his mother" (4:2) who descends in bodily form on earth and thwarts the work of the apostles of the Beloved (v. 3). His coming is accompanied by astronomical anomalies (v. 5), as he usurps the status of the Beloved by acting and speaking like him (v. 6), performing miracles (v. 10), and erecting statues for himself (v. 11). These actions win him a large following from among those previously heeding the Beloved (vv. 7-9) who serve him and sacrifice to him. Then, after the obviously Danielic period of 1,335 days (vv. 12, 14), the Beloved will descend from the seventh heaven and cast Beliar and his accomplices into Gehenna.

The antimessianic character of this passage is self-evident and has been studied repeatedly.⁶⁴ Granted that the Beloved is certainly identifiable with Jesus, i.e. a messianic figure *par excellence*, Beliar confronts him in two different ways. Firstly, the author appears to pay more attention to construing Beliar as a mimetic rival of the Beloved.⁶⁵ He

⁶³ Most of this material used to be assigned to a source separate from either "The Martyrdom" or "The Vision"; see Ewald 1868: 372; Dillmann 1877: xi–xii; Charles 1900: xiii–xiv, xlii–xliii (who calls it "The Testament of Hezekiah"); Tisserant 1909: 55; cf. criticisms in Pesce 1983: 24–7; Knight 1996: 29–30.

⁶⁴ Bousset 1896: 154–5, 236; Charles 1900: li–lxxiii; Ernst 1967: 291; Jenks 1991: 312–27; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 194–205.

⁶⁵ See esp. Acerbi 1989: 83–98.

assumes a human image (4:2) which is exactly and explicitly what Jesus does gradually during his descent and birth in 10:18-11:17. He is said to imitate the Beloved's actions and speech, including miracles which are, again, later ascribed to Jesus (11:18). Beliar claims lordship (4:6) which the narrator himself ascribes only to Jesus (v. 13; see also 10:13). Notably, people who previously believed in Christ are said to now turn *en masse* to Beliar, thus underscoring their apparent similarity. The tension between the two leads to a direct conflict in 4:14, when Christ punishes him upon descending from the seventh heaven. Later in the text, it is the demonic powers that are identified as responsible for Christ's crucifixion (11:19). *Ascension of Isaiah* thus depicts its eschatological antagonist both as the Messiah's militant enemy and as his deceptive imitator.

The text makes clear that Beliar is related or even identical with Nero, as he is called "the murder of his mother" (4:2), a typical accusation referring to Nero's murder of Agrippina. 4:8, 12 appear to criticise the standard practices of erecting imperial statues and sacrificing to the Emperor. The Danielic timing of Beliar's rule (4:12, 14) was also linked to the period that elapsed between the fire of Rome sometime in 64 CE and Nero's death in mid-68 CE.⁶⁶ The image of the end-time foe in *Ascension* thus appears to have been at least partially modelled after that of Nero.⁶⁷

In conclusion to this section, *Ascension of Isaiah* proves to be an extremely important source for the Antichrist tradition due to its relatively early date. It places the document nearer the relevant NT texts than the later Patristic ones, but at the same time also due to its detailed and expansive description of the messianic opponent. *Ascension*, similarly to Revelation, combines and expounds the two basic motifs of ancient antimessianism, namely violent conflict and mimetic rivalry. Furthermore, the text brings together—perhaps through redactional activity, but possibly due to a singular author's own

⁶⁶ Laurence 1819: 157–8.

⁶⁷ On Beliar as the eschatological tyrant see Dochhorn 2012: 293–315.

intention—Jewish and Christian elements, such as the demonic names, which are clearly of Hebrew origin, on the one hand and references to the Beloved on the other. Since such an early document is able to present such a complex vision of the Antichrist, it makes it very likely that the antimessianic expectation was not set off purely by the early Christian texts such as 1 and 2 John, but was always already steeped in the pre-existent Jewish eschatological imagination.

5.6 **Apocalypse of Peter**

The *Apocalypse of Peter* is a second-century Christian apocalypse and indeed one of the very few NT Apocrypha that can be considered relevant for the Antichrist tradition. The text⁶⁸ is set as a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples (among whom Peter is frequently singled out) in which Jesus reveals the signs of the coming end (ch. 2), the nature of judgement and eternal punishment (ch. 3-14), and finally the vision of paradise (ch. 15-17). Since *Ap. Pet.* 10:5 (Ethiopic) condemns animal idolatry, which was widely practiced in Egypt and commonly criticised and ridiculed by outsiders, the text is often understood to have originated from that region.⁶⁹ On the other, the probable historical context of the text, i.e. the Bar Kochba revolt, as well as the testimony found in Sozomen (*Hist. eccl.* 6.19), that the *Apocalypse of Peter* was read in Palestinian churches on Good Friday in the fifth century, would point to Palestine as the place of provenance.⁷⁰ While the arguments in favour of the Palestinian setting appear slightly stronger, it should be said that the *Apocalypse of Peter* might have enjoyed a considerable degree of circulation, as geographically diverse audiences found it relevant to their contexts (or redacted it to

⁶⁸ The full text is preserved in two Ge'ez manuscripts, while the Greek is attested in a shorter version of the text in *P. Cairo* 10759, the so-called Akhmim Codex and two small fragments (coming from a single codex), reproducing *Ap. Pet.* 10:6-4 and 14:1-4. On the textual situation of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, see Buchholz 1988: 119–55; van Minnen 2003: 15–39; Kraus, Nicklas 2004: 101–30. Although Greek appears to have been the language of the now lost original, the Ge'ez, the readings of which seem to be corroborated by the Greek fragments, is probably closer to it than the Greek Akhmim text.

⁶⁹ Bauckham 1998: 186–7; Tigchelaar 2003: 71–2.

⁷⁰ Buchholz 1988: 39–40; Elliott 1993: 595 (tentatively); Tigchelaar 2003: 175.

this effect). The dating of this text directly hinges on the passages I am going to investigate and will be discussed after I summarise them in what follows.

The relevant material from the beginning of the *Apocalypse of Peter* differs considerably in the Ethiopic and the Greek of the Akhmim Codex and so will be treated separately. Chapter 2 of the Ge'ez text begins with Jesus making the growth of the fig tree a metaphor for the coming end (2:1; see Matt 24:32). Peter, not understanding the real significance of the parable, requests explanation (2:2) which Jesus promptly provides—the fig tree is a figure for Israel (2:4, 7). A parable (overtly based on Luke 13:6-9) follows in 2:5-6 where the uprooting of a fruitless tree is postponed at the behest of the gardener. Unlike in Luke, where the parable lacks an explicit conclusion, *Ap. Pet.* 2:7 states that fig tree/Israel eventually starts growing, but its blossoming is accompanied by the arrival of false Messiahs. They usurp the anointed status for themselves (v. 8), deny the messiahship of Jesus (v. 9), and perform deceitful wonders (v. 12). Having been rejected by the people, the false Messiah—suddenly a singular figure—begins to persecute them, and the new martyrs are identified as the awaited sprouts of the fig tree (v. 10-11). The rejection is said to be caused by the teaching of Enoch and Elijah (v. 12) and the martyrs of the false Messiah are accepted by God (v. 13).

Several motifs present in the above passage would be familiar to those who know the antimessianic traditions in the NT. The reliance of the *Apocalypse of Peter* on the Synoptic Apocalypse and especially on Matthew 24 is palpable throughout.⁷¹ The false declaration in *Ap. Pet.* 2:8: “I am the Christ who has come into the world”,⁷² seems to echo the proclamation in Matt 24:5; furthermore, both Matt 24:24 and *Ap. Pet.* 2:12 speak about false signs and wonders. On the other hand, the text can be linked to the

⁷¹ Jenks 1991: 347–50; Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 56–61; Bauckham 1998: 175–6 (with a synopsis); Bădiliță 2005: 104–11.

⁷² For the Ethiopic text I use the translation by Buchholz 1988.

Antichrist(s) of 1-2 John in multiple ways. The Petrine false Messiah denies the true Christ (2:9) which is also what 1 John 2:22a imagines such a figure would do, with both texts calling him a “liar”. Most interestingly, *Apocalypse of Peter* and 1 John alike present a singular and a plural Antichrist at the same time.

While clearly drawing on Biblical traditions, *Ap. Pet.* 2:10-13 introduces an interesting motif to the Antichrist tradition, namely that the usurper’s deception will not be successful and thus he will have to resort to killing those who refuse to follow him. Active persecutions are rarely ascribed to the antimessianic agents and do not figure in either the Synoptics (but cf. Matt 24:9) or the Johannine Letters.⁷³ What is more, the martyrs are emphatically said to represent the house of Israel which possibly hints at the Jewish Christian origin of the document.

Ap. Pet. 2:7-13 in the Ge’ez recension is the bone of contention in the debates about the dating of the whole document. The singular false prophet is often identified with Simon bar Kochba, especially due to the traditions about the messianic claims associated with him (*y. Ta’an* 4.8, 68d), his persecutions of Christians (Justin, *1 Apol.* 31.6) and false wonders (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.6.2; Jerome, *Ruf.* 3.31).⁷⁴ The text does not provide any definitive hints and differs from the aforementioned later sources about Bar Kochba in important details and so caution is vital.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, since second-century Palestine appears to be an otherwise likely setting for the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the text might preserve some memory of the trauma of the years 132-135 CE. Nevertheless, the document appears unwilling to disclose its original circumstances fully, which certainly contributed to its dissemination across many settings in different periods, and so this dating can only ever remain a proposal.

⁷³ So Bauckham 1998: 182–3. However, see Rev 13:15 for the Beast of the land slaying those not worshipping the image of the First Beast.

⁷⁴ See Buchholz 1988: 408–12; Bauckham 1998: 187–94.

⁷⁵ See Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 59; Tigchelaar 2003: 63–77.

The Akhmim text of the introductory eschatological section offers an altogether different vision to that espoused by the Ge'ez manuscripts. The words should be construed as uttered by Jesus due to the possessive pronoun in v. 3. Here, unlike in the Ethiopic text, the plurality of false prophets is preserved throughout and, interestingly, translates into a plurality of perverse figures, called the sons of destruction and lawlessness.⁷⁶ These titles are deeply embedded in the Antichrist tradition, appearing in 2 Thess 2:3 (see also John 17:12 for the “son of destruction”). Jesus’ languishing followers are then rescued by God who judges the lawless ones, i.e. probably the false prophets and their acolytes alike. The scenario presented here departs significantly from the Synoptic Apocalypse and 1-2 John.⁷⁷ The antimessianic conflict, if present at all, is only gestured towards by the Akhmim text of *Apocalypse of Peter*, as it is God who combats the eschatological enemies who themselves do not mimic Jesus in any way. It is only through the possible echo of the definitely antimessianic 2 Thessalonians 2 that the fragment might relate to the Antichrist tradition.

In conclusion, *Apocalypse of Peter*, especially in the Ethiopic version, contributes significantly to the early Christian expectation of the Antichrist. It is one of two ancient NT Apocrypha to engage with the Antichrist tradition substantially. Importantly, some of the relevant passages from the NT become points of reference for the eschatological scenario of the *Apocalypse*. Furthermore, it preserves the peculiar aspect of the antimessianism of the NT, especially the Synoptic eschatological speeches and 1-2 John, namely the plurality of Antichrists. The false prophets usurp Jesus’ status and try to imitate his works, thus becoming his mimetic rivals. On the other hand, Christ does not violently confront his opponent who in turn kills the faithful Israelites. The direct

⁷⁶ This goes unnoticed by Bolyki 2003: 52-62 who ignores the plurality of the evil figures in the passage and claims that the false prophet spoken of here is Rabbi Akiba.

⁷⁷ *Contra* Elliott 1993: 594 who sees the Akhmim text as bringing the Ethiopic version closer to the Gospel material.

messianic conflict is hence absent from the text—indeed, both the Ethiopic and the Akhmim recensions—but plays out nonetheless through the reference to martyrdom at the hands of the Antichrist. Consequently, the *Apocalypse of Peter* presents an early and substantial witness to the ancient Christian antimessianic speculation and the role of the NT in it.

5.7 Coptic Apocalypse of Elijah

This section of the chapter will be devoted to the Coptic *Apocalypse of Elijah*,⁷⁸ a pseudepigraphic writing of uncertain origins and complex transmission history⁷⁹—a feature common among the texts discussed in this chapter. The textual evidence places the *terminus ante quem* at some point in the fourth century CE⁸⁰ and makes Greek the most probable language of the now lost original.⁸¹ The relative prevalence of the Coptic versions, explicit references to Egypt (e.g. *Ap. El.* 2:29-39),⁸² as well implicit dependence on late ancient Egyptian culture make Egypt the most probable place of composition of the text. While the *Apocalypse of Elijah* used to be understood as an effect of the Christian redaction of a Jewish source (or sources),⁸³ Frankfurter's study makes a very strong case for seeing it as a unified document originating in the Egyptian Christian circles in the late third century CE.⁸⁴ In my discussion I will follow Frankfurter's lead, as at no point in the text can Jewish and possibly Christian motifs be clearly demarcated, and to attempt to do so would be to mute the text's overall message.

⁷⁸ The adjective "Coptic" is meant to distinguish the text at hand from a Hebrew text known either under the same title, or as *Sefer Eliahu*. I will henceforth refer to the Coptic text simply as the *Apocalypse of Elijah*.

⁷⁹ On the textual history of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* see Frankfurter 1993: 7–31.

⁸⁰ The Patristic references, on which see Steindorff 1899: 20–2; Rosenstiehl 1972: 13–7, are not clear enough to substantiate an earlier dating. On later texts quoting *Apocalypse of Elijah* see Frankfurter 1993: 24–6.

⁸¹ Frankfurter 1993: 21.

⁸² I follow the verse numbering and translation of Wintermute 1983: 735–53.

⁸³ Bousset 1896: 91 (he knows the text as *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*); Steindorff 1899: 19; Ernst 1967: 43 n. 3; Rosenstiehl 1972: 76 (he sees no Christian influence whatsoever); Schrage 1980: 204–7.

⁸⁴ Frankfurter 1993: 17–21; 241–98. This is in line with the suggestion of Rosenstiehl 1972: 75.

The *Apocalypse of Elijah* begins in a homiletic fashion,⁸⁵ promising heavenly rewards to those who obey the Lord (1:8-12), and exhorts the hearers about the importance of fasting (1:13-22) and single-mindedness (1:23-27). The sermon-like introduction is followed by an eschatological prophecy, beginning with the rule of an unjust Assyrian king (2:1-5), then replaced by the ambiguous “king of peace” arising from the west (2:6-16). His reign is on the one hand marked by a wonderous arrival (v. 7), killing the Assyrian monarch (v. 8a), professing God, and honouring the saints (vv. 10-11), yet on the other he is associated with “vain gifts” (vv. 9, 12), “deception” (v. 13), deportation of the holy and wise ones (v. 15) and, according to A, bloody vengeance against Egypt (v. 8b).⁸⁶ The following section (2:17-28; preserved only in S3) focuses on one of the king’s sons, who initiates further oppression (vv. 24-26).⁸⁷ The text goes on to recount a series of eschatological woes (2:31-38) which conclude with an Assyrian-Persian war (vv. 42-45) and which initiates the benevolent rule of “the king of righteousness” from “the City of the Sun” (vv. 46-53). Ch. 3, which I will discuss in greater detail in what follows, describes the works and the signs of the son of lawlessness. During his reign, he embarks on a series of murderous persecutions of those who dare criticise him, namely Tabitha (4:1-6), Enoch and Elijah (vv. 7-19),⁸⁸ and the sixty righteous (vv. 30-33); he also tortures the saints (vv. 20-29). Ch. 5 recounts the final eschatological woes (5:7-14a), started by the ascension into heaven of the righteous (vv. 2-6), the lawless one’s final words and attack (vv. 14b-21), and three judgements scenes

⁸⁵ On the similarity between *Ap. El.* 1:1-4 and the *Apocalypse* (or *Vision*) of *Paul* 3-4 see *ibid.* 28–9.

⁸⁶ Frankfurter 1993: 211–4 plausibly points to the folk memory of Alexander the Great as the source of the portrayal of the western king. McNeil 1978: 39–45 points to the messianic overtones in this passage, but is fully oblivious to its inherent ambiguity. It is quite possible that the author utilised messianic motifs to amplify the duplicitous nature of this character.

⁸⁷ See Frankfurter 1993: 214–6 on the Ptolemaic background of this part of the oracle.

⁸⁸ On Enoch and Elijah in *Apocalypse of Elijah* see specifically Bauckham 2008: 27–38; on their role in the Antichrist tradition in general see Bousset 1896: 202–11.

(vv. 22-29, 30-35, 36-39), during the second of which the eschatological foe is slain by Enoch and Elijah (vv. 33-35).

I will now move to the discussion of how *Apocalypse of Elijah* relates and contributes to ancient messianism and antimessianism.⁸⁹ Firstly, it ought to be stated that no strictly messianic attributes can be detected in the quasi-historical narratives in ch. 2. As noted by Frankfurter, the sequence of the four kings presented there should be understood as a generalised story of decline, not as a *vaticinium ex eventu*.⁹⁰ None of the monarchs is undoubtedly positive, as even the “king or righteousness” is said to rule for the inauspicious three-and-a-half years, i.e. a measure of Antiochus’ reign in Dan 7:25. Therefore, none of them can be understood as actually messianic. This role is reserved Christ who is referenced repeatedly across ch. 3-5 and functions primarily as an eschatological judge (5:22-29) and king (5:36-39). Interestingly, as noted by Rosenstiehl, Christ and God are portrayed as having identical or similar attributes, such as being the Creator (God in 1:3; Christ in 5:11).⁹¹

The author balances his messianic eschatology with a detailed history of the eschatological foe, called the “son of lawlessness” (1:10; 3:1, 5, 13, 18; 4:2, 15, 20, 28, 31; 5:6, 10, 32; see 2 Thess 2:3), the “son of perdition” (2:40; see John 17:12; 2 Thess 2:3), “the lawless one” (2:41), and the “shameless one” (4:1-3, 5, 7, 15; 5:14b). The figure is properly introduced for the first time in 3:1 where he claims to be the Christ, after which the narrator himself intervenes to admonish his audience: “Do not believe him!” 3:5-13 contains a list of messianic actions which the lawless one would be able to accomplish,

⁸⁹ The importance of this text for the antimessianic speculation was noted already by Bousset, *ibid.* 87–91; Jenks 1991: *passim*; cf. reservations in Frankfurter 1993: 104.

⁹⁰ Frankfurter 1993: 103–4, 215–6, 236–8.

⁹¹ Rosenstiehl 1972: 52–3. Interestingly, *Apocalypse of Elijah* appears to apply the title “Lord” to both God and Christ; see e.g. 1:1 where “Lord” certainly refers to the former as per standard prophetic introduction and, on the other hand, 4:27b where “Lord” prefaces words based on Matt 20:20-21//Mark 10:35-40 and so points to Jesus.

including manifesting himself in temples (v. 5; see 4:1, 7), influencing celestial bodies (vv. 6-8a), walking on water (v. 8b), as well as healings (vv. 9-10a) and exorcisms (v. 10b). These are together classified “his signs and wonders”, alluding to the works of the Man of Lawlessness in 2 Thess 2:9, and the works of Christ (v. 12). The mimetic rivalry between the Messiah and his enemy is thus not only clear, but made explicit. It does, however, have a limit, as the Antichrist’s usurpation is revealed by his inability to raise the dead (vv. 12-13; see 4:31).⁹² The incompleteness of the imitation in *Apocalypse of Elijah* 3 brings to mind a very similar pattern throughout Revelation where, as was argued for in the previous chapter, the eschatological foes of Jesus and God are distinguished from the them in very subtle, yet decisive ways.

Ap. El. 3:14-18 offers a description of the Antichrist’s physiognomy—a motif almost unique in the sources I study in this thesis, yet very prominent in late ancient and mediaeval antimessianic imagination.⁹³ The passage is linguistically perplexing,⁹⁴ but two core traits emerge, namely that the Antichrist’s appearance will not be human-like but rather grotesque and monstrous (which might constitute a parody of Christ’s incarnation), and that he will be able to shapeshift, changing his age and looks at will. Again, however, the son of lawlessness is constrained in his wondrous abilities, as he is not able to remove “a tuft of grey hair at the front of his bald head” (3:15, 18) which the narrator construes as the way to distinguish his falsehood.⁹⁵

⁹² Cf. *Sib. Or.* 3.66. See Bousset 1896: 176–81 on the contrary claims preserved in the later Antichrist tradition on whether the Antichrist would be able to raise the dead.

⁹³ On this physiognomy see Frankfurter 1993: 117–25; for the motif in general see Rosenstiehl 1967; McGinn 1994: 72–3; Massyngbaerde Ford 1996 who reference antimessianic physiognomies in texts such as the *Testament of the Lord*, *Book of Zerubbabel*, *The Signs of Messiah*, *Apocalypse of Esdras*, and the apocryphal *Apocalypse of John*.

⁹⁴ See Wintermute 1983: 746 n. w for a summary of the difficulties posed by the beginning of 3:15.

⁹⁵ The exact significance of this physical feature is uncertain. Wintermute, *ibid.* n. x, suggests this might allude to the mark Cain receives after killing Abel (Gen 4:15). Frankfurter 1993: 118 n. 44 notes mediaeval texts that refer to the Antichrist’s unchanging mark.

The true nature of the Antichrist is then recognised and sternly rebuked by Tabitha, Enoch and Elijah, as well as the sixty righteous, all of whom suffer martyrdom at his hand because of that. In 5:14b-18, his lament is cited—again, a literary feature absent from other sources which keep the eschatological enemy largely silent—where he accepts his impending doom, but decides to engage in the final battle nonetheless. The last portion of the text (5:22-39) repeatedly describes the conflagration of the earth by Christ (5:23, 36b) which will purge it of sinners and “devils” (vv. 23, 37). It is clear that the defeat of evil and the inauguration of the new era happen by Christ’s power and intervention. At the same time, vv. 32-35 state that the destruction of the Antichrist, who melts like ice and is thrown into the abyss along with his believers, is an act of Enoch and Elijah upon their return to earth. This development is a deviation from the standard violent confrontation between Christ and his opponent where it is Christ’s emissaries, rather than he himself, who execute the antagonist.⁹⁶ The messianic conflict thus undergoes transformation, with the Antichrist being confronted with Jesus only indirectly. To be sure, Enoch and Elijah are most obviously associated with Christ (see 4:15-16: “Do you not know that we live in the Lord?... [W]e are always strong in the Lord”), so their execution of the son of lawlessness most certainly aligns with Christ’s purpose.

To summarise this section, the *Apocalypse of Elijah* must be treated as a crucial source for the development of the Antichrist expectation among early Christians. It pays great attention to the eschatological enemy whose appearance is described in detail and who speaks in his own voice. The text brings together mimetic rivalry and messianic conflict and emphasises the former, whereas the latter is refashioned so as to include Enoch and Elijah as the Antichrist’s executors. This document incorporates Jewish,

⁹⁶ This is a rare motif. Bauckham 2008: 3–5 notes a few other texts that resemble *Apocalypse of Elijah* in this respect, most importantly Tertullian, *An.* 50. See above, p. 200, on the Great Prostitute being killed by God’s delegates in Revelation 17.

Christian, and local Egyptian motifs which in turn inspired many late ancient and medieval authors engaged in the end-time speculation. Its place within and unique contribution to the Antichrist tradition is therefore central.

5.8 Testament of the Lord

The majority of the elusive Christian apocryphal writing, usually identified by the title the *Testament of the Lord*, is an extended church order, supposedly conveyed by Jesus to the Eleven after his resurrection. Most importantly for my purposes, however, the text begins with an apocalyptic section (*Test. Dom.* 3-14) where Jesus foretells the signs and corruption of the end-time and characterises its actors. Whilst the complete *Testament* is preserved in Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic⁹⁷ and dates most probably to late fourth or fifth century CE,⁹⁸ the apocalyptic opening appears to have been (or to have become) an independent document, preserved alone in another Syriac recension,⁹⁹ as well as in a Latin fragment¹⁰⁰ and in Ethiopic (used as an introduction to another apocryphon, *Epistula Apostolorum*).¹⁰¹ The section is variously dated, but the most recent and persuasive attempt to do that was made by Stewart who related the depiction of the opponent to Zoroastrian imagery and hence linked the whole narrative to the birth of the Sassanid Empire and its confrontation with the Romans in the mid-third century CE.¹⁰² This placement in time is substantiated by the identification of the king in ch. 5 as “a king of foreign race” which quite probably refers to Maximinus Thrax (ruled 235-238 CE) who was the first Roman emperor of “barbarian” (Thracian) origin.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ On the versions see Corcoran, Salway 2011: 124–6.

⁹⁸ See e.g. Cooper, MacLean 1902: 25–42 (ca. 356). Cf. Rahmani 1899: xlv (first half of the second century).

⁹⁹ Published by Arendzen 1901: 401–16.

¹⁰⁰ Published by Robinson 1893: 151–7.

¹⁰¹ Published by Guerrier 1913: 178–87 who sees the section from the *Testament of the Lord* and *Epistula Apostolorum* that follows as one text. This view is refuted by Schmidt, Wajnberg 1919: 156–77.

¹⁰² Stewart 2011: 136–43.

¹⁰³ A slightly later period would have to be argued if one followed the Latin recension which concludes with *Dexius erit nomen antichristi*, “the Antichrist’s name will be Dexius”, certainly pointing to the reign

The eschatological scenario is prefaced with the disciples' request to the risen Jesus to disclose the signs of the end-time to them (ch. 2) which is then granted as he promises to reveal the details of the coming of "that Son of Perdition, the Enemy, the Adversary"¹⁰⁴ (ch. 3), naming the eschatological enemy in line with 1 Cor 15:25-26 and 2 Thess 2:3-4. The versions disagree on the details of the narrative to follow. While Rahmani's text presents a chaotic period of natural disasters and infighting evil princes (ch. 4), who are followed by an even worse Western king (ch. 5), the MS published by Arendzen inserts a group of immature and murderous Eastern monarchs between the princes and the Western king. The second reading should probably be judged original, as a later copyist could have accidentally omitted the passage due to homoioteleuton (the "lovers of gold" are mentioned twice in Arendzen's text).¹⁰⁵ Both recensions continue with an account of astronomical (ch. 6) and earthly (ch. 7) wonders which signal the unravelling of nature at the end of times. The tumult and confusion intensify as countries and Christian communities are overrun by sinners from whom the true faithful become separated (ch. 8). Ch. 9 announces the coming of the eschatological opponent who performs deceitful miracles in order to gain supporters even among the believers. The physical description of the Adversary, whose appearance is accompanied by political turmoil in the East (ch. 10),¹⁰⁶ is included in ch. 11. It differs slightly in all of the preserved versions, but the overall intended sense is that the opponent's physiognomy is unsettling or even monstrous.¹⁰⁷ The apocalyptic section concludes with an admonishment to be

of Decius (249-251). However, this might well be a later gloss linking the text to a historical figure otherwise known to have persecuted Christians.

¹⁰⁴ In what follows I use the translation of Cooper and MacLean based on Rahmani's edition.

¹⁰⁵ Arendzen 1901: 402, accepted by Stewart 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Arendzen 1901: 414–5 compares this scenario to the one found in Philostorgius, *Hist. eccl.* 11.8. Stewart 2011: 140–1 links this description to the an autobiographical inscription by Kerdir, a Sassanian Zoroastrian high priest.

¹⁰⁷ For a synopsis see Rosenstiehl 1967: 50–2. All versions agree that one of the eyes of the Adversary has two pupils, a condition known as polycoria and which in antiquity was often taken as a sign of the evil eye (Pliny the Elder, *Hist.* 7.2.16-18).

watchful (ch. 12-14), after which *Testamentum Domini* transitions to ecclesiastical regulations which are probably intended to be the visible signs of endurance of the faithful throughout the final travails.¹⁰⁸

One essential observation needs to be made in order to try to relate the beginning of *Testamentum Domini* to other texts discussed in this chapter. The apocalyptic section of the text does not recount the final combat between Christ and the Adversary and thus does not portray them as conflicted directly. The latter is definitely evil and unamicable to the purposes of Christ—who is the narrator of the entire section—and the Christian community. The Adversary performs false wonders to deceive the faithful, although they are not specifically stated to be like Jesus’ own miracles. Furthermore, as I noted above, the titles used for him in ch. 3 identify him with the NT antimessianic actors. The repulsive physical exterior of this figure might hint at a tradition common with the *Apocalypse of Elijah* and thus entail that a creature so described is indeed antimessianic. These aspects make it quite probable that the Adversary in the *Testament of the Lord* was thought to play the role of the Antichrist implicitly. As the text does not depict him as a violent opponent of Christ or his mimetic rival, it could only be hinting at a pre-existing antimessianic tradition which would be known to the author’s audience and which would allow them to fully comprehend the end-time antagonist.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter offered an investigation of multiple sources of central importance to the Antichrist tradition and to my argument. Several conclusions arise. All of the sources I have discussed seem to have been composed between 50 BCE and 300 CE, with most originating from the first and second century CE. As it was then that many of the DSS and all of the NT were written, it was the time when the Antichrist tradition developed

¹⁰⁸ Stewart 2011: 137.

significantly. The pseudepigraphic and apocryphal texts envisaging the Antimesiah began to focus on him extensively and in detail that is difficult to find, for example, in the Qumran writings (with possible exception of 4Q175 and 4Q285 which are both very brief). Quasi-biographical accounts of the Antichrist, such as those in *Sib. Or.* 3.63-74; *Asc. Isa.* 4:1-14; *Ap. El.* 3:5-18, begin to emerge, testifying to the authors' willingness to help their audiences identify the eschatological opponent.

My decision to group the OT Pseudepigrapha and the NT Apocrypha together due to their non-canonical status allowed for connections to emerge that would have otherwise been lost. The *Apocalypse of Peter* from NT Apocrypha envisages the arrival of Enoch and Elijah before the Second Coming, just as is the case in the pseudepigraphic *Ascension of Isaiah* and *Apocalypse of Elijah*. The *Apocalypse of Elijah* and the apocryphal *Testament of the Lord* both express unique interest in the Antichrist's appearance. The two also describe evil antimessianic rulers who figure in the end-time visions of *Psalms of Solomon* 17 and *2 Baruch*. These details are by no means unique to these texts, but they go on to show that the non-canonical Biblical literature, whether based on the OT or the NT, envisaged the Antimesiah in broadly similar ways.

Some texts of Jewish origin and without noticeable Christian traits, such as the *Psalms of Solomon* and *4 Ezra*, were appealing to Christian audiences due to their content and are now known only in Christian textual transmission. On the other hand, some undeniably Christian texts, e.g. *Ascension of Isaiah* and the Coptic *Apocalypse of Elijah*, are evidently in contact with Jewish eschatology and the esotericism of their times and draw on them to enrich their own speculation. As it was said before, the early centuries of the Christian era appear to be not so much a period of the 'parting of the ways'—a scholarly framework now widely questioned and often abandoned altogether—but rather of fruitful crosspollination between different communities and their respective beliefs.

Several (though not all) texts studied above do not try to present themselves as explicitly Christian or Jewish *vis-à-vis* the other religious tradition and should not be construed as such.

Secondly, I have shown that the Messiah is portrayed as having enemies in non-Christian Jewish texts, especially *Psalms of Solomon* 17 and quite probably *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*. This fact substantiates one of the core claims of my thesis, namely that antimessianism was alive in the Jewish eschatology of the Second Temple period—something I have also argued for at length in CHAPTER III while discussing the DSS—and also beyond it, as evidenced by *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra* which both date to the late first century CE.

Thirdly, the non-canonical texts have evidenced the prominence of two distinct motifs in the ancient antimessianic speculation, i.e. violent opposition and mimetic rivalry, which I argue to have been present throughout the Antichrist tradition. Some texts focus solely on the Antimessiah being a militant enemy of the Anointed One during the end-time struggle (*2 Baruch*, *4 Ezra*), others see him only as a deceitful imitator (*Sibylline Oracles*), whereas still others combine the two ideas (*Psalms of Solomon*, *Ascension of Isaiah*). Aside from the stability of these two concepts, change is also noticeable, as additional related motifs emerge in the later Christian texts. By these are meant the physiognomy of the Antichrist (*Apocalypse of Elijah*, *Testament of the Lord*), the Antichrist as a persecutor (*Apocalypse of Peter*), or Christ's emissaries as the destroyers of the Antichrist (*Apocalypse of Elijah* with Enoch and Elijah).

Fourthly, many of the above texts depend on Biblical sources to inspire their speculation. Most notably, the later Christian texts begin to use the NT as their source, proving its prominence in the development of antimessianism. Such dependence is most prominent in *Apocalypse of Peter*. On the other hand, many pseudepigraphic and

apocryphal document of Christian origin appear to draw not only on the relevant NT passages, but also on Jewish traditions. This is the case with *Ascension of Isaiah* which uses Hebrew demonic names for the antimessianic opponent. Consequently, while the NT most certainly became a key source for the Antichrist tradition, the early Christian authors were able to engage with a robust Jewish eschatological tradition. This link shows the continuity between the Jewish and the Christian antimessianic imagination.

CHAPTER VI

The Church Fathers

This chapter will discuss the last group of writings which contribute substantially to the development of the ancient antimessianic expectation, namely the literary heritage of the Church Fathers. The Patristic evidence is of paramount importance to my argument for a variety of reasons. First of all, the name “Antichrist” itself, previously attested only in the Johannine Epistles, becomes widely used. Secondly, the figure itself receives sustained attention and is speculated about at length. While this development is paralleled by some sections from the texts discussed in the previous chapter, such as *Ascension of Isaiah* 4 and *Apocalypse of Elijah* 3, it is only Hippolytus who devotes an entire work to the Antichrist, namely *De Christo et Antichristo*. Thirdly, the Patristic writings develop the two key motifs that constitute the Antichrist tradition, namely the military conflict and the mimetic rivalry.

The Patristic corpus is incomparably larger than any of those I have studied up to this point which makes the task of analysing every single reference to Christ’s enemies impossible. Therefore, the field of study needs to be managed differently. While acknowledging that the Antichrist tradition might be present—usually as a brief mention—in many more texts of the Church Fathers, I will only focus on its more substantial and developed appearances.¹ The authors and texts to be studied originate between the year 100 and the early fifth century. This timeframe will encompass all of the ancient Patristic discussions of the Antichrist, whilst leaving out later developments which belong more properly to the Middle Ages. The following works and writers will be studied: the *Didache*, Irenaeus of Lyon, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen, Commodianus, Lactantius,

¹ See Bădiliță 2005: 521–32 for a list of occurrences of the term “Antichrist” the writings of the Church Fathers. Even such an extensive enumeration does not exhaust the Patristic notion of antimessianic opposition in its entirety.

Cyril of Jerusalem, Tyconius, and Augustine of Hippo. I will not reiterate in full the findings about Patristic antimessianic exegesis from CHAPTER II, but I will reference some of them in relation to particular authors.²

6.1 Didache

The first text to be discussed in this chapter, called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* and commonly known under the shortened Greek title *Didache*, is not a Patristic text in the strict sense because of its anonymity. Nevertheless, it is usually included among the modern category of writings of the Apostolic Fathers and does not make any claim to authorship, and therefore is not an NT apocryphon. Therefore, it belongs more properly among the writings of the Church Fathers rather than the Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha. The dating of *Didache* is debated, but a majority of scholars agree on placing it at some point around the year 100 CE.³ The text is an extended moral admonition falling into two sections (quite probably representing two separate sources): the so-called “Two Ways discourse” (*Did.* 1:1-6:2) and a set of church regulations (6:3-15:4). What follows is a short apocalyptic section (16:1-8) which most probably represents yet another separate source and appears to have lost its ending.⁴

The passage begins with a call to watchfulness (16:1-2). Vv. 3-5 envisage the emergence of false prophets, general lawlessness, and then the appearance of ὁ κοσμοπλανῆς ὡς υἱὸς θεοῦ, “the world deceiver as the Son of God” who performs signs and wonder and achieves universal dominion. The final testing is endured only by those

² On the antimessianic interpretations of the OT by the Fathers see above, pp. 62–5 (Gen 3:15), 78–82 (Gen 49:16-17), 92–3 (Isa 11:4), 100–101 (Ezekiel 38-39), 118–9 (Psalms), 109–10 (Daniel). On the two authors I do not discuss in this chapter, namely Justin Martyr and Cyprian of Carthage, see pp. 63–4, 165, respectively. Justin’s and Cyprian’s antimessianism is fully dependent on the interpretation of Genesis 3 (Justin) or 1-2 John (Cyprian).

³ Niederwimmer 1998: 52–3; Sandt, Flusser 2002: 48.

⁴ See *ibid.* 226–7; Aldridge 1999: 1–15 on the possible endings of *Didache*.

who keep their faith (v. 5). The section concludes by mentioning the signs of the end (v. 6) and the arrival of the Lord (vv. 7-8).

The eschatological conflict in *Didache* 16, although only hinted at, is clear enough. The deceiver of the world, who is preceded by false prophets, corruptors, and overall lawlessness, is clearly depicted as the mimetic rival of Christ.⁵ He appears as God's son who in a Christian text, which *Didache* undoubtedly is, must immediately evoke Jesus. The deceiver's actions also include performing signs, wonders, and profanities which mimic Jesus' earthly ministry and which win him universal following. On the other hand, the text as it stands does not portray Christ and the deceiver as being in direct conflict, but the complete original text could have very well included a scene of the latter being condemned.⁶

Much of the language and vocabulary of *Did.* 16:3-5 is shared with Matthew 24. Both mention false prophets (*Did.* 16:3; Matt 24:11, 24), signs and wonders (*Did.* 16:4; Matt 24:24), and deception (cognates of the verb *πλανάω* in *Did.* 16:4; Matt 24:5, 11, 24).⁷ The lexical and conceptual overlap is certainly not accidental and points to either dependence of *Didache* 16 on the Matthew⁸ or reliance of both on a common eschatological source.⁹ The first option is a simpler and thus preferable solution. Interestingly, *Did.* 16:3-5 presents two eschatological actors: the group of false prophets and the deceiver of the world. This move from plurality to singularity of the Antimesiah is mirrored in the Ethiopic *Apocalypse of Peter* 2 which introduces both multiple Antichrists and a singular deceiver.¹⁰

⁵ Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 181–2; Verheyden 2005: 204.

⁶ This is exactly what happens in *Ap. Const.* 7.32, a text which preserves and expands *Didache* 16 and which Aldridge 1999: 5 sees as including the original ending of *Didache*.

⁷ See an in-depth discussion of the relation between *Didache* 16 and Matthew 24 in Verheyden 2005: 201–11.

⁸ Lietaert Peerbolte 1996: 173–4; Verheyden 2005: 193–215.

⁹ Jenks 1991: 307–11; Niederwimmer 1998: 207–13; Sandt, Flusser 2002: 39.

¹⁰ The relationship between the *Didache* and the *Apocalypse* is noteworthy; see Niederwimmer 1998: 219. On the *Apocalypse of Peter* see above, pp. 228–32.

The *Didache* shows the importance of the NT for ancient Christian antimessianism which very early on began to derive motifs and ideas about the Antichrist from what would later become the canonical Christian scripture. On a more general level, this document is another manifestation of the traditionary nature of antimessianism where later texts depend on the earlier ones and recycle their details and ideas. This fact further substantiates my core claim about the Antichrist story being a tradition. Along with the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Didache* testifies to the continuity of the Christian antimessianism between the writing of the NT and the earliest Patristic treatments of the topic.

Furthermore, the *Didache* understands the messianic conflict primarily as through the lens of mimetic rivalry between the deceiver of the world and Christ. This is yet another occurrence of this crucial motif which I have previously argued to be present in Jesus' eschatological discourses in the Synoptics, 2 Thessalonians 2, Revelation, and the *Apocalypse of Peter* (both Greek and Ethiopic). Mimetic rivalry thus must be understood as particularly important for Christian antimessianism.

6.2 Irenaeus of Lyon

Moving into the first Patristic testimonies about the Antichrist, one finds the earliest, yet one of the most substantial and lengthy treatments of this topic in the chief work of Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 130–ca. 202 CE), that is his *Adversus haereses*. The work is primarily intended as a refutation of Gnostic teachings and an elaboration of what Irenaeus considered to be orthodox Christian doctrine. Although *Adversus haereses* does not bear out a precise time of writing, it is usually dated to the last quarter of the second century.¹¹ With the Greek original unfortunately lost save for several passages copied and

¹¹ Unger 1992: 3–4; Bădiliță 2005: 130.

preserved in other Church Fathers, the complete text is preserved in a possibly early Latin translation.¹²

The Irenaean discussion of the Antichrist is to be found towards the end of *Adversus haereses*, in 5.25.1-30.4.¹³ This section begins the concluding part of the fifth book in which Irenaeus is primarily concerned with matters of eschatology, but does not lose sight of his overarching purpose, i.e. correcting false teachings. The author starts by describing the eschatological opponent as *apostate et latro quasi Deus vult adorari et, cum sit servus, regnem se vult praeconari*, “an apostate and bandit who wants to be honoured like God and, though being a slave, wants to be proclaimed a king” (*Adv. haer.* 5.25.1) which signals the Antichrist’s duplicitous and deceptive nature. He also appears to assume Satan’s authority and even to replace him, since he sets himself up as an idol, *ut hi qui per multas abominationes adorant diabolum, hi per hoc unum idolum serviant ipsi*, “so that those who honour the devil through many abominations may serve him [Antichrist] through this one idol” (*Adv. haer.* 5.25.1). Irenaeus then goes on to provide Scriptural proofs of the Antichrist’s expected actions (5.25.2-4), including session in the Temple (quoting Dan 8:12 and Matt 24:15-17, 21), tyranny (identifying him with the little horn of Daniel 7), and unjust judgement (based on Luke 18:2).

In 5.26.1, he moves away from the antimessianic agent in order to make a political point, namely that *dividetur quod nunc regnat imperium*, “the empire, which now rules, will be divided”, obviously with Rome in mind. He adduces Rev 17:2-14; Matt 12:25; and the dream vision from Daniel 2 as proof texts, and then states that these passages show the justness of God’s judgement and so prove the heretics, who deny such judgement, wrong (5.26.2). The real significance of the future judgement is expounded in 5.27.1-28.1 after which Irenaeus segues back into the description of the Antichrist by

¹² On the transmission history of the text see Rousseau, Doutreleau 1979: 9–111; Unger 1992: 11–5.

¹³ For Irenaeus’ interpretation of Gen 3:15 see above, pp. 64–5.

quoting 2 Thess 2:10-12 and most of Revelation 13. He takes the number of the Beast from Rev 13:18 as representative of the total duration of the world (5.28.3).

After a short aside on judgement (5.28.4-29.1), Irenaeus returns to his exegesis of 666, stating that the apostasy it represents is the consummation of historical wickedness. He sees the Antichrist's numerical designation as an addition of 600, i.e. the age of Noah at the time of the Flood (Gen 7:6), and 60 and 6 which were the height and width in cubits of Nebuchadnezzar's statue (Dan 3:1). In 5.30.1-4, Irenaeus concludes his discussion by trying to get as close as possible to the real meaning of the number of the Beast and hence to the identity of the Antichrist. He first rejects the textual variant of Rev 13:18, which gives the number as 616 (5.30.1) and portrays the arrival of the Antichrist as violent and beginning from the tribe of Dan (5.30.2). The question of the Antimessiah's name is treated by Irenaeus with great caution, since he believes that prophecy rather than gematria should be the believers' guide in recognising him. Nevertheless, he hazards three names: EYANΘΑΣ, ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ, and ΤΕΙΤΑΝ, the letters of all adding up to exactly 666.¹⁴ The last name, associated with the mythological giants, is discussed at the greatest length. Irenaeus is ultimately reluctant to opine on this issue, claiming that it was the Holy Spirit who decided not to divulge the Antichrist's name.

Having presented a survey of the Irenaeian depiction of the eschatological enemy, I will now make several observations on its characteristic features. Very importantly, in the mind of Irenaeus, this figure does not appear to be an especially violent opponent of Christ, as there is only a brief mention of him being cast into the fiery lake upon the Second Coming (5.30.4; see Rev 20:10). Irenaeus is also not as keen to portray the Antichrist as mimicking Jesus' earthly ministry as are e.g. the authors of *Ascension of Isaiah* or *Apocalypse of Elijah*. Furthermore, *Adversus haereses*, most certainly under the

¹⁴ See below, p. 257, on those same three names in Hippolytus, *Antichr.* 50.

influence of Daniel and 2 Thessalonians, presents the end-time foe as claiming not merely messianic but divine honours (5.25.1).

Does then my definition of the Antichrist as an explicitly antimessianic agent fit the description of this figure in Irenaeus? I believe this to be the case, albeit in a subtle way. Firstly, the Antichrist claims both divine and messianic honours, the latter being mentioned in 5.28.2: ἵνα ὡς Χριστὸν αὐτὸν προσκυνήσουσιν οἱ πλανώμενοι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ,¹⁵ “so that those deceived by him may worship him as Christ”. Just as in 2 Thessalonians (of which Irenaeus is a discerning reader), usurping divine status is conjoined with proclaiming oneself to be the Christ. The Antichrist, introduced in 5.25.1 as acting as if he were God, meets his end in 5.30.4 where he is punished by the returning Jesus. This pattern of Christ being the active defender of both his and his Father’s status is surely of consequence to the Irenaeian Christology.

While the author of *Adversus haereses* does not himself indulge in portraying the end-time antagonist as the mimetic rival of Christ, there are two ways in which he makes this very point indirectly. Firstly, Irenaeus quotes 2 Thess 2:9-10 (5.25.3) and Rev 13:13-14 (5.28.2), with both passages mentioning deceptive wonders on the part of the end-time antagonists and thus most probably representing Irenaeus’ own view (expressed also in 2.32.3-5). Secondly, he repeatedly states that the Antichrist’s apostasy concentrates in itself all previous wickedness, indeed, is its recapitulation. In 5.25.5, he is the one *qui in se recapitulatur omnem diabolicum errorem*, “who recapitulates in himself all of the Satanic error”. 5.29.2, referring to the First Beast of Revelation 13, says that *in bestia veniente recapitulatio fit universae iniquitatis et omnis doli*, “in the Beast, that is to come, there is the recapitulation of all wickedness and every deceit”, and that its number represents *illius in quem recapitulatur sex millium annorum omnis apostasia et injustitia*

¹⁵ The Greek preserved in *Scholia in Apocalypsin*; the Latin agrees.

et nequitia et pseudoprophetia et dolus, “the one in whom six thousand years of all apostasy, injustice, depravity, false prophecy, and deceit are recapitulated”.¹⁶ Within the theology espoused by *Adversus haereses*, Antichrist being the sum of all sins parallels Christ being the recapitulation of all humanity (see e.g. *Adv. haer.* 3.18.1; 5.21.1).¹⁷ With both prefigured in the Fall narrative of Genesis 3, their parallel roles as the Apostate and the Saviour permeate human history and meet in their eschatological conflict (5.30.4). The mimetic rivalry in Irenaeus does not play out on the level of the Antichrist imitating Jesus’ ministry, but rather on both performing parallel and contradictory roles in salvation history.

Another interesting feature of *Adv. haer.* 5.25.1-30.4 is that it is replete with Biblical quotations, coming especially from the Scriptural texts I have previously identified as the key sources of the antimessianic speculation, i.e. Daniel, the Synoptic Apocalypse, 2 Thessalonians, and Revelation (though, interestingly, not 1-2 John). While, as I will discuss shortly, Irenaeus is tacit in his application of the Antichrist tradition to historical events, he refers to the Bible abundantly and argues for its right understanding over against that of the heretics. The Antichrist section of *Adversus haereses* shows the ancient antimessianism was not only—or even not primarily—an exercise in reading the signs of history but rather an expectation fuelled by Scriptural exegesis which only later would find its secondary application to political events.

While the importance of the Bible for the Irenaeian antimessianism is paramount, it cannot be fully disjointed from its historical circumstances. In line with the major thrust of the entire work, the author is not shy in criticising his opponents (see esp. 5.26.2 which

¹⁶ The idea that the six days of Creation set the duration of the world at 6,000 years is attested in the post-Mishnaic Jewish sources (*b. Sanh.* 97a). While it is possible, that Irenaeus knows a related Jewish tradition, his calculation is more probably based on Scriptural hints (Ps 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8).

¹⁷ Bădiliță 2005: 135–7.

calls out the disciples of Marcion and Valentinus explicitly).¹⁸ As noted above, in his eschatological scenario he makes several asides (5.25.5, 27.1, 28.1, 4) which are clearly designed to convey separate doctrinal points, in line with Irenaeus' overall aim of promoting orthodoxy. Apart from the quite overt anti-Gnostic polemic, the author hints at the nefarious role of Rome in the end-time development. Rome is evoked when the Danielic fourth kingdom is discussed in 5.26.2, 30.3. The latter passage also includes a proposal of deciphering 666 as ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ and so insinuates the Antichrist's Roman origin. Interestingly, the two other solutions of the cipher, ΕΥΑΝΘΑΣ and ΤΕΙΤΑΝ may also contain anti-Imperial overtones. The former might be a Hellenisation of the name Florus and be associated with the person of Gessius Florus, the reviled procurator of Judea in the eve of the First Jewish War, whereas the latter might invoke the emperor Titus who participated in the conflict and in the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.¹⁹ These two readings are haphazard and speculative at best, with the second one going against what Irenaeus explicitly says. They do, however, harmonise with his vision of Rome as the fourth transient political force of the world history and might explain why he is so secretive about decoding the number of the Beast.

Irenaeus offers one of the most important pieces of evidence in this study. His is a lengthy, carefully structured, and explicit treatment of the Antichrist which shows how important this figure was for ancient Christian eschatology, polemics, and doctrine already in the second century. On the other hand, it is problematic to see *Adversus haereses* 5.25.1-30.4 as the textbook example of the antimessianic discourse which was postulated by Jenks.²⁰ The Irenaeian Antichrist is primarily the sum of all wickedness and as such the foil to Christ, while his role as Christ's mimetic rival and violent opponent are of

¹⁸ See also *Adv. haer.* 1.13.1 where Marcus is called *praecursor Antichristi*, "the forerunner of the Antichrist"; see Bădiliță 2005: 155–8.

¹⁹ For these two proposals see Colson 1915: 100–1.

²⁰ Jenks 1991: 27–8.

secondary importance. On the other hand, Irenaeus builds his eschatology on Biblical foundations and uses it to criticise his doctrinal opponents and, much more quietly, the Roman Empire. Since Irenaeus is quite clear about the point of his work, which is not the case with the authors of the texts I have previously discussed, it is quite visible to what ends he develops his antimessianic speculation. As such, Irenaeus' contribution to the Antichrist tradition reflects his peculiar theological concerns and should be seen as a point—rather than a watershed—in the history of this tradition.

6.3 Tertullian

A brief discussion should be devoted to Tertullian (ca. 170–after 210),²¹ the first major theologian from the Latin West. Unlike Irenaeus, Tertullian is far from systematic in his treatment of eschatology which he touches upon in multiple treatises. He also seems uninterested in offering a lengthy eschatological scenario. Nevertheless, the overall idea of the Antichrist emerging from Tertullian's writings has some peculiar and noteworthy characteristics.²²

The majority of references to the Antichrist in Tertullian's writings come from his anti-heretical polemics. He repeatedly identifies his doctrinal opponents as antimessianic (*Adversus Marcionem* 1.22.1), most often drawing on 1-2 John (*Adversus Marcionem* 3.8.1-2; *De praescriptione haereticorum* 3.13-4.5; 33.11; *De carne Christi* 24.3; *Adversus Praxeum* 31.3; *De ieiunio contra psychicos* 11.5).²³ Tertullian stays close to the rhetorical thrust of the Johannine passages, criticising those who deny Jesus' divine sonship and incarnation. *De monogamia* 15.5 contains a variation of the anti-heretical theme, as it vividly describes the punishments the Antichrist will visit upon sinners in the end-time. *Adversus Marcionem* 5.16.4-6 contains a complex discussion in which

²¹ This dating of Tertullian's life is proposed by Barnes 1985: 58–9 and accepted by Dunn 2004: 4 n. 2

²² See Bădiliță 2005: 411–6 for an extended discussion.

²³ See also above, p. 175.

Tertullian denies Marcion's supposed identification of the Man of Lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2 as the Christ of the Creator rather than the Antichrist.

On the other hand, a handful of remarks about the messianic opponent are nestled within passages where Tertullian discusses eschatology (*De resurrectione mortuorum* 22.11; *Adversus Marcionem* 5.12.2; *Scorpiace* 12.10; *De fuga in persecutione* 12.9). While the Antichrist is never described as engaging in a direct conflict with Christ, in *De Anima* 50.5 Tertullian sees the two witnesses, Enoch and Elijah, as coming to earth *ut Antichristum sanguine suo extinguant*, “so that they may quench the Antichrist with their blood”. The execution of the eschatological opponent is hence delegated to God's emissaries. With the militant aspect of the Antichrist absent from Tertullian's speculation, *Adversus Marcionem* 5.16.4 associates him with deceitful signs which would quite probably liken him to Christ.

What is very interesting from the perspective of the study of Tertullian himself is that almost all of the references to Antichrist in his writings come from the later period of his activity when he associated himself with the Montanist movement. Apart from *De praescriptione hereticorum*, which dates to the late second or the early third century and does not contain Montanist themes, all of the works referenced above are influenced by the apocalyptic Montanist favour.²⁴ It is significant that the figure of the end-time foe becomes only prominent in any way once Tertullian becomes engaged with that movement. It could be speculated—but only speculated—that as Montanism spread from Asia Minor, it carried with itself traces of the Antichrist tradition, which is also present in such Asiatic texts like Revelation and which reached Tertullian shortly after 200 CE.²⁵

²⁴ For the chronology of Tertullian's *œuvre* see Fredouille 1972: 487–8; Barnes 1985: 30–56, 326–9; Dunn 2004: 7–8.

²⁵ On Montanism see Trevett 1996; Hirschmann 2005: 23–53; Tabbernee, Lampe 2008: 1–13. The extant sources about Montanist theology do not attest any interest in antimessianism or eschatological conflict. The accusation of being an antichrist appears in some anti-Montanist polemic (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.1.6–7; Marcus Magnes, *Apocr.* 4.5).

In conclusion, the reflection on the Antichrist to be found in the Tertullianic corpus is primarily a function of his anti-heretical polemics, more so than in the case of Irenaeus. This development takes away from the imaginative speculation about the Antimessiah's role in the end-time struggle. Again, just as in the case of Irenaeus, Tertullian firmly grounds his antimessianic expectation in the Bible and especially the NT, as he draws extensively (and quite unlike other Patristic authors) on 1-2 John, but also occasionally on 2 Thessalonians and Revelation.

6.4 Hippolytus

The most important and substantial contribution to the Antichrist tradition in the Patristic era comes from the writings ascribed to Hippolytus. The questions of who Hippolytus exactly was, which of those writings can be ascribed to him, and which were authored by someone else are among the most contested issues in Patristics.²⁶ These issues require far more attention than could possibly be devoted to them in this chapter. Fortunately, my argument does not make such a discussion necessary, as the two documents in the name of Hippolytus on which I will focus, i.e. *Commentary on Daniel* and *De Christo et Antichristo*, are universally understood as coming from a single individual.²⁷ I will refer to the author as Hippolytus for the sake of simplicity and without committing myself to any of the theories about his identity. *Commentary on Daniel* refers to *De Christo et Antichristo* on three occasions (*Comm. Dan.* 4.7.1, 13.1, 24.7) and so must post-date it. The creation of both texts is usually placed in the first years of the third century.²⁸ As with all other data on Hippolytus, his place of work is debated, and so both documents are of undetermined provenance; both Rome and Asia Minor have been

²⁶ See especially Nautin 1947; Dunbar 1977: 1–51; Brent 1995: 115–367; Cerrato 2002; Bracht 2014: 28–33.

²⁷ Bardy 1947: 14–7; Nautin 1947: 80; Dunbar 1977: 59; Norelli 1987: 36; Cerrato 2002: 152–4; Bracht 2014: 28.

²⁸ Bardy 1947: 17; Norelli 1987: 40; Cerrato 2002: 154; Shelton 2008: 1; Schmidt 2017: 8–9; cf. Nautin 1947 (ca. 250, during the Decian persecution); Brent 1995: 278–9 (dating the *Commentary* after 223).

suggested.²⁹ The latter option seems interesting, as Asia Minor appears to have been a hotbed of apocalyptic fervour in the second and third century CE and Hippolytus' works are attested only in Greek, which was dominant in that area. However, the evidence for such a provenance remains circumstantial and it is not impossible that Hippolytus accompanied Irenaeus and Tertullian in speculating about the Antichrist in the Roman West.

6.4.1 *De Christo et Antichristo*

Hippolytus' short treatise *De Christo et Antichristo* constitutes one of the very few extant religious works devoted specifically to the Antichrist and affords a lot of information relevant to my study. The text, preserved fully in Greek, but also attested in several other languages,³⁰ dates to around the year 200. The express purpose of the work is to satisfy the request of one Theophilus for Hippolytus to elaborate on the nature of Antichrist (*Antichr.* 5). Hippolytus begins with an exposition of the importance of prophecies (*Antichr.* 1-4) which then explicitly form the ground of his narrative about the eschatological opponent: δίκαιόν ἐστιν ἡμᾶς ἐφαψαμένους αὐτῶν τῶν θείων γραφῶν ἐπιδεῖξαι δι' αὐτῶν τίς καὶ ποταπή ἡ τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου παρουσία, "it is right for us, having grasped the divine Scriptures themselves, to show through them what and of what kind the coming of the Antichrist is" (*Antichr.* 5). Hippolytus thus reveals himself to be primarily an exegete and he continues in this function throughout the rest of the work which quotes frequently and lengthily from the Bible. *De Christo et Antichristo* goes on to show, yet again, how important Scriptural interpretation is for the development of the Antichrist tradition.

²⁹ Most of scholars favour Rome, but cf. Cerrano 2002: 221–58 who suggests Asia Minor. Cerrano's argument is criticised by Smith 2013: 90–6. Nautin 1947: 88–93 leaves the question open.

³⁰ See Norelli 1987: 54–60 on the transmission of *De Christo and Antichristo*; for a careful study of the Slavonic MSS see Iliev 2018: 175–95.

The author then proceeds to contrast the activity of the Antichrist with that of Christ (*Antichr.* 6), listing several points of apparent similarity: being depicted as a lion; kingship; appearance as a lamb; circumcision; having apostles; gathering those scattered; sealing their followers; incarnation; relation to the Temple (Antichrist to the Jerusalem Temple, Christ in the temple of his body). Hippolytus leaves no doubt about the reason behind these similarities: κατὰ πάντα γὰρ ἐξομοιοῦσθαι βούλεται ὁ πλανος τῷ Υἱῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ, “for the deceiver wishes to liken himself to the Son of God in all respects”. The next section of the text (*Antichr.* 7-13) offers a Christological reading of the blessing of Judah in Gen 49:8-12 and explains the point made previously about Christ’s leonine image. *Antichr.* 14, on the other hand, combines the curse of the serpent in Gen 3:15 and the Dan passages in Gen 49:16-17 and Deut 33:22 in order to determine the origin of the lion-like Antichrist from the tribe of Dan and so to amplify the contrast between him and Christ from the tribe of Judah.

The eschatological enemy is then characterised by extensive quotes from Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, Daniel 2 and 7 (*Antichr.* 16-22). The texts from Daniel appear to be of particular importance to Hippolytus, as they provide the starting point for his effort to systematise history.³¹ He identifies the successive parts of the statue in Daniel 2 and the kingdoms in Daniel 7 as Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome, respectively, with the last one representing the political order current in his time (*Antichr.* 23-28). According to Hippolytus, the prophecies also describe the coming of the Antichrist, spoken of as the little horn in Daniel 7, and of Christ himself who is the stone destroying the statue in Dan 2:34-35 (*Antichr.* 25-26).

In the following sections of *De Christo et Antichristo*, Hippolytus invokes a series of prophetic oracles from Isaiah, Daniel, and Revelation against Babylon in order to give

³¹ See Dunbar 1977: 59–64.

the reader an idea of what the end-time tribulations might be like (*Antichr.* 29-44). The quotes are, once again, extensive, contributing to the overall sense of the whole treatise being a Scriptural exposition. *Antichr.* 43-47 is a discussion of the appearance of Enoch and Elijah as the two witnesses preaching for a half-week of years (based on Dan 9:27) before they are slain by the Antichrist. Hippolytus then interprets the description of the second Beast in Rev 13:11-18 as referring to the reign of Antichrist who is again marked out as a false Christ: τὸ δὲ εἰπεῖν “τὰ [δύο] κέρατα αὐτοῦ ὅμοια ἀρνίῳ”, ὅτι ἐξομοιοῦσθαι θέλει τῷ Υἱῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν βασιλέα ἐπιδεικνύων, “saying ‘His [two] horns like those of a lamb’ because he wants to liken himself to the Son of God, even showing himself alone as a king” (*Antich.* 49). Whilst acknowledging that the Antichrist’s pride and actions were represented in the past by Antiochus Epiphanes, Hippolytus is more concerned with pinpointing its future referent. In order to do this, he proposes the names Τειτάν, Εὐάνθας, and Λατεῖνος as the solutions to the riddle of 666, with subtle preference for the last one (*Antichr.* 50). The three names are the same those hazarded by Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 5.30.3. This connection might not be simply due to Hippolytus’ and Irenaeus’ skill in performing gematria or to a shared exegetical tradition, but—if one believes the much later Photius (*Bibliotheca* 121) that Hippolytus studied under Irenaeus—due to a direct dependence of the former on the latter.

Hippolytus nears the conclusion of his eschatological treatise, as he recounts the Antichrist’s military exploits, again quoting Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 (as well as Jer 17:11) as authoritative, and his persecution of the Church, supposedly illustrated by Revelation 12 (*Antichr.* 51-63). The eschatological enemy is supposed to rule for the Danielic 1,260 days, representing the half-week in Dan 9:27 and the three-and-a-half years in Rev 12:14 (*Antichr.* 43, 61). The text ends with the account of Christ’s Parousia

and the resurrection of the dead (*Antichr.* 64-66) and calls upon the reader to keep faith (*Antichr.* 67).

The general features of *De Christo et Antichristo* prove it to be a complete narrative of the Antichrist's nature and activity and a source of paramount importance to my study. As I have noted above, the whole text is shot through with Biblical quotations, even resembling the later catenae. Hippolytus is very keen to show that the matters of eschatology have been foretold, albeit in a veiled way, in the Scriptures. On several occasions he does not feel the urge to interpret these passages, but quotes them at length and leaves them to speak with their own voice. This is the case in *Antichr.* 63 which quotes 2 Thess 2:1-11 without any exegesis. Importantly, this is the only passage which seems to envisage a direct confrontation between Christ and his eschatological opponent (2 Thess 2:8; see Isa 11:4). Hippolytus finds that this NT passage fully satisfies the need to describe such a confrontation. That such a confrontation is otherwise assumed is attested in *Antichr.* 64 where Jesus ἐπάξει τὴν ἐκπόρωσιν καὶ τὴν δικαιοκρισίαν πᾶσι τοῖς ἀπειθήσασιν αὐτῷ, "will bring conflagration and just judgement on all those disobedient to him."

While Hippolytus does not accentuate the violent antimessianic conflict, the motif of mimetic rivalry between Christ and Antichrist emerges front and centre throughout the text, especially in *Antichr.* 6. Nowhere in the sources discussed heretofore is the parallelism between the two figures so developed and profound. Hippolytus thus stands at the apex of the interest in the Antichrist's deceitful similarity to Christ which I have previously shown to be of central importance to texts such as 2 Thessalonians 2,³²

³² See above, pp. 168-9.

Revelation,³³ *Sibylline Oracle* 3,³⁴ *Ascension of Isaiah* 4,³⁵ and *Apocalypse of Elijah* 3.³⁶

Hippolytus' *De Christo et Antichristo* is willing to provide a biographical account of the Antichrist's life and activity in which it resembles the narratives about the antimessianic *res gestae* in the Pseudepigrapha.

6.4.2 *Commentary on Daniel*

The second work of Hippolytus, in which he discusses the Antichrist, is his *Commentary on Daniel*, written shortly after *De Christo et Antichristo* sometime in the first decade of the second century.³⁷ This document is extant in several (usually incomplete) Greek MSS, with fragments preserved in Syriac and Armenian and a complete translation available in Slavonic.³⁸ The *Commentary* is very important from the point of view of the study of early Christianity, as it is the oldest fully preserved Christian commentary on any book of the Bible. The fact, that it engages with Daniel, testifies to the importance of eschatological expectation among the earliest Christian communities.

The references to the Antichrist all appear in Book IV of the *Commentary* which offers an exegesis of Daniel 7-12, thus treating the apocalyptic sections of the book almost as a self-contained whole. The major concern of this part of Hippolytus' *Commentary* is to localise his own historical moment in the larger scheme of salvation history and to counter the claims that this history is nearing its finish (see *Comm. Dan.* 4.5.6, 16.1-2, 19.1-7). He does this primarily through computation, asserting that Christ's birth (which Hippolytus is the first to date precisely to 25 December) happened 5,500 years after the creation of the world. Since the creation happened in six days and one day represents a

³³ See above, p. 179.

³⁴ See above, p. 215.

³⁵ See above, pp. 226–27.

³⁶ See above, pp. 234–5.

³⁷ Lefèvre 1947: 10; Bracht 2014: 33. Cf. Brent 1995: 278–9; Schmidt 2017: 9 who argue for 220s.

³⁸ On the textual transmission of the text see Richard 2000: xiv–xxv. On the Slavonic translation see Iliev 2014: 149–70.

millennium, the Eschaton will happen 6,000 years after the creation (4.23.1-24.7; see Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 5.39.2 for the same calculation), and so the end-time consummation would happen only after several centuries into the future.

While modern scholarship sees the figure of Antiochus IV as a consistent feature in the background of the visions in Daniel 7, 8, 9, and 11 alike, Hippolytus surveys both history and the future in order to find their referents. The vision of the four living beings Daniel 7, discussed in *Comm. Dan.* 4.1.1-24.7, is interpreted by Hippolytus very much like in *De Christo et Antichristo*, i.e. as representing a succession of historical empires of the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans (4.2.4-5.2; see also 4.7.1-8.9 for the same sequence in reference to Daniel 2). The Antichrist is supposed to emerge as the small horn (4.5.3, 12.4) and persecute the saints (4.12.5, 14.1). On the other hand, the vision of the ram and the goat, which also speaks about the little horn (Dan 8:9-14), is seen as a historical narrative about the events of Antiochus' reign (*Comm. Dan.* 4.26.7-8). While interpreting Daniel 9 in *Comm. Dan.* 4.28.3-35.3, Hippolytus sees the seventy weeks prophecy as referring to the rebuilding of the Temple after the return from exile. Finally, Hippolytus understands Daniel 11 as straddling the divide between the past and the future, as he reads Dan 11:3-35 as a historical account of Antiochus and his successors (*Comm. Dan.* 4.42.1-47.10), but Dan 11:36-45 as a futuristic prophecy about the Antichrist (*Comm. Dan.* 4.48.1-54.3) who (just as in *De Christo et Antichristo*) engages in military conquests (4.49.1) and persecutes the saints (4.50.2-4). The apparent double orientation of the Danielic prophecy towards history and the future alike is emphasised by Hippolytus in the strongest terms when he discusses the prophecy about the abominating sacrilege: Δύο οὖν βδελύγματα προείρηκεν Δανιήλ, ἓν μὲν ἀφυσισμοῦ, ἓν δὲ ἐρημώσεως. τί τὸ του ἀφανισμοῦ ἀλλ' ἢ ὃ ἔστησεν ἐκεῖ κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν ὁ Ἀντίοχος; καὶ τί τὸ τῆς ἐρημώσεως ἀλλ' ἢ τὸ καθόλου, ὡς παρέσται ὁ ἀντίχριστος, "Daniel then has foretold two sacrileges,

one of destruction and of abomination. What is the one of destruction but that which Antiochus set up there at that time? And what is the one of abomination but that which will be universal, when the Antichrist draws near?” (*Comm. Dan.* 4.53.1).³⁹ The eternal punishment of the Antichrist, along with his accomplices, is recounted in 4.55.6. The antimessianic speculation thus frames Hippolytus’ exegesis of the Danielic visions and is portrayed as the violent final act of history before the Eschaton.

Several important points emerge with which I would like to conclude my discussion of Hippolytus’ anti-Christology. First, both *De Christo et Antichristo* and the *Commentary on Daniel* are extremely beholden to the Bible in their treatment of eschatology, with the voice of the exegete often indistinguishable from the testimony of Scripture. Hippolytus engages the main prophetic writings of the OT, as well as Jesus’ eschatological discourses in the Synoptic Gospel, 2 Thessalonians, and Revelation (with 1-2 John not even hinted at). This fact further substantiates my argument about the importance of Biblical interpretation for ancient antimessianism.

On the other hand, Hippolytus, quite similarly to Irenaeus, is very reserved about linking the Antichrist to his own political circumstances, especially since he is explicit about the Eschaton not being imminent. The messianic opponent—who, to be sure, is identified as Jewish in origin—is supposed to come only after the dissolution of the Roman state which acts as the restrainer spoken of in 2 Thess 2:7 (*Comm. Dan.* 4.21.3; see also Tertullian, *Apol.* 32.1; 39.2). However, Hippolytus is by no means entirely sympathetic to Rome, especially as he is writing in the context of apparent persecution.⁴⁰ His subtle anti-Roman attitude is visible in his preference for the name *Λατῆριος* as the reading of 666 in Rev 13:18 (*Antichr.* 50), at the same time encouraging caution in such exegetical exercises. It is also difficult to read the quotations from the anti-Babylonian prophecies

³⁹ On this see Schmidt 2017: 17.

⁴⁰ On Hippolytus’ writings in the context of martyrdom see Shelton 2008; Schmidt 2017: 15–6.

is Isaiah 47 and Revelation 17 and 18 (*Antichr.* 34-42) as not being a coded criticism of the Roman power. Furthermore, in Hippolytus' exegesis of Daniel 2, the rock, representing Christ (*Antichr.* 28) destroys all of the earthly kingdoms, including Rome (*Antichr.* 26; see also *Comm. Dan.* 4.10.2) which shows that they are not on the same side of history. While Hippolytus is much more interested in expounding the Scriptures, he offers veiled hints to his attentive readers that make clear that Rome is part and parcel of the historical sequence which culminates in the Antichrist.⁴¹

Finally, the two eschatological works by Hippolytus seem to complement each other in how they develop the key motifs of the antimessianic conflict. Whilst *De Christo et Antichristo* presents the Antichrist primarily as the mimetic rival of Christ, the *Commentary on Daniel* clearly indicates an overt victory of the latter and an eternal punishment for the former, though without any details.

In conclusion, Hippolytus shows himself to be the antimessianic author of antiquity who sees the potential of the OT and the NT in illuminating the end-time conflict, as well as the importance of this confrontation for the larger framework of history.

6.5 Origen

The fifth section of this chapter will be devoted to Hippolytus' contemporary and the most consequential figure of early Christian theology before Augustine, i.e. Origen (ca. 184-254). Very much like Tertullian, Origen did not produce a single work concerned with eschatology and his references to the Antichrist emerge in a non-systematic way across his vast corpus. Nevertheless, Origen's intentions in mentioning the eschatological enemy are peculiar and worth analysing for their own merits.

⁴¹ On the attitude of Hippolytus to Rome see Dunbar 1977: 59–64; Cerrato 2002: 236–49; Bădiliță 2005: 237–40.

Most of Origen's remarks about the Antichrist are connected by the theme of falsehood that is supposedly represented by the eschatological enemy. Commenting on the Matthean eschatological discourse in *Comm. ser. Matt.* 47, Origen—here in line with Irenaeus and Tertullian—sees the heretics, including for instance Marcion, as the false prophets and Antichrists, with the singular Antichrist representing their overall deceit. *Comm. Joh.* 20.21 on 8:44 identifies the Antichrist, whose name is used synonymously with “the devil”, as the father of lies.

The Antichrist's duplicitous nature becomes focalised when brought in close juxtaposition with Christ. One of the key passages to understand Origen's thinking about the Antichrist is *Cels.* 6.45-46. There, he enumerates its Biblical sources as Daniel, Jesus' prophetic sayings from the Gospels, and the Pauline corpus (certainly meaning 2 Thessalonians). Furthermore, he characterises the Antichrist as the extreme opposite of Christ, with the human nature of the latter representing utmost goodness and the former being utterly evil. Earlier on, *Cels.* 2.50 describes the Antimesiah's activity primarily in terms of deceptive signs and wonders. In *Comm. ser. Matt.* 33 on Matt 24:5, Origen goes at length to portray the Antichrist (again a synonym for the devil) as simulating Christ in all of his qualities and actions. Later on (*Comm. ser. Matt.* 42), the Antichrist is presented as *falsum verbum*, “the false word” (obviously echoing Christ being the Logos), and as *ostendens se quasi sit deus et quasi ipse sit Christus dei verbum*, “displaying himself as if he were God and as if he himself were Christ, the Word of God”. These passages show how keen Origen is to amplify the mimetic rivalry between Christ and his end-time opponent.⁴² In like manner, Origen in *Comm. Matt.* 15.31 offers a striking exegesis of the Matthean crucifixion scene and identifies the hour of Jesus' death as the “last hour” from

⁴² See also *Cels.* 6.79 where the direction of imitation seems to go the other way round, as Origen deduces from the plurality of Antichrists in 1 John 2:18 that there also many Christs, probably meaning Church leaders.

1 John 2:18 and hence as a time of heightened antimessianic activity. Origen moves beyond the extensive accounts of the Antichrist's life and deeds which are found in Hippolytus and some Christian Pseudepigrapha and which make the eschatological opponent the foil of Christ. In Origen's understanding, the mimetic rivalry between the two permeates their respective natures—as Christ is the Truth and the Word, so the Antichrist become the False Word.

Some of Origen's antimessianic discourse is clearly parenetic. In *Comm. Joh.* 33.17 on John 13:20 he advises the audience not to associate with the Antichrist, here also called “the evil one” and, again, “the false word”; the same point is made in *Selecta in Exodum* on Exod 20:5-6. *Expositio in Proverbia* 30.65 contains a similar warning that the Antichrist leads people to perdition.

To summarise Origen's thinking about the antimessianism, several points stand out. As is the case with Irenaeus and Hippolytus, Scriptural texts are the irreducible basis of Origen's eschatological speculation. It is developed at considerable length in his commentaries, especially those on Matthew. At the same time the polemical *Contra Celsum* argues for its firm grounding in the Biblical texts and quotes from them extensively. When it comes to the nature of antimessianic conflict, Origen does not envisage the Antichrist as violently combating Christ. He does present repeatedly, however, the two as bound by mimetic rivalry, with the Antichrist performing miraculous acts and mirroring Christ's essential qualities, e.g. his identity as the Logos of God. As noted by Bădiliță, Origen “abandonne provisoirement le cadre eschatologique et place la figure de l'adversaire du Christ dans un contexte «métaphysique»”.⁴³ The Alexandrian is not interested in historicising the Antichrist or describing his appearance or actions. He instead construes him as the paragon of falsehood and evil and the deceitful reflection of

⁴³ McGinn 1994: 64–5; Bădiliță 2005: 280.

Christ's attributes. Consequently, Origen's antimessianism to some extent ceases to be beholden to a vision of the end-time and becomes spiritualised, thus being a precedent for the development of the Antichrist tradition in Tyconius and Augustine.

6.6 Commodianus

The early Christian Latin poet Commodianus was probably the most enigmatic and at the same time the most original eschatological thinker of the Patristic era. He left two books of poems entitled *Instructiones* and a long *Carmen apologeticum* (also known under the title *Carmen de duobus populis*), both of which refer to the Antichrist(s). Commodianus did not garner widespread attention and so almost all of the details of his life are lost, including his place of origin and dates of life. The first external attestation of his life comes from Gennadius of Massalis, *De viris illustribus* 15, written most probably in 490s, only to be followed shortly thereafter by the condemnation of Commodianus' writings in the Gelasian decree. On the other hand, the very scant and uncertain references in Commodianus' own writings led scholars to a widely divergent proposals as to his time of activity, ranging from mid-third to late fifth century.⁴⁴ The debate is a complex one, but I will side with the majority of scholars and date his writings to the time of the Decian persecution. This conclusion is supported by the fact that this earlier dating is able to accommodate the kind of speculative eschatology Commodianus espoused and which waned across Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries. Provenancing Commodianus' work is an even more difficult task, especially since, while writing in Latin, which was dominant in the Roman West, he is acquainted with apocalyptic traditions of Eastern origin, such as those preserved in the *Sibylline Oracles*.

⁴⁴ Dombart 1887: i (mid-third century); Brewer 1906: 29–145 (mid-fifth century); Durel 1912: viii (between 250 and 257); Martin 1913; idem 1957: 51–72; idem 1960: x–xiii (mid-third century); Visser 1965: 131 (mid-third century); Salvatore 1977: 25–31 (between 250–260); Bădiliță 2005: 302–5 (mid-third century).

6.6.1 *Instructiones*

An important description of the Antichrist emerges in the acrostic *De Antechristi tempore* (*Instr.* 1.41). The poem opens with a quote from Isaiah 14:16b-17a about the eschatological tyrant who is then most certainly identified as Nero. In line with the well-known *Nero redivivus* tradition, he will emerge from the underworld and rule for the apocalyptic measure of three-and-a-half years during the tumultuous last week of world's history, with the other half being given to Elijah (whom Commodianus surprisingly does not pair up with Enoch). Nero is accused of setting fire to Rome, here traditionally veiled as Babylon, and envisaged to depart for Jerusalem where he would proclaim himself Christ, perform deceitful signs, and garner Jewish support ("the deceived First People").

In the *Instructiones*, the Antichrist is mentioned twice more. In *De resurrectione prima* (*Instr.* 1.43) the martyrs *sub Antichristo qui uincunt/Robusta mar[tyr]ia*, "who triumph under the Antichrist by their firm martyrdom", enter the thousand-year kingdom. In the final poem of the collection, *Nomen Gasei* (*Instr.* 2.35 which is a reverse acrostic identifying the author as *Commodianus mendicus Christi*, "Commodianus, the beggar of Christ") the social order is reversed, as the dignitaries and nobles *sub Antichristo deuicto*, "under the defeated Antichrist" will be the servants of the saints during the millennium after which they are to suffer destruction.

6.6.2 *Carmen apologeticum*

An even richer treatment of eschatology is offered in the final portion of *Carmen apologeticum* (vv. 791-1060) that describes a complex set of end-time developments. It can be broken down as follows:

- (1) vv. 791-804 – introduction describing the future life of Christians;
- (2) vv. 805-822 – Gothic invasion and Roman defeat;

- (3) vv. 823-890 – the rise and rule of *Nero redivivus* who persecutes Elijah and the Church;
- (4) vv. 891-940 – the invasion of the Eastern nations led by a ruler who defeats Nero, sacks Rome, and lures the Palestinian Jewish population with false miracles;
- (5) vv. 941-970 – the description of the nine-and-a-half Israelite tribes which were preserved by God beyond the Euphrates and lead a peaceful existence there;
- (6) vv. 971-1060 – the final eschatological battle, conflagration of the world, and the glorification of the saints.

Carmen includes a vast array of interesting apocalyptic motifs which cannot be fully elaborated on here.⁴⁵ Most importantly for my present argument, Commodianus introduces a crucial innovation to the Antichrist tradition, as he introduces a double antimessianic actor: *De Persida homo immortalem esse se dicit./Nobis Nero factus Antichristus, ille Iudaeis*, “He calls himself an immortal man of Persian origin./Nero was the Antichrist for us, but this one is the Antichrist for the Jews” (*Carm. apol.* 932-933). He thus casts both the revived Nero and the Eastern ruler, who dethrones him, as antimessianic,⁴⁶ although they engage in the end-time conflict in different ways.

Nero is not depicted as performing deceitful signs or combating Christ, but is shown primarily as the persecutor of the Church. Interestingly, however, his post-mortem

⁴⁵ One such motif is the description of the lost tribes of Israel (*Instr.* 1.42; *Carm. apol.* 941-970) on which see e.g. Bădiliță 2005: 513–9. On Commodianus’ sympathetic stance towards Torah and Judaism see Kinzig 1998: 81–6.

⁴⁶ This obviously stands in contrast to the singular Neronic Antichrist spoken of in *Instr.* 1.41. Visser 1965: 131–6 argues that the poem in the *Instructiones* was originally much closer to the more complex scenario of the *Carmen*, but was later redacted and simplified. This solution appears plausible, especially since both works had separate transmission histories. Nevertheless, the vision of *Instr.* 1.41 might be due to Commodianus’ own willingness to present his eschatology in a simplified manner for instructional purposes. The *Carmen* itself acknowledges the difficulty of its scenario and stops short of developing it further: *De quo pauca tamen suggero, quae legi secreta*, “About which I say little, what I read in secret” (936).

return elicits an amazed and worshipful response: *Hunc ipse [se]natus inuisum esse mirantur;/Qui cum apparuerit, quasi deum esse putabunt*, “The senate wonder at him being invisible,/So when he appeared, they thought him to be a god” (832-833; see also 835). Nero’s coming back to life is thus the grounds for a claim to divinity and, possibly, an imitation of Christ’s resurrection.

On the other hand, the Persian monarch acts as the liberator of the Jews and gains their support through signs and wonders (926-931), although they begin to recognise his falsehood shortly thereafter (937-940). He thus attempts to act in a messianic fashion, presenting himself as immortal and numinous. On the other hand, he meets his demise not at hands of Christ but rather those of the returning Israelite tribes. Overall, Christ does not play an active role in the final stage of the eschatological development which is led by God.

Commodianus is one of the most daring contributors to the ancient antimessianic speculation. He is clearly in touch with the texts of both the OT and NT, as well as with traditions and texts now outside of the canon. His engagement, however, is not one of exegetical inquiry, but rather of evocation and borrowing of motifs. The antimessianic conflict is divided between two separate Antichrists who, while not directly conflicted with Christ, can be said to act deceitfully by rising from the dead (Nero) and performing miracles (the Persian king).⁴⁷

6.7 Lactantius

Lucius Cae(ci)lius Firmianus Lactantius (ca. 250-325) was a Christian rhetorician who, having converted around the year 300 at the onset of Diocletian’s persecution,

⁴⁷ This division is introduced without any reference to the Antichrists of the Johannine Epistles. It does have, however, a distant parallel in *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Deut 34:3 which envisages פורענות ארמילגוס רשיעא וסדרי “the punishment of Armilgos [sic] and the order of battle of Gog” to afflict Israel. On Armilus see pp. 93–4 above.

became a tutor to Constantine's son, Crispus around 310. His most substantial work, the *Divine Institutes* in seven books, was written around that time⁴⁸ and offers an apology for the Christian faith addressed to Constantine, touching on a large number of doctrinal themes in passing. As such, the work comes from the exact moment of a major shift in both Christian theology and history.

Lactantius' contribution to eschatology and the Antichrist tradition is included in the final, seventh book of the *Institutes*. After discussing the question of immortality of the soul (*Div. Inst.* 7.1.1-13.14), the author moves on the question of the Last Judgement which would inaugurate a new and better age (7.14.6, 15.4). In agreement with other Patristic authors, he places this event six thousand years after Creation (7.14.7-11; see 7.25.5 where he asserts that, based on this calculation, no-one expects the Eschaton to happen sooner than in two centuries⁴⁹), to be followed by a thousand years of peace (7.14.11, 26.1). The end-time will be accompanied by signs more amazing than those of Exodus (7.15.1-6) and signify the end of the Roman rule which Lactantius sees foretold by pagan prophets (7.15.7-19). In 7.16.1-4, the first eschatological antagonist, a Northern king, takes advantage of the civil strife within the Empire and usurps power for himself; this would be followed by disturbances in the natural world (7.16.5-11) and suffering of humans (7.16.12-13). The eschatological evils are then interrupted by a God-sent prophet, who converts people to the true faith and violently destroys those not heeding him (7.17.1-2). They recommence, however, with the arrival of *alter rex e Syria malo spiritu genitus*, "another king from Syria, born of an evil spirit" (7.17.2). He destroys the Northern king and kills the prophet who, left unburied, is resurrected and assumed into heaven (7.17.3;

⁴⁸ McDonald 1964: 8–10; Nicholson 1985: 291; Bowen, Garsney 2003: 3; Bădiliță 2005: 326–5. See DePalma Digeser 1994: 33–52 for a more precise dating to 310-313.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, this predication harmonises with the one made a century earlier by Hippolytus in *Comm. Dan.* 4.24.4 that five hundred years separate the birth of Christ from his Parousia. Since the *Institutes* were written in the early fourth century CE, the Hippolytan time measure would indeed be achieved in no less than two hundred years. On Lactantius' chronology see Nicholson 1985: 294–7.

see Rev 11:7-12). These events appear to incite the Syrian king's fury, as he becomes *mendaciorum propheta, et se ipsum constituet ac uocabit deum, se coli iubebit ut dei filium*, "the prophet of lies, and he will set himself up as and call himself god, he will issue an order to be worshipped as god's son" (7.17.4). He performs deceitful natural miracles and violently persecutes the faithful (7.17.5-9), with his activity peaking in the siege of the mountain where the remaining believers found refuge and call upon God to help them. Their pleas are heard and God sends yet another king who liberates them and kills the tyrant (7.17.10-11).

Lactantius then moves to a theological interpretation of the scenario he has just presented. He first offers a proof from Gentile prophecy to confirm the trustworthiness of his prediction (7.18.1-8), and then links the foreseen night of eschatological liberation to the night of Easter (7.19.3-5). Lactantius elaborates on the figure of the Syrian king whom he explicitly calls the Antichrist and whom he envisages to suffer final defeat at the hands of Christ (7.19.6-9).

Lactantius then discusses at length the questions related to the nature of the souls and judgement (7.20.1-25.9), but returns to eschatological speculation in 7.26.1-7. There, he describes the end of the millennium when "the prince of demons" will be released from bondage and lead the nations of the world to besiege Jerusalem. The evil forces are destroyed by the heat of the sun which God kept in the sky for three days, while the elect—the only remaining humans—are preserved underground. The creation then experiences renewal, whereas the evil forces along with their leader *in conspectu angelorum atque iustorum perpetuo igni cremabitur in aeternum*, "will burn in eternal fire for eternity in front of the angels as well as the just".

The ending of the *Divine Institutes* clearly places Lactantius within the stream of ancient antimessianism. Most importantly, he is explicit in his identification of the Syrian

king as the Antichrist and characterises him both as usurping the status of God and Christ (who are, to be sure, most intimately connected; see 7.19.4) and as being conflicted with, defeated, and punished by Christ. Lactantius thus testifies to the significance of mimetic rivalry and eschatological war in the Antichrist expectation.

It is important to note that, unlike Commodianus, Lactantius does not portray a double Antichrist.⁵⁰ Although the author might be relying on *Carmen apologeticum* or share a common tradition with it, the king from the North does not present himself as an antimessianic agent. He does not claim Christ's status, mimic him in any way, or fight him. His reign is much more associated with usurpation of all political power (see 7.16.4: *noua consilia in pectore suo uolutabit, ut proprium sibi constituat imperium, leges commutet et suas sanciat*, "he will come up with new plans in his heart in order to appropriate power for himself, to alter the laws and enact his own").

Furthermore, the Syrian tyrant acts as a persecutor of the Church, both before and after the millennium. This detail must have evoked the fresh memories of Diocletian's persecution that which predates the *Institutes* by not much more than a decade. Interestingly, however, Lactantius does not harbour any, even the subtlest, anti-Roman attitude, unlike what can be said about Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Commodianus. Indeed, just like Tertullian (*Apol.* 32), he invites prayers for the state so that the emergence of the tyrant can be delayed (7.25.8-9). The Syrian king is decidedly not Roman and does not have a historical counterpart beyond embodying the general fear of an Asian force conquering Rome (see 7.15.11: *imperium in Asiam reuertetur ac rursus oriens dominabitur atque occidens seruiet*, "the empire will be returned to Asia, and again the East will dominate and the West serve"). One has to remember, however, that Lactantius in *On the Death of the Persecutors* (written around 320) shows the Roman rulers before

⁵⁰ Cf. Hill 1995: 101.

Constantine as objects of divine wrath due to their persecution of Christians. Since none of that sentiment is present in *Divine Institutes* 7, the eschatology of the work, which probably predates the edict of Milan, might be deliberately designed to appease its addressee, i.e. Constantine and the Roman elite in general.

Unlike Irenaeus and Hippolytus, Lactantius does not see Rome as the fourth Danielic kingdom, as he does not make any reference to this Biblical concept. He comes close to it while listing past kingdoms in 7.15.13, but there Rome is preceded by Persians, Greeks, Assyrians, and, unusually, Egyptians, thus breaking what would have been a standard fourfold pattern. He also does not reference 2 Thessalonians 2 while praising Rome as the restrainer of the eschatological tyranny. These two facts are a confirmation of Lactantius' only sporadic engagement with the Bible. He claims to derive his knowledge from the prophets (7.25.1, 26.8), but does not name any and quotes Scriptural texts only twice (Ps 89:4 in 7.14.9; Ps 1:5 LXX in 7.20.5). It is clear that Lactantius knows Biblical traditions (7.17.3 and Revelation 11; 7.26.1-7 and Ezekiel 38-39 as well as Revelation 19-20).⁵¹ However, since he departs from the Biblical stories as we have them significantly, it is quite probable that he knows these texts as interpreted by other authors. On the other hand, Lactantius quotes copiously from the *Sibylline Oracles* (the only occasion when a pseudepigraphon is acknowledged as a source for the Patristic antimessianic speculation), *Oracle of Hystaspes*, Vergil, and other Graeco-Roman sources. It might very well be the case that he pushes his Scriptural knowledge to the background and his classical education to the fore, as it is only the latter that his audience, the educated Roman upper class, would grasp and accept. Undoubtedly, however, Lactantius, unlike all other authors I discuss in this chapter, does not consider the Bible to be a useful starting ground for his antimessianic speculation, immersing himself instead

⁵¹ On Lactantius' reading of Ezekiel 38-39 see above, p. 99.

in his received eschatological lore and the testimonies of Gentile (or originally Gentile, like Sibyl) authors.

6.8 Cyril of Jerusalem

This and the following section of the chapter will engage three post-Constantinian authors who conclude the development of the ancient Christian antimessianic speculation. A brief discussion needs to be devoted to Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315-387) who describes the coming of the Antichrist in his fifteenth *Catechesis*. The text belongs to a series of eighteen Lenten catechetical lectures to catechumens about to be baptised during Easter that were preached in Jerusalem at the beginning of Cyril's episcopacy in 350 or 351.⁵² Most of the *Catecheses* are an exposition of the articles of the Nicene Creed, with the fifteenth one being devoted to Christ's Parousia, judgement, and everlasting kingdom.

After assuring his hearers about the certainty of the Second Coming (*Catech.* 15.1-3), Cyril teaches them about the signs that will accompany it, noting, that some of them are already visible, and warning against the Antichrist's deception (15.4-8). He is especially interested in presenting the divisions within the Church caused by heresies as the apostasy preparing the way for the Antichrist, in line with 2 Thessalonians 2 which Cyril quotes at length (15.9). Following a well-established exegetical precedent, present already in Irenaeus and Hippolytus, he depicts Rome as the fourth Danielic empire (15.12). Its future fall would then precipitate the appearance of the Antichrist who will declare himself to be Christ (15.11) and perform false signs of power (15.14). The appearance of the eschatological enemy will happen in the ruins of the Jerusalem Temple which were supposedly, almost three centuries after its destruction, still visible (15.15). After noting, that the Antichrist will reign for three-and-a-half years (which Cyril

⁵² For this dating, see Hellemo 1989: 146; Doval 1997: 129-32; Yarnold 2000: 6; Drijvers 2004: 56-8. Bădiliță 2005: 345 opts for the slightly earlier date of 348.

explicitly draws from Daniel and not from Revelation which he considers apocryphal) and that his reign will be marred by persecution (15.16-17), Cyril spends the rest of the lecture describing the Parousia and the Final Judgement in order to admonish and build up his audience.

On the one hand, Cyril presents a very unoriginal vision of the Antichrist, lacking in the exciting eschatological detail in which the accounts of Irenaeus, Hippolytus, or Commodianus abound. The end-time antagonist will appear for a set amount of time to imitate Christ and persecute the faithful, only to be destroyed by Christ at his Second Coming. The simplicity of Cyril's treatment is most likely due to its catechetical, i.e. introductory, setting, but also speaks to a decrease in the apocalyptic speculation in the decades following the edict of Milan. Indeed, most of the Patristic testimonies (as well as, indeed, pseudepigraphic and apocryphal ones, as far as they can be dated) about the Antichrist come from the first three centuries CE. Cyril is a witness to the reorientation of eschatology away from speculation towards being a tool of ethical instruction and admonition which becomes clearer still in Tyconius and Augustine.

On the other hand, however, Cyril is not without distinctive marks in his appropriation of the antimessianic tradition. Most importantly, his lecture—itsself a commentary on the creedal text—sparks with Biblical quotations which, when directly relevant to the Antichrist, come almost solely from Daniel, the Matthean eschatological discourse, and 2 Thessalonians 2. By not utilising 1-2 John or Revelation, Cyril limits himself to the same Scriptural sources that were enumerated by Origen in *Cels.* 6.45. Furthermore, Cyril, while not eschatologically adventurous, does not envisage the Parousia as something distant, but sees some signs of the end as already manifest (15.5-6). Most importantly, while seeing Christ and the Antichrist as directly conflicted (15.12 echoing 2 Thess 2:8), he pays much greater and consistent attention to the latter being a

false imitator of the former. This motif appears to be of rhetorical weight, as it enables Cyril to warn his hearers that they need to be watchful, since the Antichrist will be so much like the one whom the audience should really worship.

6.9 Tyconius and Augustine

This chapter will conclude with the discussion of the antimessianic ideas of two closely related Christian theologians of the late ancient period, namely Tyconius (ca. 330-395) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430). The reason for treating them together is the paramount and pervasive influence Tyconius had on Augustine, especially in the approach to eschatology and the figure of Antichrist. As Augustine knew Tyconius' writings and drew heavily from them, their visions are best discussed in conjunction.

Tyconius was a North African layman, who, while maintaining a lifelong Donatist persuasion, took issue with some of the Donatist doctrinal points and yet never joined Catholicism. Two works of his have been preserved, i.e. an exegetical treatise *Liber regularum* and the commentary on Revelation *Expositio Apocalypseos*. Together they offer a novel approach to Christian ecclesiology and eschatology and have left a very significant mark on later theology.

Liber regularum is work proposing a set of seven rules of the proper interpretation of Scripture, especially of its prophetic portions. Beyond the purely exegetical issues, however, Tyconius have intended his work to respond to a much more profound concern, namely the continued presence of evil in the Church in the end-time.⁵³ This issue might have been prompted by the passing of 350 years since Christ's death in the year 383 which is posited as the *terminus ante quem* of the book.⁵⁴ Tyconius grapples with *mysterium*

⁵³ Bright 1987: 50–7.

⁵⁴ Based on the reference to this timespan in *Reg.* 5.6.2-3, this dating was posited by Burkitt 1894: xvii-xviii; Anderson 1974: 164 n. 61; cf. Vercruysse 2004: 24–6, 292 n. 2. Even granted that Tyconius advances immanent eschatology and refuses to give precise predications, he might be responding to heightened end-time expectations around that time.

facinoris, “the mystery of iniquity” (2 Thess 2:7 in the Vulgate)⁵⁵ of the morally mixed nature of the Church which makes it impossible for the whole community to be identified as the people of God in the Eschaton. He tries to resolve this problem by showing that both Christ and Satan have their respective bodies and kingdoms composed of the members of the Church—this is the argument of *Liber regularum* 1, 2, and 7. The Church is therefore not a uniformly holy group, but contains both saints and sinners whose true destiny and identity will only be disclosed by the end-time apostasy (1.13; 7.4.3, both quoting 2 Thess 2:6-7; see also 3.28 quoting Matt 13:30). While Tyconius does envisage an eschatological consummation at some point in the future, the sixth rule, the recapitulation, shows that, in a sense, the Eschaton happens already in the present. Christ’s coming, for instance, is represented in the baptism of each of the believers (1.9). He provides the example of Matt 24:15-16 which foretells the Danielic abominating sacrilege and which is being fulfilled during the persecution of the Donatists in North Africa (6.3.1; see *Ex. Apoc.* 2.35). Several passages from 1 John are then quoted to show that those, who persecute fellow Christians, in fact deny Christ’s incarnation, since the believers are Christ’s own body, and thus the persecutors are themselves the Antichrist (6.4.2). A similar point is made in 3.19 where *inimici crucis Christ, negantes Christum in carne*, “the enemies of the cross of Christ who deny Christ in the flesh” (a combination of Phil 3:18 and 1 John 4:2), i.e. most probably the members of the body of Satan, are identified with the Man of Lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2.

Tyconius’ exegetical and ecclesial ideas are applied to the Book of Revelation in his slightly later *Expositio Apocalypseos* which profoundly influenced the reading of the last book of the NT in the West for centuries to come. He understands John’s prophecy not as being a sequence of events preceding the Eschaton, but rather a revelation of the

⁵⁵ 2 Thessalonians 2 is the central Scriptural text in *Liber regularum*, as shown by Bright 1987: 54–5.

tribulations the Church will endure throughout its history (*Ex. Apoc.* 1.5 on Rev 1:15). Consequently, the Antichrist does not function as an actor emerging in the distant future, but rather as someone already at work, though concealed (1.41 on Rev 3:10). On the other hand, Tyconius does not entirely give up on the futurity of this figure who is yet to inaugurate unprecedented persecution (7.18 on Rev 20:3).

The references to the Antichrist himself in *Liber regularum* and *Expositio Apocalypseos* are few and far between. It appears that it is Satan that Tyconius considered to be the chief opponent of God and Christ throughout history. The devil's antimessianic function—which, under my proposed definition, makes him a part of the Antichrist tradition—is focused primarily on imitation. *Reg.* 1.9 notes that the end-time enemy will arrive with false wonders and try to establish his own Church. In *Reg.* 6.4.4, he is said to preach Christ only to gain popularity and prepare the way for himself. In *Ex. Apoc.* 4.46 on Rev 13:18, the number of the Beast (which Tyconius knows through a textual variant as 616) is deciphered as ΧΙΣ which evokes some of the letters in the names ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ. The Beast is therefore an imitation of Christ by claiming a name similar to his. The manuscript tradition of the Tyconian commentary adds to this explanation a peculiar 'Antichristogram': which  combines the letters ΧΙΣ.⁵⁶ Lucifer himself resembles Christ, as the former preserves some of his angelic nature and both are identified with the morning star (*Reg.* 7.3.2). Most importantly, however, the similarity between God and Christ and Satan moves beyond deceptive mimicry and achieves cosmic proportions. Both parties are corporate in their nature and possess their respective kingdoms; Tyconius is ready to acclaim that *ipse est mons, ipsi montes Aquilonis. In his diabolus sedet, et nubium caeli ueluti dominatur; hactenus se similem dicit Altissimo*, "he is the mountain, they are the mountains of the North [Satan's kingdom]. The devil sits

⁵⁶ See the discussion in Gryson 2011: 310–1. This passage from Tyconius, including the sign, is preserved in the early mediaeval anonymous *De monogramma* (lines 1–55), published by Gryson 2003: 149–57.

upon them, as if ruling the clouds of the sky; to this extent he calls himself to be similar to the Most High” (7.4.1). The presence of the antimessianic force in the world provides a constant and hostile counterpart to the dominion of God and Christ, with the entire salvation history being structured around this division. At the same time, Tyconius pays little attention to the way the conflict between the two kingdoms is going to be resolved in the actual end-time (see *Reg.* 3.19 quoting 2 Thess 2:8). From the two basic motifs of ancient antimessianism, mimetic rivalry and violent conflict, Tyconius is actually concerned only with the first one on which he builds the idea of the bipartite bodies of Christ and Satan which always resemble each other and yet are always in conflict.

All of the salient features of Tyconian eschatology are taken up in Augustine who, though viciously anti-Donatist, appreciated and indeed appropriated Tyconius’ theological ingenuity.⁵⁷ The references to the Antichrist in the Augustinian corpus are numerous and emerge across all periods of Augustine’s literary activity. He does occasionally display knowledge of the earlier, more speculative forms of the antimessianic tradition, such as the Antichrist’s origin from Dan (*Quaest. in Hept.* 6.22) or that Elijah will disturb his persecutions (*Quaest. ev.* 1.21).

Most importantly, however, Augustine develops Tyconius’ idea of the two kingdoms which continue until the end of time and which Augustine famously calls “the two cities”. This concept is thematic in his *magnum opus*, that is *De civitate Dei*, written between 413 and 426. In it, he emphasises the present intermingling of the two cities:

In hoc ergo saeculo maligno, in his diebus malis...multi reprobi miscentur bonis et utrique tamquam in sagem evangelicam colliguntur et in hoc mundo tamquam in mari utrique inclusi retibus indiscrete natant, donec perveniatur ad litus, ubi mali segregentur a bonis et in bonis tamquam in templo suo sit Deus omnia in omnibus,

“So in this malicious age, in these evil days...many wicked are mixed with the good. They are, as it were, both gathered in the net of the Gospel and swim in this world, as if in a sea, both caught together in nets, until they are brought ashore. There, the evil will

⁵⁷ The link between Tyconius and Augustine is acknowledged by the latter (*Doctr. chr.* 3.92-134) and discussed in scholarship; see e.g. Chadwick 1990: 49–55; Harvey 1999: 133–51.

be separated from the good and in the good, like in his temple, ‘God may be all in all’” (*Civ.* 18.49 echoing 1 Cor 15:28).

This idea naturally influences his eschatology, as is visible in *Civ.* 20.9.1 where he notes that the Kingdom of God has a double signification, referring to both the present Church, which includes good and evil alike, and the future, glorified one into which only the good will be admitted. He does not in any way deny the futurity of the Eschaton, but at the same time refuses to speculate on when it will take place (18.53.1). He also excuses himself from the question of whether the Church, having supposedly experienced ten waves of persecution already, will be free from it until the final tribulation during the reign of the Antichrist (18.52). He does, however, note that the persecutions were actually more numerous and are still ongoing in his time (but cf. *Enarrat. Ps.* 9.27 where the Antichrist’s persecution is the third one, after those by the emperors and by the heretics). For Augustine, whatever the Bible says about the end of the world can also be predicated on the present. In 20.19.1-4, while identifying the Man of Lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2 as the Antichrist but, admitting ignorance about his historical counterpart, Augustine keenly quotes those who resolve the *mysterium facinoris* by reference to 1 John 2. Consequently, the figure of the Antichrist would realise itself in the many heretics who will become so numerous as to become clearly distinct from the Church. The same reasoning emerges in 20.11-12 where Augustine denies that Gog and Magog, who are to wage war on the Church after the millennium is concluded, are barbarians—an idea plausible due to the foreign nations’ constant incursions into the Empire in Augustine’s time. Again, the prophecy is to be fulfilled by the persecutors of the Church anywhere in the world. Interestingly, Augustine calls Gog and Magog *partes Antichristi*, “the factions of the Antichrist”, and links their demise due to fire sent from heaven (Ezek 39:6) to Christ’s breath killing the Antichrist (2 Thess 2:8; Isa 11:4)

Augustine's immanent antimessianism found an earlier expression in three of his homilies on the core Scriptural text about the Antichrist, that is 1 John, preached in the octave of Easter in 407 in Hippo.⁵⁸ In the third homily, he understands the present plurality of the Antichrists as a sign that the end-time, which would otherwise be thought to arrive only with the final Antichrist, is really here (*Tract. ep. Io.* 3.3). Augustine's reading does not see eschatology as a speculative issue of the distant future, but embeds it in the present, thus bestowing urgency on it. He then pre-empts the question of the identity of the Antichrists by saying: *Et interrogare debet unusquisque conscientiam suam, an sit antichristus. Latine enim Antichristus, contrarius est Christo*, "and each and everyone should ask their conscience whether they be the Antichrist. For 'Antichrist' in Latin is 'contrary to Christ'" (3.4). The Antichrist is therefore an ecclesial and an ethical concept which Augustine uses as a weapon against the heretics and, as the later discussion reveals, especially the Donatists (3.7-9). They are identified as Antichrists in spite of their verbal adherence to the orthodoxy and due to their actions which divide the Church. This point is similar, but has an exactly opposite direction to that made by Tyconius in *Reg.* 6.4.2-4. Augustine later applies this argument to other heterodox groups (6.12-14; see also 7.2, 3, 4, 6). Interestingly, in *De baptismo* 6 and 7 he deals with the Donatist polemics against readmitting lapsed Christians into the Church without baptism whom the Donatist he quotes often refer to as Antichrists. This fact shows that antimessianic charges, based especially on 1-2 John, were current in the inter-Christian disputes from the turn of the fifth century.

In summary, Tyconius and Augustine represent a very significant watershed—though not a conclusion—in the development of the Christian Antichrist tradition. They together moved away from futuristic expectation of the kind seen in Irenaeus, Hippolytus,

⁵⁸ For this dating see Mountain, Lemouzy, Dideberg 2008: 7–12.

Commodianus, and Lactantius in favour of seeing the Antichrist and, even more importantly, the Antichrists as a present phenomenon. Tyconius identified antimessianic conflict and similarity between the corporate figure of Christ and Satan, and Augustine developed this vision, as he saw this conflict play out in the doctrinal debates of his day. Both authors show sensitivity to the importance of resemblance that the antimessianic actors are to bear to their divine counterparts. Tyconius identified the two kingdoms as symmetrical, whereas Augustine grappled with the degree to which the doctrines of the heterodox groups were similar to his own beliefs, as they all confessed Christ's incarnation and messianic status.

On the other hand, Augustine and Tyconius do not constitute a decisive break from the Patristic tradition of antimessianic expectation. Emphases similar to theirs have been evidenced in the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen. Furthermore, as it is the case with most of the relevant Church Fathers, they are profoundly engaged with the Bible which incites and guides their investigations. Tyconius is an exegete *par excellence*, as his two works represent the theory and practice of Scriptural interpretation and only as such contribute to his eschatology. Augustine, while less focused on exegesis, draws from the NT multiple times and preaches on the Johannine Epistles, not shying away from talking about the passages about the Antichrist. Finally, neither Tyconius nor Augustine deny the ultimately futuristic nature of Christian eschatology which, as they affirm, will find its realisation in an actual consummation. However, they appear to eschatologise the present by claiming that the end-time is not only to be watchfully expected, but is happening now, as the divisions within the Church shows.

6.10 Conclusion

This last substantial chapter of my thesis discussed the Patristic engagements with and contributions to the Antichrist tradition. This phase of its development is especially

significant for my argument, as the Church Fathers spoke explicitly about the Antichrist and expressed sustained interest in the figure which is visible especially in Hippolytus' *De Christo et Antichristo*.

Patristic references to the Antichrist substantiate my claim that ancient antimessianism forms a tradition. The authors depend on a broadly similar set of sources (this is especially notable in the case of Origen and Cyril), derive motifs from one another (the names of the Beast in Irenaeus and Hippolytus; the Northern and the Syrian ruler in Commodianus and Lactantius; chronological considerations in Hippolytus and Lactantius), and treat one another as exegetical inspiration (Tyconius and Augustine). While they offer markedly different views on the Antichrist, their writings convey the sense that they were aware that others were also engaging in this kind of speculation. The anti-Christology espoused by the Church Fathers, variegated though it is, can be fruitfully read within a traditionary framework.

Secondly, the Scriptural texts, especially Daniel and the NT, were a constant source of inspiration for the Patristic antimessianic expectation. It is only Lactantius that describes the Antichrist without offering at least proof-texts from the Bible, and it is only him and Commodianus that appear to be heavily reliant on the extracanonical material. Other antimessianic contributions I have discussed above quote the Bible repeatedly and often at length. Two early Christian commentaries—Hippolytus' on Daniel and Tyconius' on Revelation—are central to the development of Christian eschatology and greatly informed any subsequent antimessianic speculation. The authors tend to vary in their Biblical repertoires. Irenaeus and Hippolytus, for instance, disregard 1-2 John in favour of the more futuristic passages from Daniel and Revelation, whereas the Johannine distinction of the coming Antichrist and the future Antichrists proved topical for the North African Tertullian and Augustine.

Interestingly, most of the authors, while robust in the exegetical effort, are at least tacit in making claims about the relevance of the Antichrist. The Roman context of the above writings emerges typically only within the traditional four kingdom scheme within which Rome occupies the last spot. Irenaeus, followed by Hippolytus, insinuate that the Beast from Revelation 13 will be of Latin origin, but are largely (though perhaps tellingly) silent about the implications of such an identification. Hippolytus and Lactantius postpone the Parousia until after few centuries, thus purging their scenario of any relevance to immediate political circumstances. Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, and Tyconius are often engaged in anti-heretical disputes and also remain quiet on the political aspect of antimessianic expectation. It is only in Commodianus that the politics of the day visibly influences his eschatological scenario which is why perhaps his writings remained largely forgotten and/or condemned in later centuries.

The two central antimessianic motifs, mimetic rivalry and violent conflict, appear throughout the Patristic antimessianic material in various configurations. The Church Fathers were less keen on describing the confrontation between Christ and the Antichrist in a direct fashion than e.g. the authors of the Pseudepigrapha. They often recount this event through quotations from 2 Thess 2:8 or Revelation 19 and 20. On the other hand, the motif of deceitful imitation is extremely common and of increasing importance. The Antichrist is associated with false miracles already in the *Didache*, with this feature becoming staple in later literature. Hippolytus, *Antichr.* 6, and Origen, *Comm. Matt. ser.* 33, offer extended characterisations of Christ's end-time opponent based on the apparent symmetry between the two. Origen himself sees the Antichrist not simply as a false imitator of Christ's actions, but of his very nature. Finally, Tyconius (who assigns to the Beast its own antimessianic symbol similar to the Christogram) inflates this motif to the

governing principle of the *Heilsgeschichte*, with two corporate beings and their respective kingdom placed side by side and, indeed, within one another.

Finally, it is important to notice that Patristic antimessianism sometimes operates as a polemical tool against the heretics. This usage is not discernible in other ancient corpora that I have studied, but emerges prominently in Tertullian and Augustine. This is due to the influence of 1-2 John and stands apart from the two basic antimessianic motifs I have otherwise distinguished, that is violent conflict and mimetic rivalry.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusions

This thesis has attempted to answer the following research question: in ancient Jewish and early Christian thought, what is the function of antimessianism in relation to messianism? I have initially claimed that (1) antimessianism functioned as a tradition; (2) it is present in both Jewish and Christian sources; (3) it is distinguished by emphasising violent conflict and/or mimetic rivalry between the Antichrist and the Messiah, with the former depending on the latter for his existence. In order to substantiate these claims I have surveyed several bodies of ancient Jewish and Christian literature. After reviewing the findings of each chapter, I will offer a synthetic engagement with the research question and outline some additional conclusions arising from my study. Finally, I will offer some general thoughts on the significance of the topic and the perspectives for future research.

7.1 Antimessianism in Jewish and Christian literature

My study began with a review of history of research on the Antichrist and the methodological grounding of the entire project in CHAPTER I. Scholarship to date has gone through two major phases: firstly, the dominance of the approach espoused by Bousset and Charles, which saw the Antichrist across Jewish and Christian eschatology, and then the rejection of that opinion by, most notably, Jenks and Lietaert Peerbolte who argued for the Christian origin of the Antichrist and his connection to earlier Jewish traditions. The fundamental disagreement about the nature and compass of ancient antimessianism creates a need for a study like mine. I have noted several problems that are persistent throughout scholarship, most importantly the lack of clarity as to what the Antichrist is, what narrative framework he fits into, and in what sources he is to be sought. I proposed that the Antichrist should be understood as any eschatological figure conflicted with a

messianic actor, and that antimessianism is a tradition running through Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity alike.

CHAPTER II was devoted to showing that the roots of the antimessianic tradition are in the Hebrew Bible, which is a constant point of reference for later authors envisaging the Antimessiah. I have traced ancient reception history of six parts of the Old Testament which are repeatedly read as pointing to an antimessianic actor and thus serve as both foundation and constant reference point for later apocalyptic writers. Genesis 3, while initially deprived of supernatural overtones, was later read as demonic or Satanic. When this understanding met with the vision of Eve's offspring as messianic (as it did in the Targumim and the Christian exegesis), the Satanic serpent became an antimessianic actor. The blessing of Dan in Gen 49:16-18 is part of a variegated Scriptural tradition about the tribe of Dan and receives equally diverse interpretations from ancient readers. Interestingly, the Targumim read it as a passage about an insufficient redeemer, many Christian authors read the text as being about the origin of the Antichrist (due to the absence of Dan in Rev 7:5-8), whereas the Rabbis connect it to the person of Samson. Isa 11:4, which is a part of a messianic oracle itself, was interpreted as a prophecy about an Antimessiah repeatedly by both Jews and Christians, primarily due to the perceived messianic significance of Isaiah itself. The Gog oracle in Ezekiel 38-39, which has a complex relationship with its textual surroundings (as shown by $\P^{967}$) and with the versions of Num 24:7, was seen by both Jews and Christians as announcing the end-time attack of foreign nations on the People of God. This scenario sometimes (e.g. in the Targumim) involved the Messiah confronting and conquering the invaders. The Psalms were treated by ancient Jews and Christians as a Davidic—and so, by extension, messianic—prayer book and depicted the speaker as suffering and surrounded by enemies. This combination resulted in some of the Psalms, especially Psalm 2, being read as

envisaging the messianic conflict by the Qumran authors and Christian interpreters, especially the late ancient Latin Fathers. Finally, Daniel presented Antiochus IV as an eschatological antagonist and, at the same time, envisaged an end-time messianic figure, but did not see the two as conflicted. Such a confrontation, however, emerged in the later Christian interpretation which saw Daniel as central to the expectation of the Antichrist. Apart from Isa 11:4 and Daniel, none of these passages espouses any messianism or antimessianism by themselves, but have the potential of being read as depicting an embattled Messiah. All of these Scriptural texts are foundational to the development of ancient antimessianism.

CHAPTER III discussed the several relevant texts from among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Aside from the controverted case of 4Q246, which I do not see as portraying an evil eschatological actor, all of these documents have some notion of the Antimesiah. 1QM and 11QMelch conflict the angel Michael, who performs a broadly messianic and salvific function, with Beliar and his allies. 4Q285 continues the motif of the violent antimessianic conflict in much more explicit terms, as it envisages the Prince of the Congregation as fighting and slaying the leader of the Kittim. Finally, 4QTest inaugurates another central antimessianic motif, namely that of mimetic rivalry, as the text imagines the cursed man and his son(s) as foils of the ideal priest, prophet, and king. Centrally for my overall argument, the presence of antimessianic speculation in the DSS shows that it was known and entertained well before the onset of Christianity.

CHAPTER IV showed how the earliest Christian texts, included in the canon of the NT, appropriated antimessianism in the context of their overarching belief in the messianic status of Jesus. The Synoptic Apocalypse, i.e. the eschatological speeches by Jesus in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, envisage many false messianic and prophetic claimants gain traction towards the Eschaton, as they usurp and mimic Jesus' status. 2

Thessalonians 2—probably the most influential text in the entirety of the Antichrist tradition—sees the Man of Lawlessness trying to achieve divine status, but being thwarted in doing so by Jesus. The Johannine Epistles include the first use of the term “Antichrist” and, while noting both plural present Antichrists and a singular future one, they do not focus on either militant violence or deceitful imitation. Instead, 1-2 John present antimessianic activity as a function of heresy and dissent from what the author perceives to be the central tenets of the Christian kerygma. Revelation presents an extensive elaboration and deepening of the antimessianic expectation, as it combines eschatological war with complex net of contrastive similarities between its antagonists. Furthermore, it also envisages a plurality of antichristological actors, namely the Dragon, the two Beasts, and the Great Prostitute.

Several extracanonical writings, including both the OT Pseudepigrapha and NT Apocrypha, were discussed in CHAPTER V. They attest the presence of antimessianic speculation across different Jewish and Christian communities first century BCE and the first three centuries CE and develop it significantly. While some (*Psalms of Solomon* 17, 2 *Baruch*, 4 *Ezra*) construe antimessianism primarily as a violent end-time conflict, others (*Sibylline Oracle* 3, *Ascension of Isaiah*, *Apocalypse of Elijah*) develop the motif of antimessianic mimetic rivalry, construing the *res gestae* of the Antichrist as a false reflection of Jesus’ own deeds. These accounts are sometimes complemented by the Antichrist’s physiognomy—a motif first attested in the late third century in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* and the *Testament of the Lord*.

CHAPTER VI presented the further development of the Antichrist tradition in Patristic literature. This period saw the first systematic treatments of the problem of the Antichrist, namely those provided by Irenaeus and Hippolytus. While violent conflict seems to be of lesser interest to the Patristic authors, starting from *Didache* 16 onwards

they imagine the Antichrist as the mimetic rival of Christ, as noted shown especially in Hippolytus' *De Christo et Antichristo*. Some authors, most notably Origen and Tyconius, cast the Antichrist as a false reflection of Christ's very nature and the difference between them as a cosmic principle. Continuing the theme present in 1-2 John, Tertullian and Augustine saw the antimessianic activity as focalised in the work of the heretics. Some of the early Christian authors were also keen to add wholly new details to the Antichrist narrative, as did Commodianus in speaking about two Antichrists—a Jewish and a Gentile one.

7.2 The Antichrist tradition—its form, sources, and characteristics

My investigation of ancient antimessianism, as summarized above, appears to substantiate the three core claims I have made at the beginning of CHAPTER I.

Ancient antimessianism is indeed best understood as a tradition. The ancient sources I have studied envisage an end-time opponent of the Messiah are elements of a continued and interrelated effort of ancient writers to imagine, describe, and possibly identify the Antimessiah. It is the fact that this exercise is exactly continued and interrelated that makes it a tradition.

Jewish and Christian authors refer to core Scriptural texts—both from the Hebrew Bible and the NT—as inspiration for and confirmation of their speculation. Several important texts that espouse antimessianism are exegetical in nature (4Q174, Hippolytus' *Commentary on Daniel*, Tyconius' *Book of Rules*) or are replete with extensive Biblical quotations (4Q175, Irenaeus' *Adversus haereses*, Hippolytus *On Christ and Antichrist*). Sometimes, writings that themselves echo earlier texts are later received as envisaging future antimessianic conflict. This is the case for 2 Thess 2:8 and Revelation which echo Isa 11:4b and subsequently are treated as canonical antimessianic prophecies.

Furthermore, ancient Jewish and Christian writers depict the Messiah's foe in broadly similar ways. Not only do they construe him most often as a warring opponent or a mimetic rival, which I will discuss shortly, but also share other ideas and details, such as the length of the Antichrist's reign, his origin, session in the Temple, physiognomic features, etc. On the other hand, rival claims about the Antichrist, such as whether he can raise the dead (*Sib. Or.* 3.66; *Ap. El.* 3:12), are also attested and evidence the discussions in which the Antichrist expectation was forged. As noted repeatedly in CHAPTER II, Christian and some Jewish appear to gradually diverge in their readings of certain OT texts, such as Gen 49:16-18 and Daniel. While only one group of authors (here, in both cases Christians) decides for an antimessianic reading, it may point to a interconfessional exegetical debate.

Finally, the authors contributing to the Antichrist tradition often refer to or allude to the speculations of others, thus treating their ideas explicitly as something handed over to them, i.e. a part of a tradition. This can be best shown in reference to Patristics, as the dependence of Augustine on Tyconius and Hippolytus on Irenaeus is explicit or very probable. Consequently, the Antichrist story—a story within which sources and ideas were shared by writers who were often directly or indirectly in touch with one another—is most fruitfully approached as a tradition.

My other core claim was that antimessianism was present in both Christian and Jewish sources. If one accepts the definition of the Antichrist proposed by Horbury and applied in my thesis, then it would be unreasonable to reject that texts such as the *Book of War* from the DSS or *Psalms of Solomon* 17 envisage a messianic enemy. Indeed, the way the Antichrist is referred to in no uncertain terms in the NT already presumes a pre-existing expectation, as shown for instance by the echo of Isa 11:4b in 2 Thess 2:8 which I have shown to fall well within the contemporary way of reading the Isaianic oracle. The

fact that antimessianism is a shared feature of Jewish and Christian apocalypticism in antiquity is worth meditating on. Christians used the Old Testament to inform their eschatology, and Jews quite probably reacted to those Christian appropriations. Many writings, especially among the OT Pseudepigrapha, such as *2 Baruch*, *4 Ezra*, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*, occupy the interstitial space between what we would perceive as Christian and Jewish. As evidenced by CHAPTER II, the Rabbis continued to envisage the Messiah as embattled and speculated about his enemies. These facts, among other connections, show how incredibly connected ancient Jews and Christians were—to the point that differentiating these two identities from a modern perspective can be at times dangerously anachronistic. It is not simply that the Jews and Christians started speculating about the Antimessiah's opponent in separation from each other. Ancient antimessianism was one of the channels which connected the two communities.

Most of the Antichrist tradition revolves around the two axes which I claim to be its distinctive marks, namely violent conflict and mimetic rivalry. The former appears to have been a dominant way of construing the antimessianic conflict, as attested in Isa 11:4b, 1QM, 4Q285, 11QMelech, *Psalms of Solomon* 17, *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*. However, the idea that the Antichrist is a false Messiah and an active usurper emerges already in some extent in Daniel and definitely in the Qumran *Testimonia*. It has later attestation in Jesus' eschatological discourse in the Synoptic Gospels, 2 Thessalonians, Revelation, and the *Ascension of Isaiah*. Among the later Pseudepigrapha, NT Apocrypha, and the Church Fathers, the onus seems to be exactly on the Antichrist as the Christ's mimetic rival. Some sources (e.g. *Apocalypse of Elijah* 3) record antimessianic biographies, thus placing deceitful imitation at the heart of the Antichrist speculation. As stated below, early Christians developed this idea significantly and accorded theological importance to it. At the same time, the messianic war ceased to be such an important feature of their

eschatology, although they universally thought that the Antichrist is going to be defeated. The idea of violent conflict did not lose its prominent role, however, in the Rabbinic antimessianic exegesis which I discussed in CHAPTER II.

Apart from these two basic motifs, the Johannine Letters and their subsequent careful readers (Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, among others) generated the strategy to employ the antimessianic discourse against one's doctrinal opponents, without necessarily seeing them as imitating or fighting Christ. This antiheretical interpretation constitutes a form of mimetic rivalry *à rebours* as the Antichrists so construed do not claim to be similar to Christ, but rather deny him his actual identity or try to destroy him by attacking the Church. This perception is not as widespread in the relevant sources as the two major antimessianic motifs, but is noticeably present nonetheless.

I have highlighted the presence of the above motifs in all of the texts studied. Each of them intimately connects the Antichrist to the messianic actor in different ways, so that the Antichrist's being is almost exhaustively described by his relation to the Messiah. This fact evidences the intimate connection between the development of Jewish and Christian antimessianic expectation and messianism. Core Scriptural passages and books, that were taken by later interpreters as envisaging the Messiah, were also very often understood as speaking about his end-time enemy. Many interpreters deduced that the Messiah would be an embattled figure by linking previously separate details of their source texts. As the existence of the Antimessiah is dependent on that of a messianic figure—as shown by the mimetic rivalry between them—messianism is a tradition more important in understanding the Antichrist than, for instance, the Satan tradition. Novenson's term I have referenced in CHAPTER I, the "grammar of messianism", should usefully be complemented by the analogous "grammar of antimessianism".¹

¹ See above, pp. 45–6.

My investigation yielded considerable support for my claims about the form, sources, and characteristics of ancient antimessianism. Several other conclusions also emerged. Firstly, the definition of the Antichrist used in my thesis and first argued for by Horbury allows us to take into account a plethora of sources that have been previously disregarded (e.g. 11QMelchizedek, *Psalms of Solomon*, the *Testament of the Lord*). It also proposes a stable framework based on a concise, intuitively correct definition of the Antichrist. Lack of such a definition and of such a framework has been previously shown to be a problem not only of scholarly individual treatments of the topic, but also of the the Antichrist scholarship in general.²

Secondly, I showed that antimessianic expectation was fuelled not only by transient political circumstances, as critical scholarship has often claimed, but also by continued exegetical engagement with key Scriptural texts. The historical circumstances of many, if not most, of the documents studied here are difficult to ascertain due to the authors' timidity in making these connections explicit. Nevertheless, many of these documents continued to be received and transmitted quite apart from their original historical and political milieux. On the other hand, most of my sources are quite explicit in their engagement with the Bible. While political and historical issues definitely shaped the Antichrist tradition, it is Scriptural exegesis that proves to be the prime stimulus and guide for its development.

7.3 **Bousset, or there and back again**

My thesis is by no means an exhaustive study of the Antichrist and therefore some thought should be given now to the perspectives for further research.

Perhaps the most important one relates to the usefulness of the traditionary framework in the study of concepts such as the Antichrist. It allows one to see the sources

² See above, pp. 39–46, for the methodological discussion.

as a stream within which ideas, motifs, reading practices, and stories are handed over, preserved, transformed, and re-appropriated. A tradition so construed includes texts of different types and genres, from different periods, communities, and locales. It is only such an expansive approach as the one I attempted to enact that can offer a modern reader a credible panorama of a topic as widely attested as the Antichrist.

This conclusion vindicates the kind of study and method used by Wilhelm Bousset in his epochal *Der Antichrist*. While doing so without a clear definition and with an arbitrary selection of sources, he was still able to evidence the pluriformity and the wide attestation of ancient and early mediaeval antimessianism. His approach, although in need of correction, allowed him to engage a wide variety of sources from different contexts and plausibly note the connections between them. I do not myself claim that the available sources attest an existence of an esoteric oral tradition and I do believe that he omitted many important texts. Nevertheless, my method was, in the end of the day, not so dissimilar from that of Bousset. I, too, approached Jewish and Christian sources from a variety of periods, prioritising similarity in concepts and ideology over temporal or geographical links. Just like Bousset, I was eager to note indirect resemblances and not only the direct dependencies, acknowledging that the ancient cultural climate, in which such resemblances arose, is significant for the phenomenon studied. Bousset's insight about the importance of engaging a wide variety of sources without prejudice as to the kind of picture (if any) they will eventually form has withstood the test of time and is a lesson to be constantly relearnt by modern scholars.

Much of the Antichrist tradition, both in antiquity and beyond, remains to be investigated. The growth of knowledge about the DSS and the extracanonical writings will necessarily affect the scholarly vision of antimessianism. The cross-cultural links with the Graeco-Roman and Persian mythologies, which at times entertain the idea of heavenly

warfare, remain to be thoroughly studied. The Patristic literary heritage should be mined further for references to mimetic rivalry and violent conflict. The explosion of the Antichrist speculation in the Middle Ages should be traced in constant conjunction with its ancient iteration. Such a study, following in the footsteps of Bousset and McGinn, could then be expanded into modernity, thus offering a panoramic view of one of the central ideas of humanity's end-time expectation.

7.4 The importance of the Antichrist tradition

The study of the Antichrist reveals the deep-seated willingness of the Judeo-Christian religious mindset to penetrate the *mysterium facinoris* (as the Vulgate translates τὸ μυστήριον τῆς ἀνομίας, “the mystery of lawlessness” in 2 Thess 2:7). The eagerness and studiousness with which ancient writers speculated about this figure and the vividness and complexity of some of the visions they came up with astound the modern reader. What is more, they seem to go against the basic Augustinian claim about evil, which the Antichrist certainly represents, being privation of the good (*Conf.* 7.18; *Civ.* 12.6). The Antichrist in the ancient imagination—especially perhaps the pictorial descriptions of the enemies in Revelation and in the physiognomies of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* and the *Testament of the Lord*—appears very much to be a being in and of itself.

On the other hand, the notion of mimetic rivalry provides a counterpoint to that impression. The Antichrist in Jewish and especially Christian thought moved from fighting the Messiah towards being his imitator, and the more of an imitator he became, the less of distinct identity he possessed (one is reminded of how profound and essential the similarity is for Origen and Tyconius). The mimetic practice of the Antichrist reveals him to be a parasitic being whose sole identifiable characteristics are copied from the

messianic archetype.³ Plato's words on the mimetic quality of art are very relevant here: πόρρω ἄρα πού τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἡ μιμητική ἐστίν καί, ὥς ἔοικεν, διὰ τοῦτο πάντα ἀπεργάζεται, ὅτι σμικρόν τι ἐκάστου ἐφάπτεται, καὶ τοῦτο εἶδωλον, "The imitative art, then, is far away from the truth and, as it seems, this is why it can produce anything—because it lays hold of only a bit of anything, and of an illusion at that" (*Resp.* 598b).

A curious dynamic emerges. The ancient writers envision the Antimessiah and thus want him to *appear*, whereas the tendency of that figure itself is ultimately to blend with the Messiah, to *disappear* within the archetype he mimics. The more he is sought, the less tangible he becomes. The Antichrist and the entire apocalyptic scenario with him are expected to come to pass, but once they fail to do so, once one cannot distinguish them from the mundane reality, the Eschaton needs to be reimagined. Naturally, this provokes a renewed exegetical and speculative effort and sustains the Antichrist tradition.

The study of antimessianism allows one to realise this antinomy which keeps the eschatological mindset ever afresh. Nonetheless, it is perhaps itself an expression, however modern, of the ever-present will to see with whom the Messiah might be confronted and how close his coming is. After all, Charles in his commentary on Revelation, written towards the end of the Great War, gives serious consideration to Kaiser Wilhelm II and the Second Reich being the forerunners of the end-time opponent.⁴

Around the same time, Yeats wrote his famous poem "The Second Coming" in which he expresses a similar insight which also reflects the Antichrist's mimetic nature. The poem ends as follows: "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"⁵ The beast makes its way to emerge in the birth place of Jesus.

³ See Girard 2013: 164: "The reason is that [man] desires *being*, something he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess" (*italics original*).

⁴ Charles 1920: 2.87.

⁵ Yeats 1989: 295.

APPENDIX

Gen 49:16-18 in the Targumim:

<i>Tg. Onq.</i>	<i>Tg. Neof.</i>	<i>Tg. Ps.-J.</i>	<i>Frg. Tg. (MS Paris)</i>	<i>Frg. Tg. (MS Vatican)</i>	<i>Cairo Genizah Tg. (MS X)</i>	<i>Cairo Genizah Tg. (MS FF)</i>
מדבית דן יתבחר ויקום גברא ביומוהי יתפריק עמיה ובשנוהי ינוחון כחדא שבטיא דישראל: הי גברא דיתבחר ויקום מדבית דן אימתיה תיתרמי על עממא ומחתיה תיתקף בפלשתאי	מן דבית דן יקום פורקן ודיין כחדא ישתמעון לה כל שבטי דבני ישראל:	מדבית דן עתיד דיקום גברא דידון ית עמיה דינין דקשוט כחדא ישתמעון ליה שבטיא דישראל:	מן דבית דן יקום פריק ודיין כחדא ישתמעון ליה כל קהל שבטיא דבני ישראל:	יחווי פפרוקא דעתיד למיק מן דבית דן		
		יהי גברא דיתבחר ויקום מדבית דן מדמי			יתקף ויתגאי על כל מלכוות והוא יהווי מידמי להיוויא דרביע באורחא ולעורמנא דכמין בפרשת אורחתה מסתחר רכביה ואיתהפיך לאחורוי	
כחיוי חיוורמן ישרי על אורחא וכפתנא יכמון על שבילא	יהווי דמי לחיוויא דרבווע בארעא ולעורמנא דכמין בפרשת ארחתה דנכת לסוסיא בעקבי ומן אימתה מסתחר רכבה ומתהפך לאחור הוא שמשון בר מנוח	לחורמנא דרביע על פרשת אורחא ולרישי חיווי דכמין על שבילא דנכית סוסיא בעיקביה ונפיל ומן אמתיה רכביה מתפרקיד לאחוריה הכדין יקטיל שמשון בר מנוח ית כל גיברי פלישתאי	יהוי דן מדמי לחויא הרמניא דכמן בפרשת אורחא דנכית סוסיא בעקביה וממרע יתיה ומן אימתה מתהפך רכביה ונפל לאחורוי הוא שמשון בר מנוח דאימתיה על בעלי דבבוי ונפק לקרבא כל			
יקטיל גיברי משרית פלשתאי פרשין עם					הוא שמשון בר מנוח דאימתיה על בעלי דבבי ודחלתי[ה] על	

רגלאין יעקר סוסון ורתכין וימגר רכביהון לאחרא:	לפרשיא ולריגלאיא ויעקר סוסותהון וממגר דבביהון לאחורא:	קבל סנאוי ומקטל מלכין עם שלטונין:	שנאוי ויקטיל מלכין עם שילטונין:		
דאמתיא על בעלי דבבוי ודחלתו על שנאוי נפק לקרבא לקבל שנאוי ומקטל מלכין עם שלטונין:				לישועתך לפורקנך סברית [יו']	
לפורקנך סברית יי	אמר יעקב כד חמא ית גדעון בר יואש וית שמשון בר מנוח דקיימין לפרוקין לא לפורקניה דגדעון אנא מסכי	אמר יעקב אבונן לא לפורקניה דגדעון בר יואש סכיית נפשי דהוא פורקן שעה	אמר יעקב אבונן לא לפורקניה דגדעון בר יואש סכיית נפשי דהוא פורקן שעה	א[מר] א[בו]נא יע[קב] לא ל[פורקניה דגדעון] בר יואש דהוא פורקן עבר	אמר להון יעקב אבוהון לא לפורקניה דגדון[ן] בר יואש סברת דהיא פורקן שעתא
לא לפורקנא דגדעון בר יואש סכיית נפשי דהוא פורקן שעה ולא לפורקניה דשמשון בר מנוח סכיית נפשי דהוא פורקן עבר אלא לפורקניה סכיית נפשי	ולא לפורקניה דשמשון אנא מודיק דפורקנהון פורקן דשעתא אלהין לפורקנך סכיית ואודיקית ייי דפורקנך פורקן עלמין	ולא לפורקניה דשמשון בר מנוח סכיית נפשי דהוא פורקן עבר אלא לפורקנא די אמרת למיתא לעמך לישראל ליה לפורקנא סכיית ייי	ולא לפורקניה דשמשון בר מנוח סכיית נפשי דהוא פורקן עבר אלא לפורקנא די אמרת במימרך למייתי לעמך בני ישראל ליה לפורקנך סכיית נפשי	ולא [לפור]קניה דשמשון [בר מ]נוח [דהו]א פורקן שעה אלא לפורקניה דמשיח בן דוד דהוא עתיד לאיתאה לבני ישראל ל[י]ה לפורקניה סכיא נפשי	[ו]לא לפורקניה ד[שמ]שון בר מנוח ד[הי]א פורקן שעתא א[ל]א לפורקניה[ה] ד[מל]כא משיחא ד[ה]י א פורקנא ל[ע]למין די א[מ]רת במימ[ר]ך למיתיה לעמך בית ישראל ליה לפורקנה סברית יי

A man from the house of Dan will be chosen and arise. In his days his people will be redeemed and in his years the tribes of Israel will rest together.

Let the fear of the hero to be chosen and to arise from the house of Dan be cast upon the nations and let his slaughter be great among the Philistines.

Like a venomous snake he will be loose upon the road, like a viper he lies in ambush on a path.

From the house of Dan there will arise redemption and a judge.

All the tribes of the sons of Israel will obey him.

This will be the redeemer who is to arise from the house of Dan—he will be strong, proud over against all nations, and he will be like a snake lying on a highway, like a venomous snake lying in ambush at the crossroads and

From those of the house of Dan there will arise a hero who will judge his people with truthful judgements. Together will the tribes of Israel obey him.

The hero will be chosen and will arise from the house of Dan—he will be like a venomous snake lying at the crossroads and like the heads of snakes lying in ambush on

From the house of Dan will arise a redeemer and a judge.

The entire tribal congregation of the sons of Israel will obey him.

Dan will be like a venomous snake lying in ambush at the crossroads which bites the heels of the horses and caused them to be sick,

There shall arise a redeemer from the house of Dan

who will be strong and proud over all the kingdoms. And he will be like a snake lying on a road and like a venomous snake lying in ambush at the crossroads,

	biting the horse in its heels, and the rider fearfully turns around and falls backwards.	the paths which bite horses in their heels and the rider falls down out fear, as he turns around.	and the rider fearfully turns around and falls backwards.	and the rider turns around and falls backwards.		
He will kill the warriors from the host of Philistines, both horsemen and infantry, he will overturn horses and chariots and cause the riders to fall over backwards.	He is Samson, son of Manoah,	Thus Samson, son of Manoah will kill all the Philistine warriors, horsemen and infantry, and overturn their horses and overthrow the riders to the back.'	He is Samson, son of Manoah,	He is Samson, son of Manoah,		
	the fear of whom is upon his enemies and scare of whom upon those who hate him. He goes out to war with against those who hate him and kills kings along with rulers.		the fear of whom is upon his enemies, and who goes out to battle with those who hate him, and who kills kings along with rulers.	the fear of whom is upon his enemies and the scare of whom upon those who hate him. And he will kill kings along with rulers.		
I await your redemption, oh Lord.	Our father Jacob said,	When Jacob saw Gideon, the son of Joash, and Samson, son of Manoah, who	Our father Jacob said,	Our father Jacob said,	'For your salvation, your redemption do I hope, o Lord,' said our father Jacob,	Jacob, our father, said to them,

	were rising to be redeemers, he said,				
‘My soul does not await the redemption of Gideon, son of Joash, whose a redemption is for a moment, nor does my soul await the redemption of Samson, son of Manoah, whose redemption passed away. Rather my soul awaits the redemption	‘I do not await Gideon’s redemption, nor do I long for Samson’s redemption because their redemption is for a moment. It is only your redemption that I await and long for, Lord, because your redemption is an eternal redemption	‘My soul did not await the redemption of Gideon, son of Joash, whose redemption is for a moment, nor does my soul await the redemption of Samson, son of Manoah, whose redemption passed away, but the redemption	‘My soul did not await the redemption of Gideon, son of Joash, whose redemption is for a moment, nor does my soul await the redemption of Samson, son of Manoah, whose redemption passed away. But the redemption	‘not for the redemption of Gibeon, son of Joash, whose redemption passed away, nor for the redemption of Samson, son of Manoah, whose redemption is for a moment, but only for the redemption of Messiah ben David—	‘I do not hope for the redemption of Gibeon, son of Joash, for his redemption is for a moment, nor for the redemption of Samson, son of Manoah, for his redemption is for a moment, but only for the redemption of the king Messiah, for his redemption is eternal,
which you have promised		which you have promised	which you have promised in/by your Word		as you have promised in/by your Word
to bring to your people, house of Israel— you, your redemption do I await, O Lord.’		to bring to your people Israel— it, your redemption does it await, Lord.’	to bring to your people, sons of Israel it, your redemption does my soul await.’	which he will bring to the sons of Israel it, his redemption, does my soul await.’	to bring it to your people, house of Israel— for it, for his redemption do I hope, O Lord.’

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