

THE ANGELS OF THE CONGREGATIONS IN REVELATION – TEXTUAL HISTORY AND INTERPRETATION

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the textual history of the book of Revelation with special regard to the angels of the congregation in chapters 2–3. These angels has been interpreted in the reception history as either earthly or heavenly beings. Both interpretations are accounted for in the most ancient textual traditions. The A-text, normally regarded as the best text of Revelation, mirrors an earthly location of the “angels” (see esp. 2:1, 18, 20a). The S-text (⌘ and accompanying manuscripts) allows their nowadays preferred heavenly location (angels in strong sense). The prototype may be a middle text speaking of “angels” in the sense of representatives mediating between heaven and earth through an earthly presence.

The contribution correlates interpretational history and textual history and shows that the interpretation of the texts influenced the history/development of the Greek text as well as the history/development of the Greek text influenced the interpretation. Thus, the interdependency of textual history and interpretation needs to be Taken note of when dealing with the book of Revelation. The apparatus in the present critical edition (Nestle-Aland²⁷) of Revelation, which selects manuscripts and variants, shows the problems insufficiently. Therefore the currently starting *Editio critica maior* of Revelation will be very helpful. It must rework the apparatus and perhaps will correct the critical text (“Obertext”) in some of the addresses to the congregations (2:1, 18).

1 Introduction

Who are the angels of the congregations in Revelation 1:20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14 and implicitly in 1:16 (the stars of 1:16 are in 1:20 identified as angels)? Interpretations from the 2nd century which could be of some help are lacking. The first annotations concerning

the angels (Tertullian and Origen) do not decide the matter,¹ and the later commentators differ. Some church fathers and commentators from latest antiquity identified the angels of the congregations with heavenly angels; others suggested they were bishops, teachers or leaders of the churches,² or the souls of blessed members of the congregations.³ From the Middle Ages⁴ until the 17th century, the reference to bishops and teachers of the church became very popular. M. Luther risked an audacious application of this interpretation against the pope and the ministers of the Roman church.⁵

Since the 18th century, critical research has returned to the older variety of interpretation. Some scholars assumed messengers (according to the original meaning of ἄγγελος). Others identified the angels with office holders in the church (bishops or teachers). A minority claimed that the angels of the congregations were supernatural angels (maybe guardian angels or heavenly counterparts of the earthly community; cf. the overview in Bousset 1906:200). Later, the scholarly investigation of Jewish and Early Christian apocalyptic thoughts developed. An essential improvement took place between 1900 and 1920. The great commentators of Revelation, Bousset (1906) and Charles (1920a, b) applied the apocalyptic interpretation. Charles (1920a:34) stated: “If used at all in Apocalyptic, ἄγγελος can only represent a superhuman being.” From this point on, understanding angels as heavenly angels dominated, sometimes in the sense of angels working for the communities, or in the sense of serving as visionary representatives of the communities (Beale 1999:218). Certainly, the earthly interpretation of the angels did not totally disappear.⁶ Yet today, that interpretation seems to be in the domain of mysterious crime movies⁷ more than a subject of scientific debates.

As is often the case, the matter is complex. Surprisingly, it is nearly unknown that the meaning of the angels in Revelation depends not only on reflections on religious history but also on the text-critical reconstruction of the Greek text of Revelation. Our contribution will try to fill that gap. We will analyse the textual traditions of Revelation, (§§ 2–6) briefly survey the religio-historical background (§ 7) and will finally search for the textual archetype on which the heavenly and the earthly interpretations of the angels are based (§ 8).

2. The Textus Receptus

In the western mediaeval world, the text of Revelation was based on the Vulgate and variants of the Vetus Latina. Eastern Christianity used the text of the *Commentary of Andrew of Caesarea* or a Byzantine Koine. Then the humanistic movement was eager for a new edition. The work for the Complutensis took place. Erasmus started a competing New Testament. His edition of the New Testament succeeded and became widespread (thanks to the printing of Stephanus/Estienne). It shaped the Textus Receptus of the 17th to 19th century with some smaller corrections (cf. Aland 2006: 14, 16).

Erasmus, however, had found only one Greek manuscript in preparing his text of Revelation (1515/16), a codex from the 12th century with the *Commentary of Andrew*

(today min. 2814) that was brought to Europe in about 1440. Because it contained mistakes and lacunae (e.g., 22:16–21 was missing), Erasmus disregarded it – initially. Later on he changed his mind and ascribed an almost apostolic value to the manuscript (Schmid [1955:3f.5f]). This appreciation spread widely. In the 19th century, F. J. A. Hort (1882:263) still regarded this codex as reliable in many parts. Its devaluation, however, was inevitable. J. Schmid (1955:1–6) assigned the manuscript to the later text of Andrew of Caesarea. Today it is excluded from the relevant witnesses of Revelation (witnesses of first and second order in Nestle-Aland²⁷).

Table 1: The Angels of the Congregations in Stephanus' Greek New Testament 1550 and mas. 1' (=2814)			
Critical text (Nestle-Aland ²⁷)	Stephanus 1550 (Erasmus) / Textus receptus	Special spellings in the addresses 2:1–3:14 of the Textus receptus	Variants in 1' against the Textus receptus
1:16 Christ is seen ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ	1:16 Christ is seen ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ χειρὶ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ (trans- position of αὐτοῦ)		
1:20 οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν καὶ αἱ λυχνίαι αἱ ἑπτὰ ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσίν	1:20 οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν καὶ αἱ ἑπτὰ λυχνίαι ἃς εἶδες ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσίν		1:20 [...] καὶ ἑπτὰ λυχνίαι [...] (ellipsis of the article)
			Additional heading (be- tween 1:20 and 2:1) Τὰ γεγραμμένα πρὸς τὸν τῆς Ἐφεσίων ἐκκλησίας ἄγγελον The following letters have similar headings (writing δηλωθέντα instead of γεγραμμένα)
2:1 Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον		2:1 Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς Ἐφεσίνης ἐκκλησίας γράψον	2:1 Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς Ἐφεσίων ἐκκλησίας [...]

2:8 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνη ἐκκλησίας γράψον		2:8 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐκκλησίας Σμυρναίων γράψον	(2:8 no difference)
2:12 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	2:12 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον		(2:12 no difference)
2:18 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον	2:18 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον		(2:18 no difference)
2:20 ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ	2:20 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα ὅτι ἔᾱς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβηλ		2:20 shorter Text ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβηλ (omission of ὀλίγα ὅτι ἔᾱς Vulgata-manuscripts read: <i>pauca</i> ⁸ <i>quia permittis</i>)
3:1 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον	3:1 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον		(3:1 no difference)
3:7 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·	3:7 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον		(3:7 no difference, but the itacism Φιλαδελφία)
3:14 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον		3:14 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐκκλησίας Λαοδικέων γράψον	(heading [...]) πρὸς τὸν τῆς Λαοδικέων ἐκκλησίας ἀγγελον) 3:14 [...] τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας [...]

Erasmus and his humanistic printers (Stephanus in Table 1) used this manuscript of low value in a remarkably free way:

- The scribe responsible for the manuscript often exhibits a poor command of Greek grammar. The Renaissance philologists corrected his mistakes; hence the edition adds a missing article in 1:20.
- The scribe omits words and parts of sentences. The omission in 2:20 is such an error. The editors filled the gap by retranslating the Vulgate of their time (*pauca*

quia permittis). They created the Greek text ὀλίγα ὅτι ἕως differing from all Greek manuscripts (Revelation uses ἀφήμι, not ἕαω, and ὀλίγα is missing in the best manuscripts).

- The manuscript showed some variety in the addresses (τῆς ἐκκλησίας Σμυρναίων vs. ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας κτλ.). The humanistic edition perceived the rhetorical gesture of *variatio* and added a third rhetorical variant, τῆς Ἐφεσίνης ἐκκλησίας in 1:1 (against the text and the heading of the manuscript). Although this sounded fitting, it still lacks support by the extant manuscripts.

The *Commentary of Andrew* contained some further information concerning the angels: Each of them receives Christ's revelation, is a warden (a φύλαξ; commentary to 1:20) and is working like a pedagogue (ὡσπερ ἄν τις παιδαγωγὸς τῷ παιδαγωγουμένῳ).⁹ Figuratively (τροπικῶς) they are stars due to their bright and pure nature (φύσις), as the communities are candlesticks because of the light of the apostolic word (1:19–20). This provides the best sense if the angels are heavenly beings.¹⁰ That tendency was supported by 3:5, a verse distinguishing the angels in the vicinity of God and the angels of the congregations.¹¹ Nevertheless, the Western mediaeval tradition proved to be stronger and its interpretation continued. The humanistic edition of Revelation was not interested in heavenly angels but opened the way to Luther's anti-Roman actualization as mentioned above.

3. The Main Manuscripts and the Critical Text

The reconstruction of the text of Revelation obtained a new foundation in the 19th century Tischendorf (1843) made the Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus (C) known to the broad public and Lachmann (1850) did the same with the Codex Alexandrinus (A, known since 1627). A few years later (1862) Tischendorf discovered the Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲙ gained the strongest influence (the Ⲙ .(Ⲙ) majuscule-text of B does not include Rev)); however, the critical discussion showed the following:

A presents the best text of Revelation, whereas Ⲙ contains many scribal errors, omissions and singularities¹² (the weight of the codices is inverted compared to the gospels).¹³ C, the third of the great codices, presents a text related to A albeit influenced by the Ⲙ-Text as well. In effect, the value of the common witness of A and C in Revelation approximately matches the value of the common witness of B and Ⲙ in the other books of the New Testament.¹⁴

Therefore at the end of the 19th century, we would expect a critical text of Revelation which follows mainly A (and C). Yet the discussion of the manuscripts and the editorial work did not agree. Most new editions refrained from a radical change of the text. Moreover Ⲙ (or Ⲙ-correctors) often agreed with a familiar textual form. Therefore, a preference for Ⲙ allowed continuities with the older text-edition of Revelation.

As a consequence, Nestle reconstructed a text which was closer to Ⲙ than to A, combining the new editions of his time (he used Tischendorf, Westcott-Hort and

Weymouth in his famous *Novum Testamentum Graece* 1898 and Tischendorf, Westcott-Hort and Weiß in the editions from 1901 onwards). Nestle followed the correctors of \aleph , where \aleph^* made mistakes (see \aleph^* Ἐζμύρνη 2:8, Ἰαζάβελ 2:20, ἐκκλησίας 3:7), and did the same in some questionable cases too (esp. 1:16; see Table 2).

Table 2: The Nestle-Text and the Great Codices					
	Nestle-Aland ²⁶	Nestle 1898 (and following editions)	Nestle 1901 (and following editions)	\aleph^{15}	A
1:16	ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ	ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ	ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ	ἔχων ^{c2=ca} [*ἔχεν] ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ	[ἔχων is omitted] ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρες ἑπτὰ
1:20	οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν	οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν	οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν	οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν ^{c2=ca} [*εἰσιν is omitted]	οἱ ἑπτὰ ἀστέρες ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν εἰσιν
2:1	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον
2:8	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν ^{c1=51} (*Ἐ) Ζμύρῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον (Ζμυρ- νη IS found for Σμυρνη in inscriptions)	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ ἐν Σμύρνης ἐκκλησίας γράψον
2:12	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον

2:18	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θουατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θουατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θουατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θουατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ ἐν Θουατίροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον
2:20	ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ	ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ	ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ	ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ <u>πρὸς</u> ὅτι *ἀφείς (<u>ἀφῆκας</u> ^{c2=ca}) τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ ^{c2=ca} (*Ἰαζάβελ)	ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα <u>σου τὴν</u> Ἰεζάβελ
3:1	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον
3:7	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφίᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφίᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφίᾳ ἐκκλησίας ^c (*ἐκκλησία <u>ις</u>) γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφί <u>αις</u> ἐκκλησίας γράψον
3:14	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικίᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικίᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικίᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον	Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικί <u>αι</u> ἐκκλησίας γράψον

One of the resulting phenomena is of special interest. In the 16th century, M. Luther had translated the humanistic text of Revelation. But he had denied the rhetorical variation in the addresses to the seven churches and had preferred a stylistic parallelism as in the Vulgate (*angelo Ephesi [Zmyrnae...Laodiciae] ecclesiae scribe*; the differing word order in the Vulgate at 3.1, *angelo ecclesiae Sardis scribe* did not affect the German syntax). He applied the same structure „dem Engel der gemeinen (= Gemeinde) zu (Ephesus... Laodicea) schreibe“ (2:1–3:14; Weimarer Ausgabe, Deutsche Bibel 7.429f.) differing from the critical Greek text of his time. This option was confirmed by κ . At this point, the textual form of κ became the main text for the addresses of Revelation 2 and 3 (and one may wonder if this preference signals some implicit acknowledgment for Luther’s reconstruction or influences from the Vulgate). The A-text of the addresses as well as the A-text of 1:16 (omission of $\epsilon\chi\omega\nu$) and 2:20 ($\sigma\upsilon\upsilon$ / “your wife”) found their place only in the apparatus.

The Nestle-text remained stable in the 20th century – apart from the writing of the city-names in 3:7, 14 (and cf. 2:18 A). The best codices (A, \aleph and C) show itacistic forms of these names (cf. the C-text in Table 5). J. Schmid judged „auf das Zeugnis von A C S ist in diesem Falle [...] kein Wert zu legen, weil gerade diese Hss von itazistischen Fehlern wimmeln“ (1956:189). This stylistic decision allowed a somewhat surprising revival of the Textus Receptus. Today’s critical edition reads again Φιλαδελφεία (3:7) and Λαοδικεία (3:14) whereas A, \aleph (*prima manus* and correctors) and C unanimously write Φιλαδελφία (3:7 after 1:11) and Λαοδικία (3:14 after 1:11;¹⁶ cf. \aleph A B* in Col 2:1; 4:15). One may wonder if the Textus Receptus deserves this honour.

The editors seemed to regard the deviant form of the addresses in 2:1 etc., as a stylistic variant to the editors, too. Nevertheless Hort (1908:20) had proposed in 2:1 τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ... referring to the best manuscripts (A C and others) and commented “The construction is probably *the angel that is in Ephesus, the angel of a church*”.¹⁷ Necessarily, objections arose against Nestle’s text. Charles reconstructed τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ in all of the addresses claiming that Revelation never inserts a prepositional phrase between article and noun.¹⁸ His stylistic standardization did not prevail over \aleph (Schmid 1956:197f.; Delobel 1980:159f.), but is now corroborated by the Syriac text (Borger 1987:42–45) which is not sufficiently noted in the Nestle-edition until Nestle-Aland²⁷ (the apparatus of Revelation in the critical editions is very incomplete and needs a consequent redaction). Charles combined his textual variant to a superhuman interpretation of the angels (see § 1 Introduction above); Hort’s construction fits better if the “angel” is settled like a human being in the communities of Asia.

The dissent between the edition and the witnesses normally considered most important calls attention to the wide problems of style in Revelation: According to \aleph , the author of Revelation writes in an acceptable Koine Greek (classical Greek would need τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ τῆς). Really, \aleph presents a smoother Greek text in other cases, too, whereas alternative manuscripts (often A C) prefer variants which deviate more from the regular Greek (a phenomenon surveyed by Schmid [1956:173–249, esp. 244–249]).

Which text is better from a text critical perspective? The dilemma remains unresolved. The quality of \aleph does not override the alternatives, whether it be the stylistic unity of Charles or the variety of addressees in A. As it stands, we cannot exclude the possibility that the author of Revelation used some kind of “high,” “divine” style featuring uncommon variations and conscious deviations in grammar. Therefore, the critical text needs a revision relying merely on the manuscripts and avoiding every stylistic prejudice.

4 Manuscripts and Textual Criticism – the Present State

The text of Revelation has not been satisfactorily established to date. Admittedly, the manuscripts of Revelation were collated by H. C. Hoskier in 1929 (Hoskier 1929). The textual history was explored by J. Schmid in the 1950s, and the apparatus of the critical

edition was partially actualized after Schmid (the majuscules 051 etc. were included, the younger textforms \mathfrak{B}^A [= manuscripts with the commentary of Andrew] and \mathfrak{B}^K [=Koine proper] set apart). Yet, Hoskier's collation suffers from disadvantages and faults.¹⁹ Schmid did not become a member of the editing commission of Revelation for the Nestle-Aland/Greek New Testament editions, and the revision was never completed; not even A and C are consequently documented in the apparatus.²⁰ The number of available manuscripts has increased in recent decades (new papyri etc.). The ancient versions deserve more attention (we saw an example, the Syriac Text of 2:1 etc.), and the groups of witnesses must be discussed again ($\mathfrak{B}^A/\mathfrak{B}^K$ will perhaps be replaced by the sigla *And/Byz* [Gryson 2000–2003:94; with n. 2]). Therefore a new critical edition of Revelation is necessary (cf. Karrer 2010).

The direction and objective for a revision of the text seem to be clear. The previous observations concerning the textual value of the main manuscripts are ascertained. Two main text groups are to be distinguished; Schmid called them S-(\aleph -) and A-text (Schmid [1956:85–151]; $\mathfrak{B}^A/\mathfrak{B}^K$ are less valuable). Each of the groups is supported by the evidence from papyri, the S-text by \mathfrak{p}^{47} (3rd century), the A-text in particular by \mathfrak{p}^{115} (3rd–4th century;²¹ cf. \mathfrak{p}^{98} below). Unfortunately Revelation 1–8 is lost in \mathfrak{p}^{47} , and only small parts of chapters 2–3 are preserved in \mathfrak{p}^{115} (2:1–3, 13–15, 27–29; 3:10–12); the lines that are the focus of this paper are missing here (the first part of 2:1 is lost).²² Thus \mathfrak{p}^{47} and \mathfrak{p}^{115} are not very helpful for our discussion as outlined above.

The text-critical value of the A-group is superior. A can be used nearly like a neutral text (cf. Delobel 1980:153) when being supported by C and/or by an important papyrus. On the other hand, C is of minor importance in those cases where it is influenced by the \aleph -text. Yet, C deserves special attention when it contains a middle text between A and \aleph . We try a preliminary order of the manuscripts in the following Table :

Table 3: Scheme of the main manuscripts		
archetype		
/ \		
 textual tradition leading to A 	 some old traditions 	 textual tradition leading to κ (more distant to the archetype)
A and other manuscripts, forming the A-text		κ and other manuscripts, forming the κ -text
\ (main influence on C) \		/ / (additional influence on C)
C		

Oecumenius (newly edited by de Groote [1999]) stands out from the Greek commentaries. Oecumenius M = Gregory 2053 is one of the best minuscules of Revelation, and Oecumenius VTS = 2062/2350/2403 is also of high relevance. The Oecumenius manuscripts show many similarities to A, and some congruities to κ (the latter is less known). The Vetus Latina is the principal of the old translations; the recent edition (Gryson 2000-2003) shows different strands and variants near to the A- as well as to the S-text.²³ Among the Latin commentators, Cassiodorus, Primasius and Beda deserve special attention (Tyconius is lost). Most of the minuscules belong to the less important textual forms $\mathfrak{B}^A/\mathfrak{B}^K$ (resp. *And/Byz*). Some will be properly valued when the coherence-based genealogical method of modern textual criticism²⁴ clarifies the development more exactly.

5 The Text of 1:13-20 and \mathfrak{p}^{98}

The text of Revelation 1:13–20 is present in the main manuscripts and the fragmentary \mathfrak{p}^{98} . Yet \mathfrak{p}^{98} elicits more attention because \mathfrak{p}^{47} and \mathfrak{p}^{115} are incomplete (cf. above). This papyrus (which was unknown to Schmid) is actually the oldest manuscript of Revelation (late 2nd century?).²⁵ Three major variants align with A against κ ($\alpha\sigma\tau\acute{\epsilon}\rho\epsilon\varsigma$ 16, $\acute{\epsilon}\theta\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\nu$

and μη φόβου 17), and not a single variant with κ* against A. Thus the papyrus supports the value of A (see table 4).²⁶

Table 4: The Variants of μ^{98}					
Critical text (Nestle-Aland ²⁷)	μ^{98}	A	κ	Corrector of κ	Note
1:13 χρυσᾶν	[χρυσῆν]	χρυσᾶν <i>(ditto C)</i>	χρυσᾶν* <i>(ditto C)</i>	χρυσῆν c2 (= ca) <i>(ditto the text of Andrew Caes. and Textus receptus)</i>	orthographic (phonetic-stylistic) variant of μ^{98} and κ ^{c2}
1:14 ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ	καὶ ἡ κε[φαλὴ]	ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ <i>(ditto C and Andrew Caes. and Textus receptus)</i>	ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ		syntactic-stylistic variant of μ^{98} against κ A C Andrew Caes.
1:16 καὶ ἔχων ἐν [...] χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας	[text lost] αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας	καὶ [ἔχων is omitted] ἐν [...] χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας	καὶ εἶχεν* ἐν [...] χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας (cf. <i>habebat</i> [...]) <i>stellas</i> in most manuscripts of VL, in Vulgata and Primasius, PL 68.807a)	καὶ ἔχων ἐν [...] χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας c2 (= ca; <i>ditto C</i> and most manuscripts of Oecumenius)	a) variant in word order against the Textus receptus (which reads αὐτοῦ χειρὶ); Nestle-Aland ²⁷ follows μ^{98} κ A C and corrects the Textus Receptus b) syntactic variant (in κ and A); Nestle-Aland ²⁷ chooses ἔχων ἀστέρας (κ ^{c2} C)
ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει	ὡς ἥλιος φ[αίνει] <i>(ditto Oecumenius)</i> ²⁸	ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει <i>(ditto C)</i>	φαίνει ὡς ὁ ἥλιος		variants in word order and use of article

1:17 ἔθηκεν	ἔθηκεν	ἔθηκεν (ditto C)	ἐπέθηκεν (ditto Textus receptus)		μ ⁹⁸ A C use the simplex, κ the compound form of the verb; Nestle-Aland ²⁶ corrects the Tex- tus receptus
μὴ φοβοῦ	μὴ φοβ[ο]ῦ.	μὴ φοβοῦ (ditto C)	- (omission in κ*)	μὴ φοβοῦ c2 (= ca)	μ ⁹⁸ presents the main text with A C κ ^{c2} (κ* has many omissions)
1:19 γενέσθαι (vs. γίνεσθαι Textus receptus)	γενέ[σ]θαι	γινέ- σθαι (read γινεσθαι, itacism) ²⁸	γενεσθαι (cf. C) ²⁹	γινέσθαι c2 (read γινεσθαι, itacism) ³⁰	variant of tense; Nestle-Aland ²⁶ corrects the Tex- tus receptus
1:20 ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν	[ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι] - (omission of εἰσὶν)	ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν (ditto C)	ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι εἰσὶν (ditto C)		omission of the copula in μ ⁹⁸ against A κ and Textus receptus

In addition, χρυσῆν in 1:13 presents an otherwise late attested reading; μ⁹⁸ supports the text of κ^{c2} against κ* and A. κ^{c2} is conceivably valuable; the same corrector adds μὴ φοβοῦ in 17 according to μ⁹⁸ and A. Other variants, however, are of less worth: The syntactic variant in v.14 (construction with καὶ) and the omission of the copula at the end of v.20 are singular readings. These peculiarities limit the textual value of the manuscript (the editors of Nestle-Aland²⁶ rightly ignore the singular readings of the papyrus).

Nonetheless, μ⁹⁸ remains a principal witness where it agrees with A. Consequently, the editors of Nestle-Aland²⁶ correct the Textus receptus where μ⁹⁸ A κ and C or three of these witnesses agree against it (see the word order in v. 16; cf. χρυσᾶν in v. 13³¹ and γενέσθαι in v. 19³²), and they correct κ, with good reason, where μ⁹⁸ A and C agree (ἔθηκεν v. 17; cf. the word order in 16b).

Yet, what is to be done if μ⁹⁸ and A differ from κ and C? That is the case in v.16 (ἀστέρες / ἀστέρας). Here the κ-text has ἔχειν with accusative but with divided support. Vetus Latina and Vulgate agree in substance with the imperfect εἶχεν of κ*.³³ Oecumenius at first glance supports ἔχων of κ^{c2} but the textual evidence is split again. Important manuscripts show a change in case to ἀστέρες.³⁴ Therefore a short ἀστέρες might have been secondarily extended by the participle. Moreover ἔχων ἀστέρας (κ² and C) is parallel to 3:1; hence it could have been secondarily influenced by the later passage.

The pendulum therefore swings to ἀστέρες (p⁹⁸ A) or to the imperfect εἶχεν ἀστέρας (κ*). The latter variant concurs with the style of Revelation (cf. the same syntax of εἶχεν in 13:11; 21:15) and offers the best explanation for the two other variants: The A-text shortens the phrase in favour of a sequence of nominatives in 1:14–16 (κεφαλή, πόδες, ἀστέρες ῥομφαία). The κ^{c2}C-text adapts the older εἶχεν to 3:1 and to the frequent participle ἔχων in Revelation (cf. 2:12, 18; 3:7 etc.). Hence we would prefer κ* as the oldest text. Alternatively we concede a high value to A and p⁹⁸ (since Oecumenius-manuscripts seem to expand the short text).

In any case, the κ^{c2}C-text is the youngest one. The editors of Nestle-Aland²⁷, however, chose this reading (ἔχων ἀστέρας).³⁵ They unify the text of 1:16 and 3:1, 7 according to the style of a younger correction – and according to the Textus Receptus. We understand the intention in reconstructing a stylistically consistent text of Revelation. However the price of the stylistic coherence is high. The Textus Receptus returns in the critical edition a second time.

The decision between the two old variants affects the meaning of the text just slightly. If we choose the κ-text, the Christ of the vision “had the stars” (the angels of the congregations; cf. v.20) at his mighty disposal (εἶχεν with accusative); the readers learn that the angels are completely under the control of Christ. If we read the nominative (A p⁹⁸), the stars work in the domain of Christ too (see κρατεῖν 2:1; ἔχειν 3:1). But they are grammatically subjects. Christ grants them some freedom in performing their work. This small difference serves as a prelude to the textual diversity in chapters 2 and 3.

6 The “Angels” of the Congregations in ch. 2 and 3

The critical edition (Nestle-Aland²⁷) reconstructs a stylistically uniform text of the addresses in 2:1–3:14 (Table 5; cf. § 3 above): Each address contains the superscription τῷ ἀγγέλῳ, an attribute in the genitive with article (τῆς ... ἐκκλησίας), and the name of a city in a prepositional phrase (ἐν ...). All of the great codices display that scheme in 2:12; 3:1; 3:7; 3:14. But only κ presents that structure throughout the text. The edition reduces the stylistic diversity of Revelation according to κ.

Table 5: Variants in the Addresses of ch. 2 and 3					
	Critical text (Nestle-Aland ²⁷)	A	κ	C	Other relevant witnesses
2:1	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας	The line is missing in μ ¹⁵ . Oecumenius reads the same text as κ (article τῆς). Primasius has <i>et angelo Ecclesiae Ephesi scribe</i> . ³⁶
2:8	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ ἐν Σμύρνῃς ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐ (κ*) / ἐν (κ ¹) Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας	
2:12	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας	<i>ditto μ</i> ⁴³ (fragmentary:) Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας
2:18	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ ἐν Θυατίροις	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ ἐν Θυατίροις ἐκκλησίας	Primasius <i>et angelo ecclesiae qui est Thyatirae scribe</i> ³⁷
3:1	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδε- σιν ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδε- σιν ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδε- σιν ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας	
3:7	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φι- λαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας (κ*) / ἐκκλησίας (κ ^c) ³⁸	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας	Cassiodorus <i>angelo qui est Philadelphiae</i> ³⁹
3:14	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδι- κία ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδι- κία ἐκκλησίας	Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικία ἐκκλησίας	

The κ -text allows and perhaps even recommends the today's preferred heavenly interpretation of the angels, though that meaning is not explicit and not beyond doubt. Therefore some older commentators clarified the point by adding the attribute "holy" (ἅγιοι) to the angels, used for heavenly ἄγγελοι in 14:10 but missing in Revelation 1:16, 20; 2:1 etc.⁴⁰ The angels proved to be holy figures heading the life of the earthly communities (ἐφεστῶτες ἄγγελοι) full of light like heavenly stars (thus Oecumenius following Gregory of Nazianzus).⁴¹

A and C show the alternative text τῷ ἀγγέλω τῷ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας in 2:1a. The value of the manuscripts confirms this variant as the best text. A continues in 2:8 τῷ ἀγγέλω τῷ ἐν Σμύρνης ἐκκλησίας, and again τῷ could be the best text; (C 2:8 may be secondarily influenced by the κ -text). If that text shortens the awkward phrase τῷ ἀγγέλω τῷ τῆς ἐν [...] ἐκκλησίας by eliminating the article τῆς (as Schmid proposes [1956:197–198]), the sense corresponds to κ , and perhaps that was already meant in the archetype (at least if the genitive Σμύρνης is secondary, which receives less support in the text tradition, however). Nevertheless, the phrase allows another understanding too.

The seer repeats the article after τῷ ἀγγέλω (this is correct Greek). At the same time, he uses ἐκκλησία anarthrous (which is allowed especially for proper names)⁴² and attracts the names of the cities in 2:8 and 3:7 to the genitive ἐκκλησίας (Σμύρνης, Φιλαδεφίας). Ἐκκλησία and the name of the city become an idiom similar to a proper name – an offence against classical Greek but nevertheless understandable within the extraordinary grammar of Revelation. We can translate "write to the angel in Smyrna, the angel of the Smyrnan congregation" and so on (cf. Hort's rendering as described above in §3). The evidence inclines to an earthly interpretation of the angels.

Most of the later addresses of the letters in chapters 2 and 3 return to mainstream Koine Greek; our author combines deviations and common language, as in many places of Revelation. But in the midst of the ascriptions, 2:18 A brings focus to the interpretation. We read "write to the angel in Thyatira" (τῷ ἀγγέλω τῷ ἐν Θυατίροις). The Greek construction is correct (noun, repetition of article, attribute in the dative), the sense unequivocal: This angel acts in (ἐν) a town on earth (ἐκκλησία is not mentioned any more). Looking back to our last paragraph 1:16 turns out to be the setting of the course. The angels (associated with Christ as subjects on their own in A 1:16) wander into the cities and hold responsibility concerning the congregations.

Does 2:18 A provide the best text? That seems to be unlikely; the omission of ἐκκλησίας looks like a secondary shortening (cf. the same reduction in 3:7 Cassiodorus). C proposes a compromise. The variant there (τῷ ἀγγέλω ἐν Θυατίροις ἐκκλησίας) combines the tradition of A (τῷ ἀγγέλω ἐν Θυατίροις, only the repetition of the article is lost) with ἐκκλησίας of the κ -text. But even if we follow C the core remains the same. Primasius used a text like C and translated *angelo ecclesiae qui (!) est Thyatirae* (PL 68.807b). The variants surrounding the A-text keep the tendency that the angel "is (*est*) in Thyatira".

Table 6: Rev 2:20				
Critical text (Nestle-Aland ²⁷)	A	ⲛ	C	Other relevant witnesses
ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ	ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα <u>σου τὴν</u> Ἰεζάβελ	ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ <u>πολύ</u> ὅτι * ἀφείς [ἀφήκας ^{c2}] τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ ^{c2} [*Ἰαζάβελ]	ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφίς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ	Oecumenius ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ ⁴³ <u>σου</u> in many minuscules and witnesses of \mathfrak{B}^k / Byz, in the African text of the VL (<i>habeo adversus</i> <i>te multa quod uxorem</i> <i>tuam Jezabel permittis</i> (or <i>permisisti</i>), Prima- sius (<i>habeo adversus te</i> <i>multa quod sinis uxorem</i> <i>tuam Jezabel</i>) and trans- lations of late antiquity / medieval times ⁴⁴

The letter concerning Thyatira is written to the “angel”. Thus the last important variant, the reading τὴν γυναῖκα σου (“your [!] wife”) in A 2:20, syntactically connects the mentioned woman to this angel. The Greek word γυνή denotes a married woman; our angel becomes married. Primasius who used the variant tried to minimize that point. He identified the angel (as a *nomen generale*) with the congregation and criticised a quality (*qualitas*) of false preaching in facing „Izebel” (PL 68.807b-808). Other commentators tolerated the literal sense.⁴⁵ It spread widely in late antiquity and the middle ages. Later on, important witnesses linked it with an addition in the ⲛ-text, the charge of *πολύ* / *multa* (see Table 6). The incrimination of the “angel” increased.

This climax of the earthly interpretation sounds stranger today than in the early phases of critical research and even in the 19th century which allowed a variety of interpretations. K. Lachmann at that time included σου in the critical text.⁴⁶ Yet the wide distribution of the variant could not remove doubts. All the witnesses besides A (or its lost forerunner) are young. Moreover, the addition of σου is not more difficult to explain than an omission: γυνή (married woman) in the short text (the text without σου) calls for the identification of a husband. Such identification could easily happen wherever the angel was understood as a member of the earthly community. All in all, the addition of σου looks like a secondary interpretation.

7 Angels in heaven and on earth – the religious context

Our analysis assigned the heavenly interpretation of the angels to the setting of the \aleph -text (without constraining \aleph to that meaning), the earthly interpretation primarily to the A-text. Both textual forms and both interpretations spread in the old church. Indeed, they fit both into the religious and cultural framework of the 1st–4th century. Ἄγγελος (messenger) could be used in that time literally and metaphorically; it could signify men, supernatural beings and Gods.

The supernatural horizon is well known: Angelology expanded beginning in the 3rd or 4th century B.C.E. in Judaism (esp. in apocalyptic literature and Qumran-texts⁴⁷) and in some areas of non-Jewish religions; especially significant for our considerations are the regions between Syria and Asia.⁴⁸ In Judaism angels became responsible for nations (LXX Deut 32:8⁴⁹; Dan 10:13, 21), a forerunner for angelic responsibility concerning the church and Christian communities (see the Christian “angel of the church” in *Mart. Ascen. Isa.* 3:15). Admittedly, another occurrence of the idiom “angels of congregation” besides Revelation is not extant (*Mart. Ascen. Isa.* 3:15 envisages an angel of the church in heaven). But the consideration of angels and even the local veneration of supernatural angels are verifiable for early Christianity in Asia Minor (cf. Col 2:18; *Ign. Trall.* 5:1–2; *Ign. Smyrn.* 6:1).⁵⁰ Therefore, addressing supernatural angels in the special way of Revelation would fit into the wide horizon of angelic speculations of this time and region.

Moreover, “angel speculations” also spread in the religions of Asia Minor outside of Judaism and Christianity. In Didyma, a goddess was called ἄγγελος about the time of Revelation.⁵¹ An angel (ἄγγελος) accompanied the highest god at other places.⁵² Angels were sometimes called “godly” themselves (θεῖος ἄγγελος, beginning in the time of Hadrian).⁵³ Magic thoughts included supernatural beings like angels (date uncertain).⁵⁴ Surely, many witnesses for the motif belong to late antiquity. Suffice to say, we see the dissemination of the heavenly interpretation of the angels under the non-Jewish Christians in the time of the early church.

The alternative is less known although not less important: ἄγγελος held vital metaphorical potential connotating earthly beings. Already in early times poets got the title Μουσῶν ἄγγελοι (“angels of the Muses”; Theognis 769). In the Greco-Roman culture (cynic) philosophers were celebrated as ἄγγελοι (“messengers”), sent from Zeus (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3. 22.23; interestingly Epictetus was born in Hierapolis, the neighbourhood of Laodicea). Somewhat later, a Klarian oracle characterized the adherers of the many-named (highest) God “angels”. These adherers, appraised as angels, formed an earthly portion of the God (θεοῦ μερὶς ἄγγελοι ἡμεῖς, 2nd/3rd century C.E.).⁵⁵ The oracle-inscription recalls Platonic thought. Nevertheless, the cultural abstraction is possible: Humans deeply obliged to the one highest God may be called angels.

Hence, undoubtedly in the time of Revelation and later on outstanding humans could be called “messengers” of gods (“angels”). Therefore, the interpretation of the congregational angels as ministers of the church is possible as well, even if we do not find other references to this idea in the New Testament.⁵⁶

The tombstone of a Phrygian prophetess completes the observations (SEG 43.1993 §943). The tombstone is probably of Montanist origin in the 4th century. The mourning group honours “the prophetess (προφήτισα) Nanas” (line 1), who “had an angel-like ἐπισκοπή and a voice in great manner” (ἀγγελικὴν ἐπισκοπὴν καὶ φωνὴν εἶχε μέγιστον, lines 10–11).⁵⁷ Within the scholarly discussion of the inscription, ἐπισκοπή is mostly understood as “visitation” or “apparition.” Read in that way, Nanas attained her godly knowledge by an angelic epiphany in a mighty voice.⁵⁸ However, ἐπισκοπή often means “surveillance”, “oversight” and in Christian contexts especially the episcopal functions. Therefore, Hirschmann supposes an “angelic” episcopal ministry of Nanas. By this interpretation, the inscription honors the well-doing agency of Nanas in the oversight of the community by giving her an angel-like rank.⁵⁹ Long after Revelation, the Montanist movement preserves the earthly place of a prophetic “angel.”

We do not know whether the Montanist community erecting the tombstone knew Revelation. But the voice in the inscription reminds one of the voices in Revelation (1:10 etc.), and the angelic characterisation evokes the angels in Revelation 2:1 etc. Therefore, we can compare the texts heuristically: In both instances we learn about a person in “angelic” charge of a community. This person has a mighty “voice” in a double sense: hearing the voice of God and speaking in the voice of prophecy. Our inscription shows the intriguing example of an earthly “angelic” responsibility in a congregation on the borders of Christianity.

A last group of inscriptions and steles leads back to a supernatural type of angels and nevertheless deepens the horizon in the earthly direction too: These remnants stemming from Lydia and Phrygia (2nd/3rd century) personify holiness and justice by an angel-like figure (images were found on steles together with the inscriptions). The figure is named “angel” at least one time: The inscription TAM⁶⁰. 5.1.185 [P.Herrmann] from Saittai gives thanks to Ἀγγέλῳ ὁσίῳ δικαίῳ. This angel represents earthly virtues in godly purity and perfection (ὁσιος recalls holiness and purity). What is more, he receives the thanks through a prophet (διὰ προφήτου, namely the prophet Alexander of Sattai);⁶¹ the local prophet mediates between the angel and the community. Merkelbach assumed a background not only in the Greek tradition of godly messengers, but also in the originally Persian tradition of a sovereign (in our case the godly sovereign) reigning through ἄγγελοι (mighty messengers).⁶² Anyway, the “angel” underlines an ethical claim, and the communication with him is mediated by a prophet. The prophet protrudes in the life of the community calling it to a life full of justice and religious purity, face to face with an angel. The inscription gives an idea of the amalgam of ethical values, activities of prophets and respect for angels in the first centuries in which Revelation was read.

This sample from the history of religions permits both interpretations of Revelation, as we can see. In the time of Revelation and its reception, “angels” could be understood as heavenly beings guarding humans and representing values, and they could be appreciated as earthly “messengers” entrusted by God with tasks for the life of the

communities. Each of the interpretative lines touched and permeated aspects of the other one since heaven is close to earth, particularly in communities where a prophet or prophetess is working. Thus, the angels were familiar to the religious experience of the Jewish and the non-Jewish population of Asia Minor. Metaphorically speaking, angels came across and knocked at the door, maybe as supernatural beings maybe in human stature (cf. Heb 13:2⁶³).

8 The Old Text Initiating Earthly and Heavenly Interpretation

The data elucidate the emerging interpretative lines, but what was the case in the oldest composition of Revelation? Is there a point of departure preceding both the A- and the S-texts, the supernatural and the earthly interpretation of the angels of the congregations?

Table 7: The Reconstructed Oldest Text	
1:16	εἶχεν ἀστέρων (κ*) or omission of εἶχεν and nominative ἀστέρες (μ ⁹⁸ A)
2:1	τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας (A C)
2:18	τῷ ἀγγέλῳ ἐν Θυατίροις ἐκκλησίας (C)
2:20	ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ (C Oecumenius)

We necessarily refer to the reconstructed oldest text (Table 7). The text-critical analysis suggests the following readings in the crucial verses:

- 1:16 εἶχεν ἀστέρων (κ*): The Christ has the stars, later identified as our angels, at his mighty disposal. The stars evoke a heavenly background. If one alternatively ponders the omission of εἶχεν and the nominative ἀστέρες (μ⁹⁸ A), the stars are seen as visionary subjects by themselves; the heavenly background remains.
- 2:1 τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον (A C): The seer is charged to write to the congregation-angel in (!) Ephesus.
- 2:18 τῷ ἀγγέλῳ ἐν Θυατίροις ἐκκλησίας (C): The seer is charged to write to the congregation-angel in (!) Thyatira.
- 2:20 ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ (C Oecumenius): Jezebel is a married woman (γυνή) but not immediately connected to the “angel” of Thyatira.

That reconstruction is shaped by a complex examination of the great manuscripts. A, the most important codex of Revelation, does not *eo ipso* surpass the value of the other main witnesses. Papyri, κ, C and the text of the old commentaries merit great attention

too. Interestingly, C contains the best reading more than once. The correlations to the A- and the \aleph -text in that codex do not diminish its value; on the contrary, the codex exhibits a textual form of high value between A and \aleph . Last but not least, the correctors of Sinaiticus (esp. c2 = “ca”) deserve our attention.

The sequence of the sketched references puts the angels in front of both a heavenly and an earthly background. The identification with the stars in 1:16, 20 elevates them to the heavenly sphere of God and Christ, however not into the inner heavenly court; that is the realm of other angels (3:5).⁶⁴ The addresses in 2:1, 18, vice versa, associate them with the earthly cities and the congregations living in these cities. Yet specifics are few; the angels are seen “in” the cities by their responsibility for the local community, but they are associated with another earthly person in any of the letters (2:20 does not enclose the pronoun σου behind γυναικα, against the A-text). That opens the possibility of a spiritual representation and presence.

As a consequence the angels hold a somewhat pending status referring likewise to the heavenly and the earthly world. On the one hand, they are part of the vision and insofar heavenly counterparts of the seer (1:16, 20). At the same time, they mediate the contact to the communities, are active on earth and insofar belong to the earthly church (ch. 2–3).⁶⁵ That double-face between heaven and earth is conceivable in a time thinking of human “angels” (messengers of godly presence in earthly life) as well as of superhuman beings coming across on earth (cf. Heb 13:2 etc.).

The seer evidently tries to balance both aspects. He gives his readers a glimpse of the heavenly capacities of exposed members in their congregations; and he makes the conviction possible that supernatural, heavenly angels come into the congregations mediating the revelation of Christ. His approach integrates aspects of humanity and of heavenly splendour. That prohibits a single-sided understanding of the oldest text; it contradicts both a unilateral angelic identification and a unilateral earthly concretisation (e.g., the identification of the angels with prophetic leaders of charismatic communities).

However, the balance was not kept in the process of reception. The readers soon looked for a reduction of the complexity. As a consequence, the different textual traditions develop. The A-text solves the tension in favour of an earthly interpretation, whereas the \aleph -text prepares the unilateral heavenly elevation of the angels. Thus, the consideration of the oldest identifiable text explains the textual development and the variety of interpretations.

9 Conclusion

The investigation of the textual evidence brings up the following results:

1. The current critical edition of Revelation (Nestle-Aland²⁶) needs a revision. The collations of Hoskier must be checked and corrected. The textual history must be actualised and the work of Schmid continued. The documentation of the main

manuscripts in the apparatus has to be improved; all semantic variants of the papyri, A, \aleph and C and further readings of the other witnesses (including the newly edited *Vetus Latina*, Oecumenius and the insufficiently edited Syriac and Coptic versions) should be presented.

2. The eccentric language of Revelation requires text-critical decisions concerning the style of speech. Some of these decisions touch the meaning of the text. They need to be based on the best manuscripts – without any influences from exegetical traditions and grammatical or stylistic presumptions. An example is the reconstruction of the addresses in 2:1 etc.
3. \aleph , the main manuscript for the present reconstruction of Revelation 2:1 etc., cannot bear the text-critical credentials where it is not accompanied by other valuable manuscripts. But also A, the best manuscript of Revelation, cannot determine the reconstruction if it stands alone. C, often presenting a text between A and \aleph , needs more attention than it usually receives.
4. The A-text (normally the best text) and the \aleph -text differ markedly concerning the angels of the congregations. The A-text designs an earthly place of these “angels” whereas the \aleph -text fosters the heavenly interpretation which dominates today (without explicitly advocating this interpretation). The modern editors preferred most of the readings of the \aleph -text, normally due to stylistic reasons. But these reasons are open to discussion.
5. It is possible to reconstruct an oldest attainable text preceding both textual forms (A-text and \aleph -text). This oldest text differs from the critical edition in readings of 1:16 (the best text is εἶχεν ἀστέρων or ἀστέρες), 2:1 (τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας) and 2:18 (τῷ ἀγγέλῳ ἐν Θυατίροις ἐκκλησίας).
6. Following this text, the angels are present in the communities and integrate aspects of heaven. They carry both, earthly and heavenly connotations. The resulting tensions are balanced by the author of Revelation and conceivable in early Christianity. People living at the end of the 1st and beginning of the 2nd century could imagine “angels” effective on earth or even present in an earthly person.
7. The text lost the balance in the history of reception. In late antiquity, the idea of supernatural “angels”, as well as the admiration for earthly “angels” (messengers) of a deity, spread. Both trends influenced the tradition of the text. Variants in the manuscripts and the difference between A- and \aleph -text emerged.

After all, the textual history of Revelation deserves the same attention as the history of religions which influenced the seer and the recipients. It is time to revise the critical edition of Revelation.

NOTES

- 1 Tertullian and Origen perhaps may be the first witnesses for the supernatural interpretation. But Tertullian's notes (*angelus ecclesiae*: *Scorp.* 12; cf. *Paen.* 8; cf. Zahn [1924:209 n.63]) are too short to be unambiguous, and Origen read the text influenced by contemporary interests; according to him the earthly ministers (shepherds) need accompanying angels (*Hom. Luc* 13; *Or.* 11.3, [resp. VI]; cf. Constantinou 2008b:30).
- 2 Cassiodorus concerning Rev 2:8 and 2:18 (CCSL 107; ed. R. Gryson, *Comptes* 5.25; 6.25); Gregory the Great, *Moral.* 34.14 (caput 7); Ambrosiaster concerning 1 Cor 1:10 (in Gryson 2000–2003:151).
- 3 Apringius concerning Rev 1:20 (*animae sanctorum*), CCSL 107; ed. R. Gryson, 47 line 450.
- 4 See e.g., Beatus, *Comm. Apoc.* ad loc. (Sanders 1930); Beda (PL 93.137); Glossa ordinaria Rev 2:1 (PL 14.714); Rupert of Deutz (PL 169.864); cf. Hofmann (1982:195).
- 5 M. Luther, *Preface to Revelation*, Weimarer Ausgabe, Deutsche Bibel 395b; Hofmann (1982:195f., 415f).
- 6 See Vögtle (1966:327–332); Lülisdorff (1992:104–108); further literature is listed by Aune (1997:108–112).
- 7 See e.g., the movie “Les Rivières pourpres 2 – Les anges de l’apocalypse”, 2004, directed by Oliver Dahan.
- 8 Today *pauca* is excluded from the critical text of the Vulgata; but it was contained in the manuscripts used by the editio Clementina.
- 9 Andrew of Caesarea concerning 1:19–20 (ed. Schmid 1955:23.12–15).
- 10 The guard by the angels may be compared to Matt 18:10 (Constantinou 2008b:29 n.120). And (most significantly) Andrew identifies the stars in Rev 2:1 with the seven orders (τάξεις) of heavenly angels (ed. Schmid 1955:24.11).
- 11 Andrew of Caesarea concerning Rev 2:1 (ed. Schmid 1955:24.6–7).
- 12 See the research from Weiß (1891:147 etc.) up to Hernández (2006).
- 13 ⋈ Rev 1:1–5 is written by the hand D and has fewer mistakes than 1:6–22:21 (hand A). But conspicuous variants trespass on both hands: cf. ἁγίοις instead of δούλοις in 1:1 ⋈* and the addition τῶν ἁγίων in 22:21 ⋈.
- 14 Cf. the discussion from Hort (1882:260–262) onwards.
- 15 The first corrector of the NT transcripts is normally corrector S1 in the digital edition and the second corrector “ca.” (<http://www.codex-sinaiticus.net/de/manuscript.aspx?book=59&chapter=3&lid=de&side=r&verse=7&zoomSlider=0> – accessed on 20 May 2010).
- 16 We must compare 1:11 since the Textus Receptus of 3:14 reads τῆς ἐκκλησίας Λαοδικέων.
- 17 Delobel (1980:156) lists the witnesses not only for 2:1, but also for the following addresses (2:8 etc.).
- 18 Charles 1920a:clvii; 1920b:244, 246 etc.
- 19 Hoskier edited Oecumenius (the most important Greek commentary of Revelation) in advance (1928); but that edition did not suffice compared to the critical standards (see de Groote 1999:1f., 4ff.). Going on to the collations, Hoskier worked alone (without any control by a third person) and sometimes had to use older available collations, which he never cross-checked. As a

- consequence, Schmid found mistakes in the rendering of the Greek manuscripts (see Schmid 1955:6 n.1 concerning 1^o), and Gryson pointed out flaws concerning the old versions (2000–2003:93). The list and order of the manuscripts needed actualisations and corrections (Elliott 1989:100–110, 1997:116–124; cf. 2009:390–395; Aune 1997:cxl–cxlviii). More criticisms in Parker (2008:231).
- 20 Cf. the examples (11:4 etc.) in Karrer (2009:373–398).
- 21 Schmid did not know about \mathfrak{p}^{115} , but cf. Head (2000:1–16, esp. 14) and Parker (2000:159–174).
- 22 The young \mathfrak{p}^{43} (6th or 7th century; containing 2: 12–13 and 15:8–16:2) is too incomplete to be of any help.
- 23 The older research focussed on the Vulgate (but Weiß [1891:153f.] questioned the value of any version). The Syriac and Coptic (esp. Sahidic) translations need reliable editions and further research.
- 24 Mink (2002); cf. contributions by Howe, Mink, Schmid, Wachtel and others in: Reenen et al (2004).
- 25 Cf. Hagedorn (1992:244), the latest date is the beginning of the 3rd century.
- 26 In addition the omission of the article before ἥλιος (1:16) is supported bei Oecumenius; the anarthrous construction understands “Helios” as a name.
- 27 Oecumenius 1.20 = de Groote (1999:80, 385).
- 28 γίνεσθαι is read correctly in Nestle-Aland²⁷; γενέσθαι in the New Testament transcripts must be corrected (cf. <http://nttranscripts.uni-muenster.de/AnaServer?NTtranscripts+0+start.anv> – accessed on 11 May 2010).
- 29 C reads δεῖ μέλλει γενέσθαι, κ^* δεῖ μέλλειν γενέσθαι.
- 30 The corrector adds the ι and does not replace the ε. Nestle-Aland²⁷ (apparatus) correctly standardizes the spelling into γίνεσθαι.
- 31 κ^* A C against \mathfrak{p}^{98} κ^2 .
- 32 \mathfrak{p}^{98} κ^* C against A κ^2 . But the evidence of A is strong, and ε in \mathfrak{p}^{98} is not sure. Therefore there remain some doubts concerning γενέσθαι.
- 33 Most manuscripts read *habebat*, sometimes *habet*, in no instance the participle *habens*; see Gryson (2000-2003:140–141 ad loc.).
- 34 VST have ἔχειν ἀστέρες: Oecumenius 1.16 = de Groote (1999:79, 364 and n.).
- 35 The decision is not commented in Metzger (1994: 664).
- 36 Oecumenius II 2 = de Groote (1999:83, 8/7); Primasius PL 68.803c.
- 37 PL 68.807b. Gryson (2000–2003:183 apparatus at 2:18) adds minuscule 2305 and parts of the Syriac and Armenian translations.
- 38 Nestle-Aland²⁷ identifies the corrector as c² (“ca”), although the corrector cannot be singled out exactly (see the digital edition ad loc.: <http://www.codex-sinaiticus.net/de/manuscript.aspx?book=59&chapter=3&lid=de&side=r&verse=7&zoomSlider=0>).
- 39 Cassiodorus, Complex. 8.1 = CCSL 107, 116.
- 40 The motif of “holy” angels is prepared in Jewish scriptures (*I En.* 12:2; 14:23, 25; 1QS 11.8, cf. Dan 8:13; *Jub* 33:12), familiar to the New Testament (Mark 8:38 etc.) and wide spread in the Old Church (*I Clem.* 39:7; Origen, *Cels.* 5.5). An important magical parallel is PGM IV.1934, 1938 (ἅγιοι ἄγγελοι of Helios).

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- 41 Oecumenius 1.16 = de Groote [1999:79, 366–370]; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or. Bas.* 42.9.
- 42 Cf. Charles (1920a:cxxi), Mussies (1971:186–201).
- 43 Oecumenius 2.8 = de Groote (1999:90, 188–189).
- 44 Gryson (2000–2003:186–187 [apparatus 187]): Minuscles 1006 1841 1854 *pl/Byz*; VL text K; Cyprian Primasius; parts of the Syriac and Armenian translations and the Georgian translation; Primasius (PL 68.807c).
- 45 *Iezabel uxorem fuisse ipsius Thyatirae praedicatoris* in Ambrosius Autpertus 138.36 (in Gryson 2000–2003:185).
- 46 Lachmann (1846:433); Zahn (1924:286–289) renewed the earthly interpretation based on Lachmann.
- 47 Mach (1992); Davidson (1992); Stuckenbruck (1995); Sullivan (2004).
- 48 The non-Jewish data are less known but relevant; the sources are presented in Teixidor (1977:14); Cumont (1915:159–182); Milik (1972:423–444); Belayche (2001:97, 99–104).
- 49 Rahlfs-text.
- 50 See esp. Karrer (1986:177–181); Arnold (1996:61–89 and esp. 90–102); Schwindt (2002:261–310, esp. 272–283).
- 51 Wiegand includes an inscription found at a temple at Didyma describing how two benefactors erected an enclosure τῆς ἀγγέλου (Cf. T. Wiegand (ed.) 1958. *Didyma. Zweiter Teil: Die Inschriften*. Gebr. Mann, Berlin. 243 §406.). This might refer to Hecate who then is understood as angel/messenger from the underworld (Arnold 1996:77–78).
- 52 See the inscriptions at Arnold (1996:70–75); Sheppard (1980–1981:77–101).
- 53 Documentation in Karrer 1986:181–182. θεῖος ἄγγελος-inscriptions can be found as far east as Gerasa (Tuschling 2007:49).
- 54 Cf. Arnold (1996:11–31). The magical papyri lead us from Asia to Egypt. Of special interest is the image of an angel coming to the house of conjuration as a star (PGM I. 72–96) and the instruction for the conversation with an angel (PGM XIII. 608–613).
- 55 Hall (1978:263–267); Arnold (1996:78–79); Mitchell (1999:86).
- 56 Lülldorff (1992), also identified the ἄγγελοι in 1 Tim 3:16 (and perhaps 5:21) as ministers of the churches in Asia Minor. But this argumentation is disputed.
- 57 Cf. Tabbernee (1997:419–423 §68); Eisen (1996:65ff.); Merkelbach and Stauber (2001:349f., §16.41.15).
- 58 Cf. Trevett (1999:259–277); Poirier (2004:151–159); Marksches (2009:115–116).
- 59 Hirschmann (2004:160–168) points to a montanist episcopal office, held in our case by a woman (167–168). We do not need that farguing and therefore doubtful pointe of ἐπισκοπή.
- 60 Titulae Asiae Minoris.
- 61 The inscription is discussed in Merkelbach (1993:295 n.2). Another inscription of this group was understood for some time as speaking of an association of angel-friends (ΦΙΛΑΝΓΕΛΩΝ; SEG 31.1130). That reading was corrected by Malay (2005:42–44) and Harland (2008).
- 62 Merkelbach (1993:296). For the ἄγγελοι under the Persian rule see Herodotus 1.99.
- 63 The interpretation of all these texts (one may add Gal 1:8) is quite difficult: cf. the discussions in the commentaries.

- 64 κ reads there ἔμπροσθεν evoking the judgment (cf. ἔμπροσθεν in Matt 25:32 etc.).
- 65 Cf. the history of research, sketched in Aune (1997:10–112); Beale (1999:218–219 etc.); Lupieri (2006:114–15).

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