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HELLENISTIC TEXTS AND IMAGES IN JOHN'S APOCALYPSE

ABSTRACT

The Book of Revelation is a strong apocalyptic writing, which presents not only the Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic perspective, but, in our opinion, also a rich Hellenistic world view. Sometimes it is possible to identify the sources of the Greek texts almost word for word. For example, one can feel such an overlay of pictures or texts in the following apocalyptic scenarios: the urbanization of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:9–27), the Last Judgement's white judgement seat (Rev 20:11–15), Satan's punishment (Rev 20:1–3), a pleasant paradisaic climate (Rev 7:16–17), depiction of the dragon/beast (Rev 12–17), the warnings addressed to the seven apocalyptic churches (Rev 2–3), Satan's throne, etc. This fact forces us to suppose that the formation of the eschatology of the Apostolic Church might have been influenced also by the mythical theology of the Hellenistic environment. The author tries to demonstrate the extent and form of that more specifically by analysing various examples.

INTRODUCTION

When depicting his visions and describing woes in the Book of Revelation, John uses a vast amount of materials originating from various ancient sources.¹ According to the strongest position of today's researchers we should look for the basis for the exposition of the Book of Revelation in the world of Old Testament theology. Some theologians even seem to suggest that the whole Book of Revelation is merely a commentary on Old Testament apocalyptic texts updated in line with Apostolic theology. Klaus Berger, a New Testament scholar from Heidelberg University, claims that the structure of the Book of Revelation is strongly reminiscent of the book by the prophet Ezekiel and that Rev 17–22 in particular aims to be some kind of a "progressive midrash" (als fortlaufender Midrasch) of that book.²

¹ Cf. Franz TÓTH, *Von der Vision zur Redaktion: Untersuchungen zur Komposition, Redaktion und Intention der Johannesapokalypse*, in: Jörg FREY – Jame A. KELLHOFFER – Franz TÓTH (eds.), *Die Johannesapokalypse. Kontexte – Konzepte – Rezeption*, WUNT 287, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2012, 319–410.

² Klaus BERGER, *Die Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums*, UTB, Tübingen–Basel, Francke Verlag, 1994 (21995), 622.

I too³ tried to point out about 20 years ago⁴ that besides the materials from Ezekiel these and other passages from the Book of Revelation also include reminiscences of other Old Testament apocalyptic prophecies such as those from prophetic books of Isaiah, Daniel, Joel, Zechariah or Malachi. We can also say that the book may include certain fragments of materials, metaphors and kerygmatic theological reflections from the Pentateuch as well.

The picture is not simple, however, because more thorough research confirms that some parallels in the Book of Revelation are also related to several New Testament writers. According to Martin Karrer (who is writing the newest commentary on the Book of Revelation in the EKK series, to be published in three volumes) we can also observe some links between the topics and themes in the Book of Revelation and those in the letters of the Apostle Paul, in the Book of Jude and the Book of Hebrews, or even those in the texts of the synoptic gospels⁵ (those will not be analysed now).

However, besides the above the Book of Revelation also includes traces of the works of Homer and Hesiod, and of Greco-Roman mythology and ancient apocalyptic theology as showed in the Jewish pseudo-epigraphic works of that period. This allows us to assume that John's Apocalypse includes a rather rich Hellenistic perspective of the world⁶, and we can observe three trends in particular:

1. Firstly, we can *literally identify* Greek text sources in some places. Even more, we can recognise specific texts here and there.
2. Where Hellenistic texts or John's text are freer *related features of particular apocalyptic scenarios* can still be sensed quite well.
3. In some places we also observe certain *similarities or analogies* between two eschatological perspectives.

This fact makes us boldly assume the following: that the mythical theology of the Hellenistic environment, in which Christian eschatology was born, played a significant role in the development of the eschatology of the Apostolic Church. Now we will attempt to retrace these Hellenistic themes at least on the selection level. Later in the study we will try to divide the research into two parts: 1. First we will give three examples of Hellenistic and biblical texts showing specifically where and how the Apocalypse could have been directly influenced, or how the Biblical picture could have been shaped on the basis of

³ A lecture "Apocalypsis Homeri" at the conference of renowned doctors (Doktorok Kollégiuma) in Sárospatak, August 26, 1998, also published as a separate study (see Footnote 4).

⁴ Comp. Imre PERES, *Apocalypsis Homeri*, Komárno, Calvin Teológiai Akadémia, 1999. Imre PERES, *Apocalypsis Homeri*. Homéroszi motívumok az ókori görög sírköveken és a Jelenések könyvében [Apocalypsis Homeri. Homeric Themes on Ancient Greek Tombstones and in the Book of Revelation], in: Antal NAGY (ed.), *Napkeletől napnyugatig*, VT 1, Budapest, Lux, 1999, 63–149.

⁵ Martin KARRER, *Johannesoffenbarung*, I. Band (1–5), EKK XXIV/1, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2017, 65–70. Comp. Craig R. KOESTER, *Revelation*, AYBC 38, Yale University Press, 2014, 80–85.

⁶ See e.g. Klaus Berger–Carsten COLPE, *Vallástörténeti szöveggyűjtemény az Újszövetséghez* [A Collection of Religious Texts to the New Testament], Szeged, JATEPress, 2018, 20 ff.

the Hellenistic text. 2. Then, in a broader overview, we will summarise the religious themes appearing (also) in the Book of Revelation, which could originate from direct text reception, theme reception or which could have been analogies, direct imitations or just similarities, including positive or negative forms of processing.

I. EXAMPLES OF HELLENISTIC TEXTS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

First of all, we will try to explain the presence of Hellenistic texts with more or less real textual overlap in the Book of Revelation or those that at least appear to have such overlap in certain details based on identifiable sources. We can use Greek mythology, especially Homer and Hesiod, as a primary Hellenistic source, then the works of Pindar, Callimachus and Plato, as well as Greek tombstone inscriptions which clearly show how mythological themes and elements of ancient Greek religious and mythical thinking were applied in the practical popular “piety” or in common popular awareness.

I. 1. PLEASANT PARADISAL CLIMATE (REV 7:16–17)

It is more than natural that people – including ancient people – desired a pleasant life. This desire, however, did not just apply to their life on earth but also to their afterlife. For this reason it is no surprise that we find beautiful Greek descriptions of a pleasant afterlife climate and the blissful state of the dead who are spending their life beyond the grave in beautiful places in the shade, free of worries, suffering and hunger, near the heavenly sunlit Olympus. One ancient tombstone inscription on white marble, on which relatives of a woman called Próté describe their conviction of her blissful state, puts it this way (the translation is mine):

You did not die, Próté, just passed to a better place,
and now you dwell on an island of the blessed, bathed in a festive light.
There, on the Elysian plains, you stroll with joy
over a flowery field, remote from all sorrow.

**You are not afflicted by cold winter, nor by hot sun, no sickness brings you harm,
no hunger or thirst cause you suffering,**

you have no desire to return to your life on earth.

You live free of poverty, in pure radiation, near the Olympus mounts.⁷

⁷ Comp. Imre PERES, *A Jelenések könyve* [Book of Revelation], Patmosz, Debrecen, DRHE, 2013, 150. Imre PERES, *Griechische Grabinschriften und neutestamentliche Eschatologie*, WUNT 157, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2003, 116. Werner PEEK, *Griechische Grabgedichte*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1965, n° 399 = Werner PEEK, *Griechische Versinschriften – Grabatexte* (I.), Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1955, n° 1830; Hermann BECKBY, *Anthologia Graeca* VII, München, Artemis, 1965, 591, Anm. 407; Georgius KAIBEL, *Epigrammata Graeca ex lapidibus conlecta*, Hildesheim, 1965, n° 649; Paul HOFFMANN, *Die Toten in Christus. Eine religionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Untersuchung zur paulinischen Eschatologie*, NA (NF) 2, Münster, ³1978, 55; cf. Ilse FOERST-CRATO, *Ausblicke ins Paradies*, München-Planegg, 1958, 74.

The image conveyed here likely comes from Homer, because in his *Odyssey* we read:

So saying, bright-eyed Athena departed
for Olympus, where they say the gods' abode is firm forever.

**It is not shaken by winds or ever wet by rain,
and snow does not come near it, rather, cloudless clear air
spreads, and white sunlight plays, upon it.**

In it the blessed gods take pleasure every day.⁸

This Hellenistic image is closely tied to a similarly worded text of John's *Apocalypse* where (Rev 7:14–17) we also find a beautiful description of a very pleasant state of salvation after death before the throne of God and of the Lamb:

These are they who have come out of the great tribulation;
they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.⁹

Therefore, they are before the throne of God

and serve him day and night in his temple;

and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.¹⁰

For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd;

he will lead them to springs of living water.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.¹¹

“This paradisaal climate, known also from Homer's poems, is found in almost all poetry dealing with eastern (oriental) paradisaal desires and promises an absolutely optimal state of salvation bliss. This positive imagery also includes the idea that in life beyond grave the dead will live near fresh springs of water (ἐπὶ ζωῆς πηγᾶς ὑδάτων). This information is important for the description of every paradisaal location, because according to an ancient concept deceased souls get thirsty as following their death they lose the moisture of blood, and for this reason it is important that they live near fresh (running) waters in their afterlife, as we see e.g. from representations on Egyptian pyramids or in Christian catacombs.”¹²

⁸ Homér, *Odyssea* VI, 41–46. See also: Hesiodos, *Práce a dni* (*Werke*, 167–173): <http://homer.library.northwestern.edu/html/application.html>.

⁹ Comp. Dan 12:1; Matt 24:21; Mark 13:19.

¹⁰ Comp. Isa 49:10.

¹¹ Comp. Psalm 23:1–2; Isa 25:8; 49:10; Ezek 34:23.

¹² Imre PERES, *A Jelenések könyve* [Book of Revelation], 150.

1.2. SATAN'S PUNISHMENT (REV 20:1-3)

The next Hellenistic image from the Book of Revelation involves God's enemy and is that of *punishing Satan*, who is thrown to a deep Hades abyss by God and kept imprisoned by a large stone blocking the Hades entrance and sealing it so that he cannot come out unless God allows him.

This idea can lead us directly to a Greek myth according to which Zeus bound Typhoeus, who rebelled against him, and threw him in Hades where, in order to keep him from leaving Tartarus, Zeus blocked the entrance with Etna volcano. The story in Hesiod's description reads as follows:¹³

So when Zeus had raised up his might and seized his arms, thunder and lightning and lurid thunderbolt, he leaped from Olympus and struck him, and burned all the marvellous heads of the monster about him. **But when Zeus had conquered him and lashed him with strokes, Typhoeus was hurled down, a maimed wreck, so that the huge earth groaned.** And flame shot forth from the thunder-stricken lord **in the dim rugged glens of the mount**, when he was smitten. A great part of huge earth was scorched by the terrible vapour and melted as tin melts when heated by men's art in channelled crucibles; or as iron, which is hardest of all things, is softened by glowing fire in mountain glens and melts in the divine earth through the strength of Hephaestus. Even so, then, the earth melted in the glow of the blazing fire. And **in the bitterness of his anger Zeus cast him into wide Tartarus.**¹⁴

This radical intervention against an enemy represented in the given mythical Hellenistic text also appears in the Book of Revelation where God binds Satan, his old enemy and the one that corrupts the world, throws him in Hades and seals the entrance. The Hellenistically minded Christian visionary (Rev 20:1-3) describes this episode from the Apocalypse as follows:

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven,
having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain.
He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan,
and **bound him for a thousand years.**¹⁵
He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him,
to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore
until the thousand years were ended.
After that, he must be set free for a short time.

¹³ Comp. Hesiodos, *Theogonia*, 853-868. Comp. Imre PERES, *A Jelenések könyve*, 311.

¹⁴ Translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (1914): <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm>.

¹⁵ Comp. Gen 3:1.

The comparison of the texts shows that it is possible to observe significant correlations between the texts and between the stories' scenarios in particular. Even the framework of the story reveals definite related features: a battle with an enemy, the throwing into Hades, the space of Hades, the binding, and the sealing. Obviously, there are also other smaller themes from Greek mythology or from Jewish apocalyptic writings mixed into the plot, however, the reality of the correlation is clear.

1.3. KEYS OF DEATH AND HADES (REV 1:18)

We can also notice another theme in the series of Hellenistic examples, the keys of death and Hades. It is self-evident that the Book of Revelation puts the keys of death and Hades in the hands of Jesus Christ.¹⁶ The biblical text (Rev 1:17–18) expresses it in this way:

When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead.
Then He places His right hand on me and said:
“Do not be afraid! I am the First and the Last.¹⁷ I am the Living One;
I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!
And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”

This image from the Apocalypse – the power of the keys (κλείς)¹⁸ to Hades – is also well-known in Greek mythical thinking. In antiquity, death (*Thanatos* – θάνατος) and Hades (*Hades* – ᾍδης) were personified beings also well-known in Greek mythology. According to some researchers¹⁹ it is debatable whether the latter means a particular deity or just a territory of the dead or both.²⁰ It is true that the reminder that the keys of death and Hades belong to Jesus automatically indicates the fact that here the heavenly Christ gains power over such domains and powers (deities), which are known from Greek myths. In Greek mythology gods and deities fought each other in order to win the keys from the gates of the grave (πύλη) for themselves. For this reason, Greeks put the keys of Hades into the hands of such gods which are closely tied to Hades, e.g.

¹⁶ Comp. Viktor NAGY, A halál és a pokol kulcsai [Keys of Death and Hades], in: Imre PERES – Áron NÉMETH (eds.), *Az ókori keresztény világ (IV.) – Az újszövetségi eszkatológia szimbólumvilága* [The Christian World of Antiquity – Symbols of New Testament Eschatology], PK 6, Debrecen, Patmosz–DRHE, 2018, 123–132.

¹⁷ Comp. Isa 44:6; 48:12; Rev 2:8; 22:13.

¹⁸ In antiquity, the expression “power of the keys” had several meanings. E.g. in the Book of Revelation the witnesses of God (μάρτυρες) are given the power (ἐξουσία) to shut (κλείω) heaven so that it does not rain (Rev 11:6) or to cause more disasters in final apocalyptic times.

¹⁹ Comp. e.g. Traugott HOLTZ, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, NTD 11, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008, 31.

²⁰ Comp. Ernst LOHMEYER, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, HNT 16, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1953, 19.

Hades and Persephone²¹ or Aiakos,²² etc. The one who gains the keys of Hades will also gain authority over life and death.²³ If Christ is the lord of death and Hades – because according to John He has the said keys – He has access to the dead and not only can He descend to Hades²⁴ but He can also lead out those that he chooses, especially on the final day during the Last Judgement over the world.²⁵

We could give endless examples appearing in smaller or larger scenarios. However, we will only mention a few more themes involving this imagery: the urbanization of the Heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 21:9–27), the Last Judgement's white judgement seat (Rev 20:11–15), depiction of the dragon/beast (Rev 12–17), the warnings addressed to the seven apocalyptic churches (Rev 2–3), Satan's throne, etc.

2. ESCHATOLOGICAL SCHEMES IN ANCIENT AND BIBLICAL CONCEPTS

Based on the study of chosen eschatological topics and their underlying themes we can say that even though the eschatological understanding of the last things in ancient religion depended on people, religion and times, we can still observe to a certain extent the similarities and mutual influence in these times. We could see that there are different levels,²⁶ which are linked, overlapping or intersecting and we can suspect that there are many more²⁷ than those we can demonstrate in our study. Now let us try, in some kind of a summary, to cover and evaluate eschatological themes or schemes that we can discover and identify in the ancient Greek religion. Our research will again address several topics and areas.

²¹ Hades and Persephone are a married couple governing Hades. It is therefore understandable that they hold the keys of their underground empire: comp. Homéros, *Ill.*, 8,367. Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio*, V, 20,3. Sometimes Hades and the keys to it are linked together because ancient Greeks called the underground space, where gods lead the dead, an underground "palace" or residence, or Hades' kingdom (βασιλειον Ἄϊδαο), Hades' house, Hades' city (Ἄϊδαο πόλις) or also Persephone's chamber/room (θάλαμος Φερσεφώνης) Imre PERES, *Griechische Grabinschriften und neutestamentliche Eschatologie*, WUNT 157, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2003, 42–45.

²² Aiakos was considered a Hades judge by the Greeks and as such was aided by Minos and Rhadamanthys. They made decisions on the postmortal fate of souls who came to them in Hades, they judged the souls of the dead from their judgment seat (comp. reflection of this idea in Rev 20:11–14). The underworld ruling hierarchy also included a three-headed monstrous dog Cerberus who guarded the Hades gate. Comp. Imre PERES, Kerberosz, in: *Vallástudományi Szemle* 4 (2008/1), 75–92.

²³ Joachim JEREMIAS, κλείς, in: *ThWNT* 3 (1950), 743–753, here: 745.

²⁴ Comp. Matt 16:18; 1 Pet 3:19; 4:5–6; Rev 20:11–15.

²⁵ Comp. PERES Imre, *A Jelenések könyve*, 42–43.

²⁶ Imre PERES, Az ókori egyház eszkatológiai vetületei [Eschatological Themes in the Apostolic Church], in: Imre PERES – Áron NÉMETH (eds.), *Az ókori keresztény világ* (IV.) – *Az ókori egyház eszkatológiai vetületei*, PK 4, Debrecen, Patmosz–DRHE, 2016, 231–233.

²⁷ Comp. Imre PERES, *Pillantások a végidőkre* [A Look into the Last Times], PK 3, Debrecen, Patmosz–DRHE, 2017.

2.1. LANGUAGE EXPRESSIONS AND DEMARCATIONS OF ESCHATOLOGICAL SCHEMES

Perhaps the first similarity and mutual influence in the research of ancient eschatologies has to do with *language* and *terminological* determination. We can say that certain cultic practices related to eschatological belief express postmortal concepts in the same or similar ways, e.g. the Greek and Christian eschatology. Similarly, also eschatological processes, or even particular locations, beings and persons have similar names in both theological domains, and the same applies to eschatological objects, tools, times and communities. Eschatological schemes therefore confirm terminological relatedness and point in one common direction: to death, a place beyond the grave, the expectation of a blissful life, the reaching of eternity or achieving immortality. They can be also related to great world disasters, however, Christian theology is much more radical and bold in this regard.

2.2. PROMORTAL AND PROESCHATOLOGICAL PRACTICES

The painful reality of death forced ancient people to alleviate their experience as much as possible and the mortals therefore conjured the most positive ideas of the afterlife and desired to enjoy the greatest possible pleasure in eternity. They also had to realize that it is not enough to inscribe this post mortal “well-being” on a tombstone but something must be done in order to achieve it – during their lives on earth. For this reason, they started to use *various practices* in their ideas and everyday lives such as consecration or fulfilling such moral standards which would earn them enough credit to achieve a truly positive fate after their death. Here we can observe many similarities (e.g. imitated or borrowed practices), such as: baptism for the dead, cultic feasts, concentration in prayer, achieving visions or such ecstatic prayers and “states of being caught up” which could reveal secrets of the afterlife and the way of entering the space of positive transcendence. Promortal and proeschatological practices were used for this purpose, which tried to ensure positive solutions for life in the eschaton.

2.3. ESCHATOLOGICAL SIGNS AND SIMILARITIES

Eschatological *signs and similarities* which appear in ancient religions of different nations seem very similar to both the pagan and Christian world. The purpose of signs was to give an idea of the reality of death and to signal what those descending to Hades or those remaining in this world can and cannot hope for. The purpose of eschatological similarities and symbols was to help express what abstract human language expressions could not. Symbols and metaphors became tools that colourfully described what was hidden beyond death and in post mortal life beyond the grave, that is things that were most often mentioned only in mythological texts or conveyed in mythical stories. However, these images and metaphors required decoding and all those in the

ancient times who wanted to understand these secrets had to wrestle with it. In one of my previous studies I gave examples of 10 similarities and metaphors which reflected symbolical expressions of eschatological schemes and partially even revealed their meaning.²⁸ I also pointed out that in many signs and symbols we need to see the wealth of eschatological imagination, which, of course, most often wants to be or can be just a poetic and engaging example for understanding certain mysteries beyond the grave and may not mean that there is actually a rightly understood world behind these signs and metaphors. But the truth is that people affected by death found pleasure in metaphorical images and beautiful parables. And this was not just typical of the ancient Greeks or Jews but also of Christians. We can also see that the decoding of similarities and metaphors necessarily narrows down the dimension of imagination and eternity is perceived in the most central and simplest way – *to be with Christ forever*. Even positive Greek eschatology, especially since 2nd century CE, is also significantly transformed in a sense that it looks for fellowship with gods, wants to reach Olympus where they dwell or even requests divinisation in several cases. Jewish eschatology in the earlier period was, on the other hand, more restrained – thanks to strict monotheism – however, Jewish apocalyptic writings from around 1st century CE no longer considered it impossible to reach the heavenly realms and gladly localised themselves in 10 heavenly places.

2.4. ESCHATOLOGICAL PROCESSES

Eschatological processes are another category in ancient religion where we can find many similarities and analogies. This is understandable because these phenomena equally affected Greeks, Jews and Christians. The processes of dying and death itself, a funeral and grieving in ancient culture were expressed in fairly uniform ways and differed only in their intensity. From the eschatological point of view these processes can include: death as sleep (or dreaming); ascending into the ether or heavenlies; the travelling of a soul in the clouds (Himmelreise); being caught up; judgment after death; a blissful life or even suffering in perdition. We definitely need to see correlations and similarities in these eschatological processes despite individual specifics.

2.5. ESCHATOLOGICAL LOCATIONS

An ancient man usually connected death with a *location*. These locations were positive and negative places for the dead, but sometimes we also encountered a concept of a “neutral” place for the dead (e.g. the grave). Positive eschatological locations with certain connections with other ancient religious systems and eschatologies could include:

²⁸ See: Imre PERES, *Hasonlóságok és kölcsönhatások az eszkatológiában* [Similarities and Receptions in Eschatology], Debrecen, 2012.

heavenly realms; paradise; Kingdom of God; heavenly city; heavenly crystal sea;²⁹ etc. Negative eschatological places could include: Hades; Tartarus; a fiery lake; etc. Only minimum movement was expected in these places in earlier times, however, with the birth of Christianity and in Hellenistic ideas these locations became places of ever more dynamic events.

2.6. ESCHATOLOGICAL BEINGS AND PERSONS

The reality of death was not an abstract idea to ancient man. It was tied to *beings*, deities and persons from beyond the grave. Ancient texts even present death itself as a demonic being and say that other beings from beyond the grave (angels, Fates, dragons, Cerberus, etc.) serve this power. These too create certain *topoi* which play themselves out in various forms in ancient ideas of different nations.

2.7. ESCHATOLOGICAL SOCIETIES

When people die, they do not stay alone. Even though they must experience death individually, following death they join a collective circle and become part of a *community*. Greeks believed the deceased descended into Hades, to the Asphodel meadows, to an island of the blessed or to the Olympus mount. Souls of the deceased and gods dwelled everywhere. Eschatological communities are also important in Christian eschatology, e.g. the heavenly host, the 144,000 chosen by the Lamb, the community of martyrs, a people by the crystal sea (Church as the bride of the Lamb), etc. All these groups represent communities accepting the deceased.

2.8. ESCHATOLOGICAL OBJECTS AND TOOLS

There are certain eschatological *objects and tools* that play an important role in eschatological processes and events. These may include a white dress, a crown, a victorious wreath, a palm branch, God's books, heavenly food, clouds, thrones as well as a sword, a scythe, lightings, etc. These were certainly examples from life on earth that ancient people transformed into the life beyond the grave and into transcendence as they believed they would be needed in post mortal life for various reasons. That is why they appropriately penetrated the so-called popular eschatology of ancient man.

2.9. ESCHATOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The touch of death is a direct cause of human pain. For this reason we may say that eschatology is closely related to *anthropology*, specifically to sepulchral anthropology.

²⁹ Comp. e.g. Lilla KALLÓS, Mennyei üvegtenger [Heavenly Crystal Lake], in: Imre PERES – Áron NÉMETH (szerk.), *Az ókori keresztény világ (IV.) – Az újszövetségi eszkatológia szimbólumvilága*, PK 6, Debrecen, Patmosz–DRHE, 2018, 73–84.

Here the focus is what becomes of a man upon death. Names and expressions for the human soul and for what is on the inside (spirit – soul, heart, breath) play a significant role because the nature of a deceased person is best reflected by a soul. On many ancient tombstones we read that the human body and bones lose their significance in death because they are put to a grave and that is their final destination (they turn to dust). For this reason human nature is sought in a soul which enters Hades or leaves for positive eschatological places. We have already pointed out that a soul in death does not remain just a “spiritual reality” but takes on such anthropological characteristics which enable it to experience some form of pleasure. Jewish and Christian theology goes even further and sees a human body and human soul/spirit as reunited at the resurrection. The Greek perspective on death did not officially take something like that into account but in the centuries after Christ we nonetheless find such a concept and a fondness for such a view even in the ideas of the ancient Greeks. We can therefore claim that eschatological anthropology includes such features which are mutually affected and connected in the interreligious process even in the cases where they maintain their original character.

3. SUMMARY

The given eschatological categories indicate quite interesting similarities, analogies and sometimes mutual influences (reception). The aim of the study was to point out, from different perspectives, where, how and to what extent can these phenomena be observed and identified. In conclusion we can rightly assume that ancient eschatology in its syncretistic religious context had to be a very interesting dynamic religious environment,³⁰ where religious and theological trends met, intersected and were mutually inspired. Christianity was the last movement to appear and exert influence in this process because Greek religion and Judaism already had a long history of development, religious practice, complete theological texts and concepts of life after death. It is obvious that Christianity could not stay independent and form its eschatology in isolation. However, we may not say that one religion would be a mix of another. Our research does not aim to show – in percentages – the extent of mutual influence. We can only state that each religious trend and movement tried to find its own theology and create its own eschatology based on it. The fact that religious themes and values from the surrounding environment were used as an inspiration cannot be considered a problem, but rather forming of values to be used for the best of the community. The same applies to similarities and different influences (reception) in Greek, biblical and early Christian

³⁰ Comp. Karin PETER, *Apokalyptische Schrifttexte: Gewalt schürend oder transformierend? Ein Beitrag zu einer dramatisch-kritischen Lesart der Offenbarung des Johannes*, BMTTh 29, Wien–Berlin, Lit, 2011, 462 ff.

eschatology, where individual themes are lost or transformed in the course of development or reworking or where, thanks to richer reception, they continue to thrive or gain new meanings.³¹ This is how we also perceive the subject of our research which points out these similarities, mutual connections, variations, roots and transformations in the Hellenistic eschatology and in the eschatology of the Apostolic Church.

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³¹ Comp. Jörg FREY, Was erwartet die Johannesapokalypse? Zur Eschatologie des letzten Buchs der Bibel, in: Jörg FREY – Jame A. KELLHOFFER – Franz TÓTH (eds.), *Die Johannesapokalypse. Kontexte – Konzepte – Rezeption*, WUNT 287, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2012, 473–550.

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