

Shane J. Wood, *The Alter-Imperial Paradigm. Empire Studies & the Book of Revelation* (Biblical Interpretation Series 140; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2016). Pp. XIV + 300. €115. ISBN 978-9004-30802-2 (Hardcover)

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The reviewed work is a monograph published in the series *Biblical Interpretation Series* publications Brill, edited by P. Anderson and J. Koosed. The series is a collection of works, an attempt to develop or apply new methods of interpretation of the biblical text. The analysed work is 140<sup>th</sup> volume of the series and focuses on the trend in the Scripture interpretation known as *Empire Studies*, which is finding in the Scripture, especially the New Testament, certain relations and interconnections between the inspired text and the socio-historical context of the Roman Empire.

The author of the book, Shane J. Wood, Professor of New Testament Studies at Ozark Christian College, has also two other publications on the Book of Revelation, namely: *Dragons, John and Every Grain of Sand: Essays on the Book of Revelation* (Joplin 2011) and “*God’s Triumphal Procession: Re-examining the Release of Satan in the Light of Roman Imperial Imagery (Revelation 20:7-10)*” in *Currents in British Research on the Apocalypse* (Tübingen 2015). The reviewed book is a published doctoral dissertation of the author.

The work consists of 7 chapters, an introduction and three additives. It is divided into three parts: I – *The Emergence of the Alter-Imperial Paradigm*; II – *The Construction of the Sovereign Narrative and Points of Conversation*; III – *The Alter-Imperial Paradigm and the Book of Revelation*.

The first part, composed of two chapters, is devoted to creation of the title Alter-Imperial Paradigm and its relation to the existing research in *Empire Studies*. The above mentioned concept of “Alter-Imperial Paradigm” is not explained directly in the analysed work. However, from the overall reading it is possible to draw the following conclusion: The author assumes existence of the other empire (the *alter-empire*) – the Kingdom of God, which defies Satan and his tools (eg. The Roman Empire); such the paradigm requires a research methodology that will allow for looking at the text in a broad social and historical perspective and look for a relationship between various social groups. The author points at

shortages in the existing attitude towards the Book of Revelation. He draws attention to the anti-Roman assumption adopted by many scholars, that in many cases contributes to pauperisation of the message of the Book of Revelation and sometimes imposes certain mode of interpretation that leads to an artificial and unjustified exegesis. In this way the author justifies the need to create a new approach to the biblical text, which would take into account both intertextuality of the analysed pericope, the existing research of the socio-historical context (*Sitz im Leben*) and complexity of relations between various cultures and communities: between the dominant and the dominated. The principal question the Alter-Imperial Paradigm would answer is: “How does Revelation interact with the Roman Empire?”. Moreover, the author clarifies a few notions that will be helpful in further social and historical analysis: the public transcript, which is everything that has been officially expressed in the relation between the sovereign and the subjects, the hidden transcript, which are the issues that both the sovereign and the subjects wish to hide from one another; sovereign narrative, which is a part of the public transcript being a propaganda of the power and sovereignty of the former; subject narrative, which is the answer to the former narratives, that can be expressed in both defiance and submission (the both at once or none of them). The notions and attitudes defined in this way are the introduction to the next parts of the work.

The second part is composed of three chapters. Its aim is to determine the date of the Book of Revelation thanks to which it will be possible to determine the specific socio-historical context of the Roman Empire for the biblical text. At first the author describes in details the sovereign narrative – the way Rome communicates its power and authority over the subject nations.

Imperial propaganda is both static (coins, altars, statues, architecture details) and enacted (rituals, processions, ceremonies). These two types of propaganda are used by Rome to communicate the following three messages: 1) The Roman Empire is the ruler of the kings of the earth; 2) The Roman Empire is favoured by the gods; 3) The Roman Empire is the bearer of *Pax*. A lot of attention is devoted to a description of Roman triumphal processions. Profuse spoils of war, boards with names of conquered provinces and cities written on them, artistic representations commemorating war and allowing spectators to be witnesses of the depicted scenes. At the end of the procession, in a huge chariot with four white horses (*quadriga*) an emperor would ride. In front of him the most honourable and strongest prisoners of war in chains were rushed by soldiers. The most important prisoner of war was either a king or a chief of a defeated army. After a description of the sovereign narrative the author moves on to determine the date of the Revelation on the basis of external and internal pieces of evidence. He mentions two options: early (before 70 AD) and

late (92-96 AD). He points at multitude of reliable historical records (works of Irenaeus and Eusebius of Caesarea) and hints to be found in the text of the Book of Revelation itself to efficiently defend the late option (92-96 after Christ). Thanks to this it is possible to determine the socio-historical context of creation of the Book of Revelation for the reign of the Emperor Domitian. Further on the author is trying to characterise the reigns of the aforementioned ruler and his entire dynasty. He draws the readers' attention to potential persecutions of Christians that might have influenced the content of the Revelation. According to the author they did not have to be meant directly for Christians, since they originated in the aggressive policy of the Empire towards Jews, which in turn was the answer to the Jewish uprising in 66-70 AD. The uprising finished with destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. This event inaugurated the reigns of the Flavian dynasty. In many cases the anti-Jewish policy might have affected many Christians due to the fact, that Romans were not able to distinguish the former from the latter because of numerous similarities in both the cult and conduct. This part of the book concludes the deduction devoted to the reasons for which pagans might have problems with distinguishing between Christians and Jews.

The third and the final part makes the reader analyse the fragment of the Book of Revelation (Rev 20:7-10). The description of Satan's release, which has always been a difficult part for exegetes, has been analysed through the Alter-Imperial Paradigm. The author points at a striking similarity between this scene of the Revelation and a Roman triumphal procession. Satan, presented as the major antagonist of the book, is compared to a chief of a defeated army, clad in chains and lead in front of an emperor's chariot (God). The ultimate expression of the triumph is the execution of the enemy chief. In this interpretation God keeps Satan alive on purpose in order to destroy him triumphantly at the end of the times – like Roman emperors who would keep prisoners to kill them during a triumphal procession. In this way the author shows that the Book of Revelation uses abundantly images taken from the Roman Empire to present Christians with the truth about the Alter-Empire (Kingdom of God) and the kingdom of evil destroyed by the Empire. In this way the author answers the initial question and finishes his monograph.

Supplements include diagrams clarifying the sovereign narrative, the subject narrative, the hidden and the public transcript. They illustrate the notions explained in the first part of the book. They can be found at the end of the book.

The analysed publication describes the researched issue comprehensively and coherently, however a few formal rather than substantive shortcomings can be found. The annexes mentioned above together with the diagrams might be included in the body of the text, just like other photos and images. The socio-historical description may be too long. More space might have been devoted to

more in-depth analysis of the text of the Revelation with respect to the impact of the Roman Empire. Despite the overall coherence, the last chapter seems to be slightly different from the other parts of the work and leaves the reader with an impression of insufficient refinement. It includes themes that had not been mentioned in the previous parts of the work. Despite these few critical comments, the monograph deserves recognition for its fresh and broad view of the text of the Bible and introduction of a new key of interpretation of the New Testament texts. It offers a broad insight into the socio-historical context of the Roman Empire in the second half of the first century after Christ. It may be treated as an invitation to broader and fuller study of the Scripture and a source of numerous meditations on the text of the Book of Revelation. Other, already mentioned works of the author, are also worth of attention.