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## Vision and Communication in the Revelation of John. Between Emotive Memories and Authority<sup>1</sup>.

### 1. Methodological introduction

There is a persistent scholarly tradition that has tended to underestimate the fact that most ancient texts find their inspiration in specific instances of contact with the other world<sup>2</sup>. Although it is clear that «the ancient Mediterranean world was frequently visited by gods appearing in the visions and dreams of mortals, as well as leaving signs on steles and various written materials, bodies, and natural phenomena,»<sup>3</sup> the canonical dimension of many of these accounts has prevented scholars from approaching – both in a literary as well as in a religious sense – such texts as actual first-person accounts of experiences of contact with the other world.

It is without question that the literary approach has received the most consideration up to now. As Coleen Shantz pointed out in a recent paper, the experience – in the religious sense of the term – of the people who produced these texts was believed to be a kind of “black box:” authors’ contexts and the texts produced by them could be described, whereas a description of the processes by which contexts were assumed and

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<sup>1</sup> It is my duty to thank Leonardo Ambasciano and Angela Kim Harkins for their invaluable inputs on Cognitive Science Religion’s methodology as well as on recent studies in such a manifold universe.

<sup>2</sup> According to Fauconnier and Tuner, the imaginary and imaginative otherness of the world described in ancient texts is the powerful result of the conceptual blending of different, counterfactual ontologies (biological, social, physical): see G. FAUCCONNIER – M. TUNER, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> D. TRIPALDI, *Apocalisse di Giovanni. Introduzione, traduzione e commento* (Roma, 2012) 12 [English translation is mine].

transformed by texts could not be given<sup>4</sup>. The Revelation of John is not exempt from this heuristic, classifying tendency. The canonical dimension of John's text entailed the necessity of creating a literary (often also ideological and social) platform upon which the intrinsic superiority of the Neo-testamentary text could stand out. The first path taken by exegesis – especially in the Protestant tradition – was the creation of an “apocalyptic” literary *genre* belonging to a Jewish context, antecedent and/or coeval to the last written work accepted in the canon of the New Testament. It was assumed that such a *genre* was later ideologically and formally re-formulated in light of a pre-supposed Christian *proprium*<sup>5</sup>.

The other path taken was that of prophecy. Clearly, the separation of the concept of apocalyptic literature from that of prophecy, according to which the former constituted a degeneration of the latter, was instrumental in linking the final text of the Christian Bible with the prophetic traditions of the Old Testament. According to such a vision, the Revelation was nothing more than a prophetic text, unveiling the true meaning of earlier “Biblical” prophecy in light of the Christian event<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See C. SHANTZ, “Opening the Black Box: New Prospects for Analyzing Religious Experience,” in C. SHANTZ – R. A. WERLINE, ed., *Experientia, vol. 2: Linking Text and Experience* (Atlanta, 2012) 1–17.

<sup>5</sup> It is known that the term “apocalyptic” is first used to define a certain type of literature in Protestant exegesis, more specifically in the text by F. LÜCKE, *Versuch einer vollständigen Einleitung in die Offenbarung des Johannes oder Allgemeine Untersuchungen über die apokalyptische Litteratur über haupt und die Apokalypse des Johannes insbesondere*, 2 vols. (Bonn, 1852). See also A. HILGENFELD, *Die jüdische Apokalyptik im ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung. Ein Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte des Christentums nebst einem Anhang über das gnostische System des Basilides* (Jena, 1857; rist. Amsterdam, 1966). About Lücke, see A. CHRISTOPHERSEN, *Friedrich Lücke (1791–1855). Teil 1: Neutestamentliche Hermeneutik und Exegese im Zusammenhang mit seinem Leben und Werk; Teil 2: Dokumente und Briefe* (Berlin, 1999) and ID., “Die Begründung der apokalyptischen Forschung durch Friedrich Lücke. Zum Verhältnis von Eschatologie und Apokalyptik,” *Kerygma und Dogma* 47 (2000) 158–179. On A. Hilgenfeld, see J. M. SCHMIDT, *Die jüdische Apokalyptik. Die Geschichte ihrer Erforschung von den Anfängen bis zu den Textfunden von Qumran*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1969) 127–134. I will also take the liberty of citing two of my papers on the invention of an apocalyptic genre in Protestant exegesis between the 19th and the 20th cent.: see “Apocalisse di Giovanni e apocalittica giudaica da Bousset alle più recenti acquisizioni sulla cosiddetta apocalittica giudaica,” in D. GARRIBBA – S. TANZARELLA, ed., *Giudei o cristiani? Quando nasce il cristianesimo?* (Trapani, 2005) 147–156; “L’apocalittica giudaica e proto-cristiana tra crisi della presenza e crisi percepita. Il testo apocalittico e la pratica visionaria,” *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 76 (2010) 480–533.

<sup>6</sup> This aspect is especially present in Christian exegesis or, in any case, in the kind of exegesis that stems from a Catholic background: for instance, see E.- B. ALLO, *Saint Jean. L’Apocalypse* (Paris, 1921) espec. XVIII–XXVI; F. D. MAZZAFERRI, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective* (Berlin-New York, 1989); U. VANNI, “Il simbolismo nell’Apocalisse,” *Gregorianum* 61 (1980) 461–504. In a substantially apologetic key with regard to the final text incorporated into the canon of the New Testament, the

On one hand, new approaches to religious experience<sup>7</sup> benefit from the renewal that has occurred in studies that are concentrated on ancient religious facts; on the other hand, they take advantage of cognitivism-related studies of ordinary contacts with the other world and selective memory which allow a reconstruction of the participant's "visionary" experience<sup>8</sup>. Also, these approaches benefit from socio-anthropological studies about authority and dialectics between groups and the "visionary" actor with respect to his/her authoritative discourse<sup>9</sup>. This implies the underestimation of a mechanistic or merely the(le)ological vision: the problem is not about how a culture (that is always a dialectic concept, never definable in either a concrete or an abstract sense) affects the experience of one of its participants but, going back to some considerations carried out by Pierre Bourdieu, it is

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distance between the apocalyptic *genre* and prophecy is also to be found in the commentary by the Catholic scholar A. WIKENHAUSER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Regensburg, 1959<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>7</sup> Besides the group originating within the SBL ("Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Early Christianity," <http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=469>) that has already produced two important *Proceedings* (cf. F. F. FLANNERY – C. SHANTZ – R. A. WERLINE, ed., *Experientia, vol. 1: Inquiry into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Christianity* [Atlanta, 2008]; C. SHANTZ – R. A. WERLINE, ed., *Experientia, vol. 2: Linking Text and Experience* [Atlanta, 2012]), I want to remind the reader of the series published by De Gruyter, titled *Ekstasis. Religious Experience from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*. About Cognitive Science Religion (CSR) more generally, see J. A. VAN SLYKE, *The Cognitive Science of Religion* (Farnham–Burlington, 2011<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>8</sup> As for the specific study of the Revelation of John from this perspective, see L. HONGISTO, *Experiencing the Apocalypse at the Limits of Alterity* (Leiden, 2010). As for studies having the same methodological line of thought, see those specifically dedicated to 2 Corinthians 12:1–10 by P. R. GOODER, *Only the Third Haven? 2 Corinthians 12:1–10 and Heavenly Ascent* (London, 2006) and by J. B. WALLACE, *Snatched into Paradise (2Cor 12:1–10): Paul's Heavenly Journey in the Context of Early Christian Experience* (Berlin–New York, 2011). On texts from Nag Hammadi, see A. DECONICK, *Seek to See Him. Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden–New York–Köln, 1996), EAD., *Voices of the Mystics. Early Christian Discourse in the Gospel of John and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature* (London, 2001), C. SHANTZ, *Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle's Life and Thought* (Cambridge, 2009), and H. LUNDHAUG, *Images of Rebirth. Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis of the Soul* (Leiden, 2010). Concerning cosmic travel as a pattern, thus liable to be analyzed in the light of cultural anthropology see A. DESTRO – M. PESCE, "The Heavenly Journey in Paul: Tradition of a Jewish Apocalyptic Literary Genre or Cultural Practice in a Hellenistic–Roman Context?," in T. G. CASEY, J. TAYLOR, ed., *Paul's Jewish Matrix* (Rome–Mahwah, 2011), 167–200; M. TUBIANA, "Il viaggio celeste in Paolo: un *pattern* per l'interpretazione di un'esperienza?," *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 29 (2012) 83–117.

<sup>9</sup> About this matter, see for instance the analysis of shamanic phenomena by L. DE HEUSCH, *La transe et ses entours. La sorcellerie, l'amour fou, saint Jean de la Croix, etc.* (Bruxelles, 2006) and I. M. LEWIS, *Ecstatic Religion. A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (Oxford–New York, 2003<sup>2</sup>).

about paying attention to the *interplay* that exists between culture and its own participants<sup>10</sup>.

### 1.1 Communication and Power (according to M. Castells' analysis)

Before proceeding any further with this contribution, and in order to clarify my method and purpose, I believe that it would be useful to provide a brief summary of the important analysis carried out by Manuel Castells<sup>11</sup>. Castells' new book entitled *Communication Power* can be seen as a successor to Volume II of his major trilogy about the Information Age<sup>12</sup>. In this new book, Castells focuses on the role played by communication networks in power-making within society, with an emphasis on political power-making. He defines power as «the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favour the empowered actor's will, interest and values.»<sup>13</sup> Power is not an attribute of individuals and groups but rather, a relationship.

According to the approach of this scholar - that is, a sort of revision of the Cognitive Literature (henceforth CL) approach<sup>14</sup> in a cultural (and

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, see P. BOURDIEU, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédé de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle* (Genève, 1972).

<sup>11</sup> See M. CASTELLS, *Communication Power* (Oxford, 2013<sup>2</sup>), espec. 137–192.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *The Power of Identity* (Malden Mass., 1997). *Communication Power* makes the same arguments as the book released 12 years earlier, *The Power of Identity*. In two respects Castells has made considerable progress. The earlier book discussed human selves and identities. Now, the author has really discovered psychology. Meaning, it has become a core concept in the analysis of this structural thinker. He borrows from the currently popular work of neuropsychologists such as Antonio Damasio (see note 14) that have made the turn from cognition and reasoned action to biology and emotions.

<sup>13</sup> *Communication Power* (Oxford, 2013<sup>2</sup>), 10.

<sup>14</sup> On CL (also known as Cognitive Poetics), see J. GAVINS – G. STEEN, ed., *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*, (London, 2003); P. STOCKWELL, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (London, 2002). On relationships between CL, literary theory and cognitive sciences, see M. H. FREEMAN, “The Fall of the Wall between Literary Studies and Linguistics: Cognitive Poetics,” in G. KRISTIANSEN ET AL., ed., *Cognitive Linguistics: Current Applications and Future Perspectives* (Berlin–New York, 2006), 403–428; H. PORTER ABBOTT, “Cognitive Literary Studies: The ‘Second Generation’,” *Poetics Today* 27 (2006) 711–722; A. RICHARDSON, “Studies in Literature and Cognition: A Field Map,” in A. RICHARDSON – E. SPOLSKY, ed., *The Works of Fiction: Cognition, Culture, and Complexity* (Aldershot, 2004), 1–29. A recent application of CL methodology to the study of the Nag Hammadi texts is to be found in H. LUNDHAUG, *Images of Rebirth. Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis of the Soul* (Leiden, 2010), also offering a more accurate and updated view of the debate (21–64). It goes without saying that my thoughts on neuroscience are not precise since I do not hold the knowledge and thus the necessary competence to access the experiments confirming what I report in this paper. However, I recommend the studies by A.R. Damasio to my readers

sociological) perspective, the same approach that has been chosen to investigate the specific object of this paper - the concept of “frame” is the starting point from which to explain the meaning of such terms as communication, power, experience, metaphor and literacy (or the act of writing), which certainly bear their own *per se* epistemology, but are also undoubtedly linked to the concept of frame as it is established by CL.

Starting from cognitivism-related studies, Castells analyzes frames as neural networks of mnemonic associations that are accessible to language via analogical connections<sup>15</sup>. As a consequence, framing consists in activating specific neural networks, which cause words to be associated with semantic fields that refer to conceptual frames. Language and computational mechanisms thus interact through frames, which, in turn, structure the narratives by which networks result and are activated in the brain.

The theory about frames, as applied to linguistics, is indebted to the work of M. L. Minsky<sup>16</sup>. From this perspective, a frame emerges as a type of data-structure already stored in memory, a set of implicit knowledge through which we represent situations or events. Every frame contains a series of expectations and preconceptions (that can be satisfied or disappointed), which seem to be activated by previous perceptual experiences such as the sight of an environment, the reading of a text, or the narration of a series of events<sup>17</sup>. According to Castells’ analysis, the structures of frames are not arbitrary. They are based on experience, thus they are derived from the same social organization that defines cultural roles absorbed by cerebral circuits. A very common example of this is the patriarchal family: founded on the roles of father/patriarch and mother/housewife, and dominated by the gendered division of work. It is thus fixed in cerebral networks through biological evolution and cultural experience.

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since these are based on a solid experimental basis and, at the same time, are provided with a communicative freshness that is not very common in these kinds of investigations: see A. R. DAMASIO, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York, 1994); *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York, 1999); *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando, 2003); A. R. DAMASIO – K. MEYER, “Behind the Looking Glass,” *Nature* 454/10 (2008) 167–168.

<sup>15</sup> Concerning the study of the Revelation of John, this aspect has been recently acknowledged also by L. HONGISTO, *Experiencing the Apocalypse at the Limits of Alterity* (Leiden, 2010), 61–66, although in a perspective that is at odds with that offered in this paper.

<sup>16</sup> See M. L. MINSKY, “A Framework for Representing Knowledge,” in P. H. WISTON, ed., *The Psychology of Computer Vision* (New York, 1975), 211–277.

<sup>17</sup> Concerning this aspect, see also L. W. BARSALOU – A. K. BARBEY – W. K. SIMMONS – A. SANTOS, “Embodiment in Religious Knowledge,” *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 5 (2005) 14–57: the authors discuss of “Embodied theories of knowledge,” describing both general/mundane knowledge, but also relating it to “religion.”

In Castells' analysis, metaphorical association emerges as the main element that connects language (and communication *tout court*) with cerebral circuits<sup>18</sup>. It is through metaphors that narrations come to be constituted. Narrations are composed of frames, which become veritable structures of the narration, corresponding to brain structures that are produced through cerebral activities over time. As a consequence, metaphors translate communication into frames by choosing specific associations between language and experience according to cerebral mapping.

It is interesting to note that in his important volume on the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Exegesis of the Soul*, based on the research carried out by Lakoff and Johnson, Hugo Lundhaug has pointed out that within the framework of the CL approach the metaphor is foremost a modality of conceptualization in which metaphorical expressions are fundamental for daily thinking, whereas, according to the traditional approach, metaphors can only be used by people who are able to govern or dominate the language and the discourse (especially for artistic or non-ordinary purposes)<sup>19</sup>. As B. Stefaniw has recently observed about Lundhaug's methodology,

The theory he (i.e. Lundhaug) uses for the task he has set himself (to find and apply an interpretive tool appropriate to the problems presented by two densely allusive and seemingly incoherent texts) is called blending theory. The difference between blending theory and mere recognition of metaphor or intertextuality is that blending theory attends to the generative aspect of allusive interactions. Blending theory shows how the two domains elicited by a metaphor or allusion (the body of Christ and the eucharistic bread) relate mutually and elicit a third thing. (One is called upon not just to think that this bread is a body and thus different than it seems, but also that bodies in general are different than they seem.) This bilateral and generative aspect of blending theory is what makes it religiously potent: metaphors centered on reproduction and kinship gain special traction among people who have problematized their physicality and their attachment to family or spouse by pursuing an ascetic life<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> For a study of the metaphor according to CL approach, see the classic work by G. LAKOFF – M. JOHNSON, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> In the case of the Coptic texts analyzed by Lundhaug, the CL approach specifically works as a means to elucidate the soteriology of transformation through rituals and practices which implies complex conceptual and inter-textual associations having both polemical as well as exhortatory functions. Lundhaug points out how the use of metaphors and allusions concerning a *traditio*, viewed as a source of authority, not only restructures traditional scriptures together with rites and beliefs conveyed by the document, but it also restructures the actual collocation in the world of those who identified themselves with a specific text and, for any reason, used it as a means of individual and/or collective self-definition.

<sup>20</sup> Review in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 22/2 (2014) 295–297 (296).

Similar or connected methodological aspects will also emerge as important elements in this paper.

## 1.2 Experiences, Memorial Emotions, and Authoritative Narratives according to cognitivism-related studies

What the experiential approach allows us to consider is the function of selective memory in the re-proposition of any experience, even the direct contact in the first person that a specific individual believes they have had with the supernatural world. Concerning this last aspect, the cognitivist perspective is proven to be even more useful. Since the 1980s, the cognitive science of religion (CSR henceforth) has been highlighting the way in which human beings think and behave with regard to religious priming and contexts. Though the adaptive role of religiosity is still very much discussed, CSR has shown that the computational mechanisms involved in religious and non-religious thinking are the same. CSR has also thoroughly investigated the role of memory in the elaboration, retention, transmission, and/or modification of religious and cultural contents<sup>21</sup>. In the specific case of selective memory, and especially in contexts permeated by orality and dominated by knowledge automatically absorbed<sup>22</sup> as a frame-constraining

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<sup>21</sup> For a comprehensive overview, see J. BULBULIA – E. SLINGERLAND, “Religious Studies as a Life Science,” *Numen* 59/5 (2012) 564–613.

<sup>22</sup> About the role of memory in the process of transmission in ancient Christianity and/or Judaism, with respect to those materials which would eventually become the Jewish Bible and the New Testament, thus concerning the cultural production (both oral and written) of that specific context, see J. CRENSHAW, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deafening Silence* (New York, 1998); P. R. DAVIES, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville, 1998); D. W. JAMIESON–DRAKE, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archaeological Approach* (Sheffield, 1991); S. NIDITCH, *Oral Word and Written World* (Louisville, 1996); S. B. PARKER, *Stories in Scripture. Comparative Studies in North-West Semitic Inscriptions and the Hebrew Bible* (New York–Oxford, 1997). A particular role was played by W. Ong’s research in the study of the so-called Jewish prophecy and Jewish and Proto-Christian visionary texts: see R. A. HORSLEY – J. A. DRAPER, «Whoever Hears You Hears Me». *Prophets, Performance, and Tradition in Q* (Harrisburg, 1999); R. A. HORSLEY, ed., *Oral Performance, Popular Tradition, and Hidden Transcript in Q* (Atlanta, 2005); T. W. OVERHOLT, *Prophecy in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Atlanta, 1986); T. W. OVERHOLT, *Channels of Prophecy. The Social Dynamics of Prophetic Activity* (Minneapolis, 1989); P. TOWNSEND – M. VIDAS, ed., *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen, 2011); D. F. WATSON, ed., *The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse in the New Testament* (Atlanta, 2002); D. TRIPALDI, *Gesù di Nazareth nell’Apocalisse di Giovanni. Spirito, profezia e memoria* (Brescia, 2010). About the role of memorization and the subsequent writing of texts in schools active within ancient Judaism, see the discussion and the bibliography reported in J. JOOSTEN, “Prophetic Discourse and Popular Rhetoric in the Hebrew Bible,” to be found on the following website:

burden, the authoritative tradition of a specific context (which can correspond to what cognitivism-related studies define as long-term and short-term memory) represents the main area to look at in order to make any account of life experience communicable.

Such a question could be supported by more engagement with emotions and emotional memories. As T. W. Buchanan has recently stressed<sup>23</sup>, «information is first encoded and then consolidated and stored in long-term memory. Within this “modal model” of information processing, information that receives attention and elaboration is more likely to be subsequently available for retrieval.»<sup>24</sup> More important, memories are not believed to be stored in an all-or-none form, «ala a storehouse model, but as a collection of attributes, which may include factors such as the time and place of the experience, the initial phoneme of a word, or the affective valence that a word carries.»<sup>25</sup> Access to these attributes may determine whether a memory is retrieved, and research on phenomena such as tip-of-the-tongue has suggested that individual attributes may be sufficient to support successful memory retrieval.

Retrieval, then, is a reconstruction of a previous experience, and this reconstruction may be influenced by many variables present at the time of retrieval. Research on memory distortions has highlighted the malleable nature of memory and revealed various factors that contribute to these distortions, showing that many of them play a role during retrieval processing. For example, factors such as prior retrieval, cue manipulation, and imagination can impact or even change what is retrieved from memory<sup>26</sup>.

The emotional dimension of stories/narratives provide continuity and make the texts compelling, but at the same time, they allow for the selective

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[http://www.academia.edu/5191258/Prophetic discourse and popular rhetoric in the Hebrew Bible](http://www.academia.edu/5191258/Prophetic_discourse_and_popular_rhetoric_in_the_Hebrew_Bible).

<sup>23</sup> “Retrieval of Emotional Memories,” *Psychology Bulletin* 133/5 (2007) 761–779. Here, I quote this article from the on-line version:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2265099/#S1title>.

With “memory retrieval,” the Author refers to the access, selection, reactivation, or reconstruction of stored internal representations (see Y. DUDAI, *Memory from A to Z: Keywords, Concepts, and Beyond* [Oxford, 2002]).

<sup>24</sup> “Retrieval of Emotional Memories,”

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2265099/#S1title>.

<sup>25</sup> “Retrieval of Emotional Memories,”

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2265099/#S1title>.

<sup>26</sup> “Retrieval of Emotional Memories,”

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2265099/#S1title>.



adaptive modification since what people tend to remember are the strong emotions and not as much the details<sup>27</sup>.

Another aspect seems to be relevant for this discussion. Some stories/narratives exercise power and are constrained by the original social relationships in which their authors were engaged. If we couple this sociological and poststructuralist background to the study of cognition, we can say that narratives define social roles within imagined, modulated, and manipulated social contexts. In this sense, social roles seem to be based on frames which exist both in the brain as well as in social practice<sup>28</sup>. Castells<sup>29</sup>, for example, refers to E. Goffman's research<sup>30</sup> about role play as the basis of social interactions, which, in turn, are founded on the definition of roles structuring any social organization. As G. Lakoff<sup>31</sup> has pointed out, the use of neural structures, both for what concerns experience and its representation, has «enormous political consequences». D. Westen better explains the matter when he states that «political persuasion is made of networks and narrations» because «the brain is an emotive brain.»<sup>32</sup> Naturally, in this context the use of terms such as “authority,” “power,” or “political” has to be understood in the broadest sense, as an attempt by an

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<sup>27</sup> More generally on this aspect, see P. BOYER, “What are Memories For? Functions of Recall in Cognition and Culture,” in P. BOYER – J.W. WERTSCH, ed., *Memory in Mind and Culture* (Cambridge, 2009), 3–28.

<sup>28</sup> See M. CASTELLS, *Communication Power* (Oxford, 2013<sup>2</sup>), 142.

<sup>29</sup> M. CASTELLS, *Communication Power* (Oxford, 2013<sup>2</sup>), 142.

<sup>30</sup> See *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (New York, 1959).

<sup>31</sup> See *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Politics with an 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Brain* (New York, 2008). Lakoff's argument is considered also by M. CASTELLS, *Communication Power* (Oxford, 2013<sup>2</sup>), 137.142.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. D. WESTEN, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation* (New York, 2007), XV.12. Lakoff's statement is also recalled by M. CASTELLS, *Communication Power* (Oxford, 2013<sup>2</sup>), 142. On the “emotive brain,” see T. W. BUCHANAN, “Retrieval of Emotional Memory,” <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2265099/#S1title>.: «The internal representation of previously experienced emotional stimuli may elicit a transient emotional state, though one that is sufficient to cue the retrieval of an emotional event. [...]. The retrieval of an emotional event may be cued by direct exposure to a specific reminder of an event or by a partial reminder that initiates the processes required to retrieve the memory for that event. [...] Specific reminders of an emotional event are less common than reminders that only partially cue an emotional event. The re-experience of an affective state may serve either as a selective reminder of the original encoding of a particular event or as a reminder of similar affective experiences from the past. Even the attempt to retrieve an emotional memory may establish the affective state necessary to influence the cognitive and neurobiological processes of retrieval. A partial reminder of an emotional event, such as a fragment of a conversation, may trigger a search process for an emotional event associated with the context of the conversation. [...] The re-experience of an affective state serves as a selective reminder for the original encoding of a particular event, or as a reminder of similar affective experiences from the past.»

individual or a group to influence behaviors or certainties of wider social groups.

## 2 The Revelation of John between cognitivism-related studies and cultural history

Concerning the cases of direct contact between the ancient world and the other world (both those obtained via what we call “altered states of consciousness”<sup>33</sup> and dysphoric or terror rituals<sup>34</sup>), it emerges that these experiences are not only frequent and considered to be reliable in specific contexts, but that they very often constitute a means of establishing authority within, and for, specific human groups<sup>35</sup>. The moment that we try to interpret these phenomena it is important to abandon the ethnocentric and modern dichotomy of rational/irrational, as well as to avoid an analysis based on the contrasting elements of truth/falseness in order to clarify such cultural products. Because their experiences seem to be patterned on frames activated through analogical connections that are different from ours, some ancients seem to be aware of different levels of reality and they do not always (at least not systematically!) assign value to experiences of direct contact with the other world according to the polarization - truth/falseness - derived from our modern and/or post-modern scientific worldview. With respect to ancient narratives concerning experience, the cognitive approach allows us to consider a further aspect that is incidental to similar representations: communication and how its presentation can influence the behavior of others.

In the case of the Revelation of John, we are looking at a text (thus, a cultural product) which explicitly represents itself as an account originating from a direct experience of contact with the other world. The title of the work as ἀποκάλυψις refers to this dynamic clearly enough. The text’s inception explicitly stresses the process of transmission from which the text that we are familiar with originates. It is worth quoting the passage from

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<sup>33</sup> On this aspect with relation to Paul, see C. SHANTZ, *Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle’s Life and Thought* (Cambridge, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> On dysphoric or terror rituals, see H. WHITEHOUSE, “Rites of Terror: Emotion, Metaphor, and Memory in Melanesian Initiation Cults,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4 (1996) 703–715; ID., *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek, 2004), 166.

<sup>35</sup> For what concerns the complex universe of the so-called Proto-Christian Prophecy in this perspective, see. L. NASRALLAH, *An Ecstasy of Folly. Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Cambridge MA, 2004).

which the process of transmission seems to emerge (see Revelation 1. 1–3, 10–11)<sup>36</sup>:

1. 1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός, δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, 1. 2 ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅσα εἶδεν. 1. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς. [...] 1. 10 Ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, καὶ ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος 1. 11 λεγούσης, Ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἐφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Θυάτιρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν.

1. 1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, in order to show to his servants the things that must take place soon, and which he made manifest by dispatch, through the medium of his angel, to his servant John, 1. 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, that is, to all the things that he saw. 1. 3 Blessed is who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things that are written in it, for the moment is near. [...] 1. 10 I was in spirit on the day of the Lord, and I heard behind me a great voice like that of a trumpet 1. 11 which was saying: «That which you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.»

If, in Revelation 1. 1–2, there is a certain insistence on the word and the testimony (clearly oral), this does not have to eclipse another element that is present in the transmission dynamics of John's account: both in 1. 3 (even if less explicitly) and in 1. 10, 11 (more clearly), the protagonist of the experience declares that the act of writing is an essential component of the whole visionary experience<sup>37</sup>. John first stresses that the one who reads, as

<sup>36</sup> For the text and its translation, I follow E. F. LUPIERI, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> On the relationship between orality and writing in John's Revelation, see the study by D. L. BARR, "The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment," *Interpretation* 40 (1986) 243–256. On writing practices documented in the Revelation, see J. HERNÁNDEZ JR., *Scribal Habits and Theological Influences in the Apocalypse* (Tübingen, 2006). An approach in which orality and writing are well connected is the one by L. HONGISTO, *Experiencing the Apocalypse at the Limits of Alterity* (Leiden, 2010), 41–53. For writing phenomena in ancient Christianity, according to the cognitivism-related studies perspective, see I. CZACHESZ, "Rewriting and Textual Fluidity in Antiquity: Exploring the Socio-Cultural and Psychological Context of Earliest Christian Literacy," in J. H. F. DIJKSTRA – J. E. A. KROESEN – Y. B. KUIPER, ed.,

well as those who listen to the prophecy's words and keep the things written in it (τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα) are blessed (1. 3); later, explaining in detail while he relates the circumstances of his contact experience (defined with the sentence ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι), he reminds his readers about how the great voice that he heard behind him commanded that he write what he saw in a scroll (Ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον) and send it (πέμψον) - just as if it were a letter - to the seven ἐκκλησίαι (1. 10, 11).

The oral-written dynamic confronts us with a direct-contact experience with the other world that is strongly characterized on a ritual level. Generally, visions of the afterlife followed institutionalized procedures according to which the staging of the experience seemed structured and divided into two parts: in the first, the prevailing characteristic was the description of the material and physical effects of visionary experience; in the second, the act of writing reinforced what the mediator himself seemed to have ritually experienced<sup>38</sup>.

## 2.1 The Revelation of John as a narrative process based on traditional memorial frames: the case of Zechariah 12. 10 in Revelation 1. 7

The CL approach allows us to draw further attention to a question on which the intertextual method as applied to the analysis of the Revelation of John as a “finished textual product” has run aground: the nature of the “Biblical” text “used” by the seer of Patmos when he (re-)narrates his experience of contact with the other world<sup>39</sup> in written form. In light of CL

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*Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity. Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer* (Leiden, 2010), 425–441.

<sup>38</sup> On the matter, see some of studies collected in R. SCODEL, ed., *Orality and Literacy in the Ancient World: Communication and Adaptation in Antiquity* (Leiden, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> It has to be said that, with respect to the analysis of the Revelation of John, the intertextual method has reached such a refined level that it avoided, almost entirely, the intrinsic dangers of a “rigid” vision of “Biblical” texts used by the seer from Patmos. On inter-textual methods as applied to John's Revelation, the bibliography is very rich: see G. K. BEALE, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham MD, 1984); G. BIGUZZI, “L'Antico Testamento nell'ordito dell'Apocalisse,” *Ricerche Storico-Bibliche* 19/2 (2007) 191–214; S. MOYISE – M. J. J. MENKEN, ed., *Isaiah in the New Testament* (London–New York, 2005); M. JAUHAINEN, *The Use of Zechariah in Revelation* (Tübingen, 2004); S. MOYISE, *The Old Testament in the New. An Introduction* (London, 2001); I. PAUL, “The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12,” in S. MOYISE, ed., *The Old Testament in the New Testament. Essays in Honour of J. L. North* (Sheffield, 2000), 256–276; J.– P. RUIZ, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse. The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16,17–19,10* (Frankfurt–Bern–New York–Paris, 1989); J. VAN RUITEN, “The Intertextual Relationship between Isaiah 65,17–20 and Revelation 21,1–5b,” *Estudios Bíblicos* 51 (1993) 473–510; ID., “Der alttestamentliche Hintergrund von Apokalypse 6:12–

studies, it becomes clear that considering the question as a mere “pre-arranged” recovery of earlier “texts” would inevitably backdate a much later context to the period in which the Revelation was presumably composed. In fact, during the 1st century what we now define as “Bible” was a *living tradition*, fluidly expressed, and connected to practices concerning transmission of memories and thus, in this sense, a means of production of discourses and written narratives<sup>40</sup>.

I believe that the debated reference to Zechariah 12. 10 in Revelation 1. 7 could acquire a symbolic meaning, particularly the phrase «will strike themselves in the mourning for him» (καὶ κόψονται ἐπ'αὐτὸν).

1. 7 Ἴδοὺ ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ οἱ τινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν, καὶ κόψονται ἐπ'αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς. Ναί, ἀμήν.

1. 7 Lo, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, and all those who pierced him through; and all the tribes of the earth will strike themselves in mourning for him. Yes indeed, amen.

I cannot discuss here all of the exegetical problems that such a debated passage implies<sup>41</sup>. Suffice it to say that when using the classical inter-textual approach, scholars have never failed to point out how the Revelation seems to follow the LXX text of Zechariah, which, not accidentally, presents the third person pronoun ἐπ'αὐτὸν (καὶ κόψονται ἐπ'αὐτὸν). In this case, MT changes the first-person pronoun to «they shall look at me, the one whom

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17,” *Estudios Biblicos* 53 (1995) 239–260. On the inter-textual methodology in the light of the cognitivist approach, see Lundhaug’s important observations in *Images of Rebirth. Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis of the Soul* (Leiden, 2010), 2–4.

<sup>40</sup> On the matter, see the recent background offered by D. M. CARR, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible. A New Reconstruction* (Oxford–New York, 2011). Concerning difficulties connected to a more or less univocal textual definition of Biblical texts in Hellenistic–Roman Judaism, see E. ULRICH, “The Bible in the Making: The Scriptures Found at Qumran,” in P. W. FLINT, ed., *The Bible at Qumran. Text, Shape, and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, 2001), 51–66. For methodological insights on the use of various fluxes of transmission as authoritative elements in contexts in which orality and writing seem to be parallel elements and, at the same time, different, see M. PESCE, “Funzione e spazio dell’uso della Scrittura nell’attività apostolica paolina. Ipotesi di ricerca,” *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi* 1/1 (1984), 75–108.

<sup>41</sup> See L. ARCARI, *Visioni del figlio dell’uomo nel Libro delle Parabole e nell’Apocalisse* (Brescia, 2012), 172–178. See also M. JAUHAINEN, *The Use of Zechariah in Revelation* (Tübingen, 2004), 102–106 and D. Tripaldi, “*Discrepat evangelista et Septuaginta nostraque translatio* (Hieronymus, Briefe 57,7,5): Bemerkungen zur Textvorlage des Sacharja–Zitats in Offb 1,7,” in M. LABAHN – M. KARRER, ed., *Die Johannesoffenbarung – ihr Text und ihre Auslegung* (Leipzig, 2011), 131–143.

they pierced» (*wəhibbîṭû ʿēlay ʿēt ʿāšer-dāqārû*), although in the manuscript tradition there is also proof of the use of a third-person pronoun (even if it is considered as a clear *lectio facilior* example<sup>42</sup>). Despite this fact, more than as a conscious adaptation of LXX (certainly possible but not absolutely certain), the seer of Patmos' re-proposition has to be read as a selection of memories, thus, as an attempt to re-order tradition so as to confer authority to his experience. In this case, to stress the piercing of the human being seen in his vision. It is not accidental that the verb ἐξεκέντησαν refers to the Hebrew *dqr*, which the Greek text certainly has read as *rqd*, hence the form κατωρχήσαντο found in Zechariah 12. 10<sup>LXX</sup>.

The framing of memories used by the seer of Patmos seems to be directly influenced by the prophetic texts especially in the words καὶ ὄψεται [...] καὶ κόπονται ἐπ'αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς<sup>43</sup>. When they refer to the same text, Matthew 24. 50 and John 19. 37 use the form ὄψονται, meaning the verb “to see,” whereas the LXX uses ἐπιβλέπονται. According to B. Lindars, the presence of the verb ὄψονται should be connected to κόπονται as if it were a wordplay<sup>44</sup>. This probable thesis confirms the importance of memory frames as modalities of construction of authoritative discourses within fluxes of transmission that, being based on “formulaic” and “redundant” memory transmission procedures, can intervene on the authoritative *traditio* in order to re-structure it in the name of a functional and strictly situational use.

## 2.2 Emotive Memories of the Visionary Jesus: Revelation 1. 4–7, 11, 16–17 and 5. 6–10.

In the specific case of the prologue of the Revelation of John, the reference to the piercing does not seem to address the historicizing accounts about the crucifixion that are contained in the Gospels; rather, it refers to the slain lamb in Revelation 5. 6, and thus, to Jesus' expiatory death. For this reason, the absence of any reference to the resurrection does not compromise the sacrificial interpretation of Jesus' death<sup>45</sup>. The centrality of

<sup>42</sup> See discussion and references in L. ARCARI, *Visioni del figlio dell'uomo nel Libro delle Parabole e nell'Apocalisse* (Brescia, 2012), 175–176.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Zech. 12. 10, 12 <sup>TM</sup>*wəhibbîṭû* [...] *wəšāpḏāḥ hāʿāreš mišpāḥōṭ mišpāḥōṭ*, <sup>LXX</sup>καὶ ἐπιβλέπονται [...] καὶ κόψεται ἡ γῆ κατὰ φυλάς φυλάς.

<sup>44</sup> See *New Testament Apologetic. The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (London, 1961), 124. See also N. PERRIN, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London, 1967), 182.

<sup>45</sup> On the matter, see M. VINZENT, *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament* (Burlington, 2011), 72–73.202.220–223.

the vision of the slain lamb in the Revelation is acknowledged by numerous scholars, though with inevitable exegetical disagreements concerning a literary construction that is certainly hard to consider univocally or very rigidly<sup>46</sup>.

It is interesting to notice how the lamb is first introduced as a «lion» in Revelation 5. 5 (καὶ εἷς ἐκ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων λέγει μοι, Μὴ κλαῖε· ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα, ἡρίζα Δαβὶδ, ἀνοίξαι τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ). Hence, the subsequent identification with the slain lamb would seem to mirror a conception that is at once both reversing and explicatory with respect to the entity introduced earlier. Lupieri has properly argued that the slain lamb seems to be unexpected after having been introduced as a triumphant lion; the victory of the eschatological lion over an eagle (a symbol representing the Roman Empire) has to be found in 4 *Ezra* 11. 37–12. 3. Hence, the seer of Patmos seems to engage in a dialectical relationship with some Jewish ideas that were circulating at the end of 1st century, when the hope of a triumph of the lion of Judah over the Imperial eagle was certainly present, although we do not know if actually common.

The term ἀρνίον recurs 29 times in the Revelation, and this element alone is indicative of the central concern for such a being in the visionary text. But, it is not only the statistical element that requires thought. As I have already pointed out, the ἀρνίον is also described as ἐσφαγμένον, that is, slain. This notation refers to the idea of a sacrificial killing, thus to the idea of a death that has value in, and of, itself since it is the animal used in the sacrifice to ensure the desired outcome of the cultural practice<sup>47</sup>. I do not believe that there are decisive elements that allude, even implicitly, to Paul's theology of death as a path to resurrection. In the Revelation, the participle defining the lamb's function refers - quite clearly - to the idea of the killing which is effective in itself precisely because of its cruelty<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> See N. HOHNJEC, *Das Lamm, τὸ ἀρνίον, in der Offenbarung des Johannes. Eine exegetisch-theologische Untersuchung* (Rome, 1980); L. L. JOHNS, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into Its Origins and Rhetorical Force* (Tübingen, 2003); D. L. BARR, "The Lamb who Looks like a Dragon? Characterizing Jesus in John's Apocalypse," in D. L. BARR, ed., *The Reality of Apocalypse. Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta, 2006), 205–220.

<sup>47</sup> About the sacrificial worth of the Lamb in John's Apocalypse, especially concerning its sacrificial rhetorical dimension, see G. HEYMAN, *The Power of Sacrifice. Roman and Christian Discourses in Conflict* (Lanham, 2006), 135–145.

<sup>48</sup> It has to be said that the verb σφάζω is just one of the terms which refer to Greek sacrificial practices. On the matter, F. S. NAIDEN, *Smoke Signals for the Gods. Ancient Greek Sacrifice from the Archaic through Roman Periods* (Oxford, 2013), 279 argues: «Unlike *thuein* or *hierarezein*, *sphazein* refers to a single act, throat-cutting. It applied to most acts of animal sacrifice, but only as a phase. In animal sacrifice followed by a meal, *sphazein* applied to the

The set of connections with the inaugural vision of the one similar to the son of man emerges from a series of internal references. On one hand, these are useful to emphasize the peculiarity of the vision of the ἀρνίον; on the other hand, such connections work as connective frames, thus as warning signs to clarify the comprehensive meaning of what the seer experiences. We have to bear this in mind, especially if we think of the auditory of the Revelation because it is in such contexts that the recurrence of terms and expressions is an absolutely necessary stratagem for the reception, as well as for the conservation and spread, of the message.

I will now schematize the elements found in both sections (5. 6–10 e 1. 4–7, 11, 16 in particular) :

Revelation 5. 6 Καὶ εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ <b>τοῦ θρόνου</b> καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἀρνίον ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον, ἔχων κέρατα <b>ἑπτὰ</b> καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς <b>ἑπτὰ</b> , οἳ εἰσιν <b>τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα</b> τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν	Revelation 1. 4 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, καὶ ἀπὸ <b>τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων</b> ἃ ἐνώπιον <b>τοῦ θρόνου</b> αὐτοῦ
5. 6 οἳ εἰσιν <b>τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα</b> τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν	1. 16 καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας <b>ἑπτὰ</b>
5. 7 καὶ ἦλθεν καὶ εἴληφεν ἐκ τῆς <b>δεξιᾶς</b> τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ <b>τοῦ θρόνου</b>	1. 4 καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον <b>τοῦ θρόνου</b> αὐτοῦ [...] 1:16 καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ <b>δεξιᾷ</b> χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας <b>ἑπτὰ</b>
5. 8 καὶ ὅτε ἔλαβεν <b>τὸ βιβλίον</b> , τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα καὶ οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι <b>ἔπεσαν</b> ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου, [...] 5. 9 καὶ ᾄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν λέγοντες, Ἄξιός ἐστι λαβεῖν <b>τὸ</b>	1. 11 Ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς <b>βιβλίον</b> [...] 1. 17 Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, <b>ἔπεσα</b> πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρός

phase that Burkert thought most important, yet it did not give a name to this kind of sacrifice. It more referred to battlefield and oath sacrifices.» The imagery to which the seer of Patmos refers is the Jewish one, where the verb σφάζω refers to the slaying of the animal in the sacrificial practices: see Genesis 22. 10, 37. 31, 43. 16, Exodus 22. 1, 34. 25, Numbers 11. 22, Leviticus 1. 5, 14. 19, Isaiah 57. 5, Ezekiel 21. 10, 23. 39. It also has to be said that, in the LXX, the term seems to be affected by the representation of Greek sacrifices found in ancient literary sources: for instance, see *Iliad* 1. 459, Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 11. 23, Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 305, Euripides, *Phoenissae* 913, *Helen* 813, *Orestes* 1199). As it is known, these sources cannot be held as representative of the sacrificial practices as they were actually carried out in ancient Greece: on this matter, see essays collected in C. A. FARAONE – F. S. NAIDEN, ed., *Greek and Roman Animal Sacrifice. Ancient Victims, Modern Observers* (Cambridge, 2012), especially 167–194.



<b>βιβλίον</b>	
5. 9–10 ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους, καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ Θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς	1. 5–7 Τῷ ἀγαπῶν τι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ – αὐτῷ ἢ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας [τῶν αἰώνων]· ἀμήν. Ἴδου ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ οἱ τινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν, καὶ κόψονται ἐπ' αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς. ναί, ἀμήν

Just as the throne is a privileged position belonging to him who is, who was and who is to come and it has the seven Spirits before it (see Revelation 1. 4), the lamb stands between the throne with the seven horns and the seven eyes explicitly identified with the seven Spirits of God sent out into all earth (5. 6). Moreover, the lamb takes the scroll out of the right hand of the one who sat on the throne (in this case, the past tense τοῦ καθημένου indicates that the being from whom the lamb takes the scroll *had been* sitting on the throne, so the lamb eventually took his place). Besides the scenic notation concerning the throne in the beginning, seven Spirits also appear in the representation of Revelation 1. 16, where the being identified as the son of man holds seven stars in his right hand that are later revealed to be the seven angels of the seven Churches (the ones to which the letters of 2. 1 and 3. 21 seem to be addressed)<sup>49</sup>.

In Revelation 5. 8, the four animals and the 24 elders fall down (ἔπεσαν) before the lamb (a gesture expressing cultural veneration), in the same way that the seer falls down (ἔπεσα) as if he were dead before the feet of the being similar to the son of man. This scene evidently alludes to the effects that the experience of contact with the other world had on the seer<sup>50</sup>. In 5. 8, the lamb takes the scroll, since it deserves to take it, and it breaks its seals in exactly the same way that the seer is ordered to write what he sees in a scroll. Due to its being slain, the lamb purchased people from all of these tribes and nations for God with its blood, thus releasing them from their sins. The tribes in question (literally «all tribes on earth») are those who will strike themselves to the vision of the pierced being coming with the clouds.

<sup>49</sup> On the association angels–stars, see E. F. LUPIERI, “Esegesi e simbologie apocalittiche,” *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi* 7/2 (1990) 379–396.

<sup>50</sup> This falling down is a response to a theophanic encounter. In Biblical traditions, similar verbs appear in many references to encounter/theophany (for example, see Ezekiel 1. 28; 3. 23; 43. 3; 44. 4; Daniel 8. 17.18; 10. 9)

The expiatory death of the lamb turned the believers into a kingdom of priests for God and this is an element inseparably connected to their supremacy on earth itself. The expression comes back again with slight differences in 1. 6, where the one who loves the believers releases them from their sins by way of his blood, thus turning them into a kingdom of priests to God (for more particulars, see 1. 5, 6).

In the specific case of links between 5. 6–10 and the inaugural vision, the centrality of the pierced lamb involves all or most of the references to the tradition that seem to be re-proposed in order to emphasize that central element. With respect to the inaugural vision, the seer's memory seems to focus on the verb "to pierce," which John certainly borrows from the prophetic subtext, while, at the same time, it re-activates the frame concerning what follows. In the context of the introduction, this could explain what the word slain indicates in 5. 6: both of the references seem to be reformatted in the light of a "pervasive" mnemonic and visionary association that is, at the same time, symmetrical<sup>51</sup>. Moreover, the symmetries between the two sections do not eclipse, rather, they intensify the differences between the two representations. These differences are due to the fact that the being in the inaugural vision is the one who dictates the seven letters to the seven churches thus acting as a *maskyl*, whereas the lamb is the one who breaks the seals – thus commencing the vision and projecting the dynamics to which the seven letters refer<sup>52</sup> in a cosmic dimension.

### 3 The Revelation of John as an authoritative (and/or powerful) narrative: between "You" and "I"

The last socio-cultural aspect that I intend to analyze is the "authoritative posture" intrinsically connected to the account of the contact with the other world conveyed by the Revelation, and more precisely, its relation to the seer's self and to the groups referred to in the text. I believe

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<sup>51</sup> The term indicates that within a mnemonic flux some memories (dreams, for instance) are more pervasive than others and very often, besides being quite recurrent, they acquire a leading function with respect to other memories. For a cognitive approach concerning accounts of dreams, see A. W. GEERTZ – J. S. JENSEN, ed., *Religious Narrative, Cognition and Culture: Image and Word in the Mind of Narrative* (Sheffield–Oakville, 2011); J. GOTTSCHALL, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (Boston–New York, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> On this topic, see L. ARCARI, "L'Apocalisse di Giovanni nel quadro di alcune dinamiche gruppalı proto-cristiane: elementi per una (ri-)contestualizzazione," *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi* 28 (2011) 137–183. More recently, see also M. STOWASSER, "Die Sendschreiben der Offembarung des Johannes: Literarische Gestaltung, Buchkompositorische Funktion, Textpragmatik," *New Testament Studies* 61 (2015) 50–66.

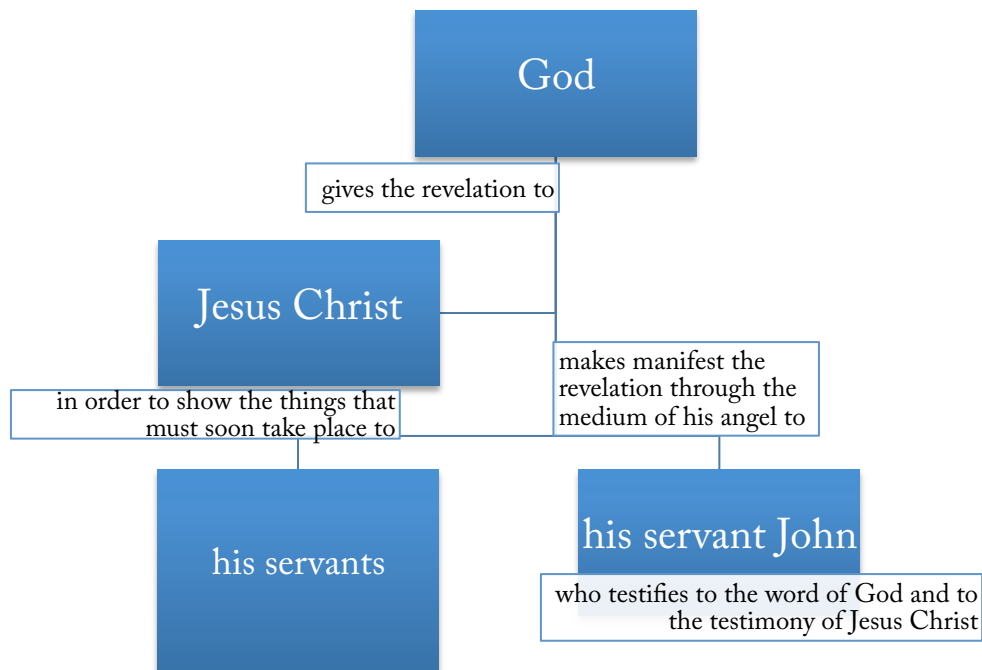
that this allows us to reassess the turning point of this study, that is, the recovery of the *traditio* deemed as authoritative in activating (culturally speaking) mnemonic frames concerning the direct experience of contact with the other world. I want to recall the “I–we–you” dynamic which the Revelation conveys, especially in the text’s *incipit* (see Revelation 1. 1–5):

1. 1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός, δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ, 1. 2 ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅσα εἶδεν. 1. 3 μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς. 1. 4 Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ, 1. 5 καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς.

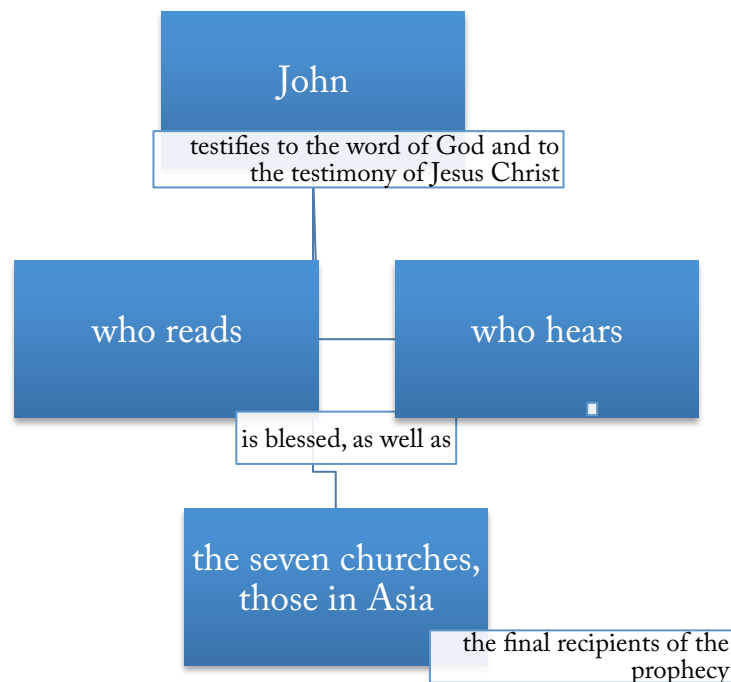
1. 1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, in order to show to his servants the things that must take place soon, and which he made manifest by dispatch, through the medium of his angel, to his servant John, 1. 2 who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, that is, to all the things that he saw. 1. 3 Blessed is who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things that are written in it, for the moment is near. 1. 4 John to the seven churches, those in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven spirits that are in front of his throne, 1. 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

The conveyance chain of the visionary message presents itself as a coming and going between a vertical and a horizontal dimension: Jesus Christ’s ἀποκάλυψις is given by God to indicate to his δούλοι things that are soon to happen. Hence, it was God himself who manifested it by sending his angel to δοῦλος John so that he could testify concerning the word of God and the witness of Jesus together with all that he has seen. In this case, the vertical association of the term δοῦλος (which alludes to the subordination of the slave) is identified by the implicit metaphorical association of the term, used both to indicate the recipients of the ἀποκάλυψις message and the mediator who experiences the vision.

If we schematized the vertical dimension emerging from the text’s *incipit*, it would resemble the following diagram:



Apart from this vertical dimension, it is also possible to observe a fundamental dialectic on a horizontal level (the second basis of a diagram) in which the same *δοῦλοι* quoted in the *incipit* together with *δοῦλος* John seems to be involved. The first element emerging from 1. 3 is that the *ἀποκάλυψις* is intended to be expressed on two levels: the reading by a single person (*ὁ ἀναγινώσκων*) and the collective listening (*οἱ ἀκούοντες*). At this point, precisely in 1. 4, John addresses the seven *ἐκκλησίαι* located in Asia. He has to inform them that the *χάρις* and *εἰρήνη* are coming from the one who is, who was, and who is to come, from the seven Spirits standing before his throne, and from Jesus himself. Schematizing once again, it emerges that the horizontal dimension, seeming to be so at least from a truthful perspective, is also structured according to the following scheme:



John's presentation is further clarified in 1. 4, where the use of pronouns is particularly enlightening to evaluate the horizontal dynamics of the ἀποκάλυψις.

1. 9 Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ. 1. 10 ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ, καὶ ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνὴν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος 1. 11 λεγούσης, Ὅ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον καὶ πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις, εἰς Ἔφεσον καὶ εἰς Σμύρναν καὶ εἰς Πέργαμον καὶ εἰς Θυάτιρα καὶ εἰς Σάρδεις καὶ εἰς Φιλαδέλφειαν καὶ εἰς Λαοδίκειαν.

1. 9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 1. 10 I was in spirit on the day of the Lord, and I heard behind me a great voice like that of a trumpet 1. 11 which was saying: «That which you see write in a scroll and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.»

John's "self" seems to be connected to a "you" through a fraternal (ἀδελφός)/equal (συγκοινωνός) relationship. Despite the prohibitive

admission of this commonality, the self inevitably stands out in its dimension at the executive apex because of the space it has been given in the staging of the vision. John is the one who was in the spirit on the day of the Lord in a place which does not coincide with any of the seven cities mentioned and, for this reason, the separation from the recipients in the moment of the ἀποκάλυψις represents a means of exaltation of the individual's activity.

The seer is the one who receives the order to write in a scroll and to send what he sees to the seven ἐκκλησίαι. Besides emerging from the first-person pronoun together with the verbs “to show” or “to speak”, the individual dimension of ἀποκάλυψις, an individuality at the same time linked and measured with relation to a collectivity - a “you” inevitably opposing a “they” (misleading or constructed as such by the seer) - also emerges in the last chapter of the text where the seer reports Jesus' words to confirm the account of the ἀποκάλυψις as a whole (22. 16), like a sort of *sphragis* to be interpreted in the light of the curse that the seer casts later in 22. 18–19<sup>53</sup>.

#### 4 Final remarks: authority, individuality, and visions

In a recent volume detailing the findings of a research project carried out at the Max Weber Center (University of Erfurt), the problem of individuality in the ancient world is explored in an innovative light, particularly in the attempt to overcome the Cartesian definition of the self that is anachronistic with respect to ancient Mediterranean witnesses<sup>54</sup>. R. Gordon's essay<sup>55</sup> emphasizes five types of individuality:

- 1) Pragmatic individuality (deriving from the breaking of family bonds)
- 2) Moral individuality (deriving from the attempt to live according to a series of ethical rules)
- 3) Competitive individuality (deriving from the competition among elite individuals in order to obtain a leading *status*)

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<sup>53</sup> In the curse of Revelation 22. 18–19, the seer seems to refer particularly to the written expression of ἀποκάλυψις: perhaps, he wants to direct the reader's attention toward a reading of exactly what is contained in the scroll?

<sup>54</sup> See J. RÜPKE – W. SPICKERMANN, ed., *Reflections on Religious Individuality: Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian Texts and Practices* (Berlin–New York, 2012).

<sup>55</sup> See “Representative Individuality in Iamblichus' *De vita pythagorica*,” in J. RÜPKE – W. SPICKERMANN, ed., *Reflections on Religious Individuality: Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian Texts and Practices* (Berlin–New York, 2012), 71–74.

- 4) Representative individuality (derived in relation to some individuals who are deemed to be models within a particular tradition)
- 5) Reflexive individuality (founded on a legitimating discourse)

The last three types seem to provide a good context for the “self” who has lived through an experience of contact with the other world. It is the dialectic emerging between vertical and horizontal dimensions in the text – quite a fluid one in the case of John’s Revelation according to which there is a relation of equality (John as ἀδελφός and συγκοινωνός) and verticality (John directly experiencing the other world) – that has led some scholars to define the characteristics of what can be considered as another category of the “self”, the visionary “self.”<sup>56</sup> If this seems to include many of the elements identified by Gordon, it also appears to be provided with some features connected to the direct experience with the other world.

The first aspect concerns the stance/approach emerging from the use of the vision-experiencing self which takes its demonstrative strength from the explicit admission of having had a first person experience of contact with the other world. This is not about choosing a Weberian or interactionist/charismatic model<sup>57</sup> but, it is about re-evaluating the role of the experience of an individual (a competitive-representative-reflexive individual according to the above-cited categories by Gordon) in order to define and clarify the procedure and the related transmission of the contact with the other world.

In order to benefit from social belonging, the ancient rhetorical use of the self – that could be also defined as the language of “incorporation” – can deceptively work as a generating element of a religious experience of transformation and ascent similar to the one reported. This procedure of fulfillment is based on the capacity of being able to reproduce the same experience of contact reported by the one who claims to have lived it in the first person<sup>58</sup>. This may be the effect of the rhetorical first person speech which allows the visions to become experienced as “scripted” experiences for a reader to then re-act. This would then allow for the generation of a predisposition to experience similar types of visions without predetermining that such experiences will happen<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> See the important book by A. K. HARKINS, *Reading with an 'I' to the Heavens: Looking at the Qumran Hodayot through the Lens of Visionary Traditions* (Berlin–New York, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> On such a matter, see C. TREVETT, “Prophets, Economics, and the Rites of Men. Some Issues of Authority in Early Christian Tradition,” in P. TOWNSEND – M. VIDAS, ed., *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen: 2011), 43–64.

<sup>58</sup> More generally, see A. K. HARKINS, *Reading with an 'I' to the Heavens: Looking at the Qumran Hodayot through the Lens of Visionary Traditions* (Berlin–New York, 2012), 25–68.

<sup>59</sup> On such a question, see A. K. HARKINS, *Reading with an 'I' to the Heavens: Looking at the Qumran Hodayot through the Lens of Visionary Traditions* (Berlin–New York, 2012).

Explicitly identified as an account of a non-ordinary experience of contact with the other world, the Revelation of John seems to render, in cultural terms, this experience in harmony with an authoritative *traditio*, capable of creating authority for those who qualify themselves as its further heirs. John's visionary self-centeredness seems to be structured as a traditional *cesura* between the tradition and the visionary experience, re-functionalized in order to make the experience reported in the text credible and communicable. Such a dynamic is the consequence of the first and main level of fulfillment of the visionary account, the oral one, through which the authoritative impact of the message emerges as effectively implemented.

If the face-to-face discourse is the primary context through which the Revelation must be understood, we do not have to forget that writing, as we have seen, is extremely relevant in this process. It does not only emerge as a procedure included in the ritual process of contact with the other world, but also as a warning sign capable of identifying dynamics with relation to who has spread the message contained in the text. In this sense, the writing-oral dialectic not only enlightens the different perceptive levels of the visionary account in concrete social groups, but it also clarifies the diffusion of the message through its (probable) public reading as well as on the different dynamics which the transmission inevitably triggers via different levels of expression.