*This paper will be presented in a session sponsored by the SBL Digital Humanities in Biblical, Early Jewish, and Christian Studies Consultation. The theme of the session is on Digital Manuscript Studies (though the other papers, from their abstracts, deal more with digital collections and publication of manuscripts and papyri than my paper). We don’t have any time scheduled for responses or questions, but our papers will subsequently be submitted for peer review this January for publication in a 2016 issue of the* Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture *(JRMDC.com). I’m also hoping to repurpose much of the research here in my dissertation in terms of how John uses Scripture to bolster his claims of Rome’s pending judgment and the power and authority of God’s empire.*

*As such, I’m looking for three levels of feedback: First, concrete ways I can improve this project in the immediate future; second, avenues of inquiry that would prove fruitful in the January version of this paper; third, methodological concerns for a dissertation-level treatment of Revelation and intertexuality.*

*To facilitate your reading of this paper, you may want to follow along with the “slides.” To get material disseminated more quickly, the powerpoint will take your through the first few pages before the URL is needed (these slides will be posted in the html eventually). Please visit* [*http://tinyurl.com/ApocalypseAndEmpire*](http://tinyurl.com/ApocalypseAndEmpire) *to start.*

**INTRODUCTION:**

Good afternoon: Given the nature of my paper, I would encourage you to follow along on your own devices if possible. A brief word of caution: In order to make the text display across platforms and browsers, I have encoded the text quite small. Please zoom in until both the body text and the license are readable. Thank you.

The Book of Revelation, along with its Semitic counterpart Daniel, has served as the paradigmatic example of apocalyptic literature.[[1]](#footnote-1) John the Seer’s heavenly journey and vision ciphered beasts and plagues of destruction, thinly veiled invectives against Rome, firmly places Revelation within the genre of Apocalypse. Yet despite the apocalyptic character of John’s narrative, many of the generic features common to other apocalypses are either absent or transformed in Revelation: Revelation is not a sealed book of a pseudepigraphy, and it contains very little “mediation” of apocalyptic visions. Perhaps most strikingly, Revelation alludes to the Jewish Scriptures more than any other apocalypse. Though there is no doubt that Revelation is apocalyptic, we are too often accustomed to treating Revelation as an apocalypse to the exclusion of other generic considerations. Yet John introduces his vision as both apocalypse and prophecy: “An apocalypse of Jesus Christ… Blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of prophecy and keep the things which are written in it” (Rev 1:3). Revelation is a prophetic text to be read.

This paper explores how reading this ancient text through modern textual techniques highlights its features: how might digital editions enhance our reading of Revelation? In particular, I am concerned with John’s participation in the tradition of reworking previous prophetic oracles in light of present social and historical circumstances. Using Rev 17-18 and 21-22, I argue that an online edition of Revelation exposes the dynamism and depth of John’s use of prophetic antecedents to demonstrate the validity of his vision of the Empire of Rome and the Empire of God. Freed from the spatial constraints of the physical page, digital editions better represent the expansive and immersive intertextuality of Revelation. John’s book of prophecy is a text digital editions are designed to display.

**Prophetic Literature and Intertextuality:**

As a literary corpus, prophetic literature was already “intertextual” long before Revelation.[[2]](#footnote-2) Since none of the prophets left behind a handbook explaining how they would reference each other, modern scholars have developed heuristic categories for describing prophetic intertextuality.[[3]](#footnote-3) First [Slide: Quotation], prophets use verbal quotation using “a pre-existing phrase, sentence, or paragraph which is taken from another source.” Joel 3:16 repeats the same phrase from Amos: “The Lord roars from Zion.” Second [Slide: Allusion], they allude to another text or texts, either through extended verbal parallels (as in Jeremiah 29 and Isaiah 65), or through the use of distinctive “catchwords.” Notice here the wordplay invoked in Isaiah 65; English translations do not reflect Isaiah’s change of *haggolah* (the exiles) and *wegiylu* (rejoice), though the secondary interplay of building houses and dwelling in them remains. Third Slide: Themes], prophets redeploy thematic parallels or motifs as literary devices to evoke other texts, such as the theme of desolated cities being retaken by the wilderness or locusts as foreign invaders.

Much has been made about the criteria for detecting intertextual references:[[4]](#footnote-4) How confident should the modern reader be that an ancient author intended to cue the audience to another text? Length of verbal parallel, precise rendering of the wording, similar themes and motifs all suggest intentionality on the author’s part; allusions are a sort of shibboleth to sort the sophisticated reader from the naïve.[[5]](#footnote-5) One concern is literary dependency: who is borrowing from whom? Was Deutero-Isaiah alluding to Jeremiah or the converse? Even when quoting, prophets rarely “cited” one another explicitly.[[6]](#footnote-6) The question of dependency is obviously less crucial in Revelation, but we lack the markers of citation familiar to us from John’s contemporaries; John does not cite Scripture using crisp formulae of Matthew, Paul, or the Dead Sea Covenanters [Slide: Citation formulae].[[7]](#footnote-7)

Ambiguity regarding the text-form and language of the Scriptures further complicates the detection of intertextual references. John seems to use a recension of Scripture that resembles both the Septuagint and Masoretic Text.[[8]](#footnote-8) Furthermore, John’s allusions are frequently short, perhaps as few as two words. They are also dense, compacted and combined phrases from multiple sources. The allusions pile up heaps upon heaps, an ever-flowing stream flooding the reader.

Revelation cites Scripture more than other contemporary Christian text [Slide: Moyise data). But, given the complications of intentionality, language, brevity, and density, modern commentators and editors of critical editions have detected a divergent number of references to Scripture in Revelation.[[9]](#footnote-9) [Slide: Enumerated Allusions], Broadly speaking, the tendency has been to identify increasing numbers of allusions in varying degrees of certainty. Compare here the marginalia of the Nestle and Nestle-Aland editions from 1904, 1927, 1979, and 2012, the most recent adding Second Temple Jewish texts as well.

[Slide – scanned images side by side]

As a means of collecting intertextual parallels, the codex has served admirably. But the codex is a reference tool. John expected his readers to read and to *hear* the allusions of his prophecy (1:3). If the goal is for the audience to “recognize, analyze, and assimilate” the intertextual reference, better tools are available in the digital age. The pdf edition of the SBL Greek New Testament and the eclectic text of the NA28 published on their respective websites are steps in the right direction [Slide: SBLGNT and NA28 Online],[[10]](#footnote-10) but neither leverages the flexibility offered by modern scribal techniques to display ancient scribal practices; they are still static pages with pixels replacing ink. Fully digital editions can display not just *that* John used Scripture, but they can gesture toward how the author adapted previous materials and how the sophisticated reader might interpret John’s intertextuality.

As case studies for digital editions, let us examine four passages from Revelation 17-18 and 21-22. [<http://encodingrevelation.github.io/revelation/apocalypseandempire.html>]. The eclectic body text is taken from Eberhard Nestle’s 1904 edition of the New Testament, the closest text to the Nestle-Aland 28 that is free from copyright protection. Where bracketed, the text has been modified to reflect the NA28. The left-most column contains internal linkages within Revelation. The right-most column contains external intertextual parallels between Revelation and the Jewish Scriptures. Both columns are eclectic, compiled from references in the NA28 and the commentaries of Swete,[[11]](#footnote-11) Charles,[[12]](#footnote-12) Aune,[[13]](#footnote-13) Beale,[[14]](#footnote-14) and Koester.[[15]](#footnote-15) Each reference has been meta-tagged with one of the three types of references identified above: Quotation, Allusion, or Thematic Parallel.

Within the eclectic body text, each reference is color-coded and linked to a source text. Similarly, the marginal references display the corresponding text when clicked. These source texts are also linked to their respective Septuagint and Masoretic texts. Internal links to Revelation can be loaded by clicking on their respective references. By color-coding the text, Revelation’s hyper-saturation with intertextual references is immediately visible. Every verse has at least one reference in it. There is some confirmation bias here, given the elective nature of case studies. Nevertheless, it is instructive to see how thoroughly John described the whore-cum-city of Rome with evocative language.

John’s description combines together imagery taken across Scripture for the enemies of God. In 17:1, an angel bearing a bowl of plagues invites the seer to gaze upon the Great Whore of Babylon. The use of Babylon as the ciphered name for Rome has long been understood as a means of connection the Flavian’s destruction of the Second Temple with Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of the First. The bowl of plagues recalls the exodus narrative and the conquest of Egypt. The whore dwells by mighty waters, a quotation from Jeremiah 51:13 where Babylon resides on “mighty waters.” In 17:2, all the kings of the earth are said to have fornicated with the whore, an allusion to Isaiah’s polemic against Tyre in 23:17. The nations drinking from the whore’s wine alludes to Jeremiah’s prophecy against Babylon in 25 and 51. The appeal to Nahum 3:4 recalls Nineveh as the city which enriches the nations by its fornication. In verse six we find a drinking allusion again. The metaphor of being “drunk on blood” would seem to be an allusion to the Yahweh’s sword being drunk with the blood of his enemies; Babylon is drunk on the blood of God’s saints and martyrs, perhaps an allusion to Jezebel. Similarly, the depiction of the whore riding the crimson beast recalls the two beasts of Revelation 13 and of Antiochus Epiphanes in Daniel 7. By combining these allusions together, Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, Ninevah, Jezebel, and the Seleucids, John depicts Rome as the final enemy who is the summation of all the enemies of God and his people.

Digital editions allow for more flexibility for research. Because the references have been tagged by reference type, the reader can isolate the quotes, allusions, and thematic parallels as desired. Toggling the dropdown menu in the right-most column activates only the links of the desired classification. While we can see that Revelation references Scripture using each of the three typologies discussed above, he has a preference for allusion compared to either quotation or thematic parallels.

Turning to Revelation 18:1-3, we find two distinctive features of Revelation’s intertextuality. The first concerns the text form used by John in the quotation of 18:2 – *epesen, epesen Babulōn*. The double proclamation of Babylon’s downfall quotes the Masoretic Text of Isaiah 21:9, rather than the LXX – *naflah, naflah bavel.* If one posits that John used a Greek translation, whichever translation he had reflected the Masoretic text of Isaiah 21:9 but used the aorist like Jeremiah, rather than the perfect of Isaiah. Alternatively, John might have used a Hebrew text and he translated Isaiah accordingly.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The second intertextual feature is the so-called “double utilization” of a single Scriptural image for two purposes. The cup of wine, again a reference to Jeremiah, served as the cup of the Great Whore’s lustful iniquity in 17:2. In 18:3, however, the wine of the wrath returns again, though now the cup is God’s cup of wrath which causes the nations to fall.

The flexibility of digital editions allows a text to be encoded to address the research questions of the researcher (or potential researchers). One prominent strand of intertextual scholarship on Revelation has examined Revelation’s use of a particular prophet: the use of Daniel, the use of Ezekiel, the use of Zechariah, etc… If properly coded, the text can be manipulated to display only those references to the particular work. Here, for example, we see the heavy dependency on Jeremiah, particularly Jeremiah 51, for describing the judgment of Babylon.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Chapter 18 also allows us to address text-critical questions. By and large, the text of the Nestle 1904 matches the NA28. Since the focus here is on intertexuality, this edition was designed to address this issue. One could, however, encode the text to display variations between manuscript traditions or individual manuscripts. The daggers here display the major variants and their textual support in the side window. However, the variations in both 18:2 and 3 regard intertexuality and merit some discussion.

In 18:2, we find that the third class of animals that haunt Babylon, the unclean beasts, have been dropped. The textual support for both readings is relatively even, though a majority of the commentators have adopted the text used by the NA28 on the grounds that it better reflects the theme to beasts inhabiting the desolated city. This demonstrates, however, the dangers of anchoring an argument in thematic parallels. The combination of unclean spirits, birds, and animals does not appear in any of the supposedly parallel source texts, though one could make that John had Isaiah 13:21-22 in mind given the combination of *daimon* and *theria*.

The variation on 18:3 presents another interesting case regarding the verb associated with *ta ethne* and the text-form John is using. If *peptokan* is accepted, John would seem to be alluding to Jeremiah 51:7, translating the hiphil of *shakar* with a perfect active indicative of the verb *pino*, since the Septuagint has a form of *methusko*.

The aural and visual similarities which may have resulted in this manuscript variation may result from intentional word play. John may also be engaging in word play here similar to Deutero-Isaiah’s *haggolah* and *wegiylu*. Many commentators have noted that the Septuagint of Isaiah uses *emporion*for the Hebrew *etnan*, the wages of a prostitute. The kings of the earth committed fornication – *eporneusan* – with the whore. John may have also used a form of *pino* instead of *methusko*for the aural similarities between *pepokan* and *peptokan*.[[18]](#footnote-18) Moreover, the manuscripts which use verbs of falling have dropped the “wine” from the beginning of the verse, perhaps suggesting that 18:3 was harmonized with 14:8 and 17:2.

As a conclusion, consider Rev 22:6-7. John’s account of his vision concludes by reasserting the validity and truth of his prophetic book. The phrase “that which are necessary to happen” used in both Revelation’s introduction and here at the conclusion of the vision, allude to Daniel 2 and the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon. But Revelation modifies Daniel’s promise of eschatological validity, proclaiming that the vision of judgment and renewal will happen soon.

John expected those who read his book to understand the prophetic underpinnings of his vision. By tying the judgment of Rome to the prophets through quotations, allusions, and thematic parallels, Revelation proclaims that like Babylon, Egypt, Tyre, and Nineveh, Rome will fall. Digital editions allow us to read like John asks us to read, recognizing, analyzing, and assimilating Revelation’s intertextuality and keeping the prophetic words.

1. See, among others, John J. Collins, “Towards the Morphology of a Genre: Introduction,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1–20; Adela Yarbro Collins, “Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 1–11; David E. Aune, “The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 65–96; David Hellholm, “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 13–64. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Pr; Oxford Univ Pr, 1985); James Nogalski, “Intertextuality and the Twelve,” in *Forming prophetic literature* (Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield Academic Pr, 1996), 102–124; Patricia Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Palo Alto, Calif: Stanford, 1998); Richard L. Schultz, *The Search for Quotation: Verbal Parallels in the Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Pr, 1999); Marvin A. Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. My categories here are derived from Nogalski, “Intertextuality and the Twelve.” Insufficient attention has been paid by scholars focused on intertextuality and Revelation to prophetic intertextuality, though note Bauckham’s critique of those (esp. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza) who would divorce Revelation’s allusions from their original contexts Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 296–307. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Strictly speaking, “intertextuality” does not imply intent or direction, but rather the “linkages” between two or more texts. The point here is one of intention, rather than coincidence. Benjamin D. Sommer, “Exegesis, Allusion and Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible: A Response to Lyle Eslinger,” *VT* 46 (1996): 486. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. After Kendra’s and Jeff’s seminar contributions, I’m increasingly interested in pursuing this element of the argument paper I would like to expand for both publication and dissertation. John expects his readers to understand, or want to understand, his allusions. Apocalypses also play on what Aune calls a “reveal/conceal dialectic” -- that which is revealed to the wise is necessarily concealed from the masses. (Aune, “The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre,” 86–88.) Extended comments along this front are most welcome. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The most notable exceptions being Daniel’s appeal to Jeremiah in Daniel 9 (though cf. Jer 26:18-19). John J. Collins, “Prophecy and Fulfillment in the Qumran Scrolls,” *JETS* 30 (1987): 270–72. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Beale has suggested that the solecisms of Revelation may “mark” allusions, as John will often keep the case of his source text even if this leads to a grammatical error in his own text. Perhaps, but this would account for a relatively limited number of instances, maybe twenty. Gregory K. Beale, “Solecisms in the Apocalypse as Signals for the Presence of Old Testament Allusions: A Selective Analysis of Revelation 1-22,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 421–46. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Steve Moyise, “The Language of the Old Testament in the Apocalypse,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 76 (1999): 97–113. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. At least one scholar has taken a “weighted average” approach from previous commentators to adduce a scale of “certain,” “probable,” and “possible.” This “wisdom of the crowds” approach has benefits, as it curtails the confirmation bias of scholars hunting for allusions. But it also limits readers’ ability to decipher John’s allusions for themselves. It is a scientific way of sampling allusions, but it multiplies scholarly “group think.” Since the commentators are not operating in isolation, the data is polluted. Jon Paulien, “Criteria and Assesment of Allusions to the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation,” in *Studies in the book of Revelation* (ed by. Steve Moyise; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 113–30. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <http://sblgnt.com/download/> and <http://www.nestle-aland.com/en/read-na28-online/text/bibeltext/lesen/stelle/76/> respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (3rd ed.; London ; New York: Macmillan, 1909). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. R. H Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (2 vols.; ICC 44; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. David E. Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols.; WBC 52A-C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. There could also be source-critical data which muddle the question, a hypothetical prophetic proclamation that is neither Isaiah nor Jeremiah but is otherwise unknown. For reasons of parsimony, I am hesitant to multiply hypothetical texts unnecessarily. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. NB: This will be clearer when all of 18 is encoded. Given my focus, I focused on 18:1-3 for the coding efforts and will continue with the rest of the chapters in the next two weeks. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This is a speculative observation made after reading Jeff’s paper and may be coincidence rather than anything John intended. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)