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PREPARATION FOR VISIONS IN SECOND TEMPLE JEWISH
APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This essay deals with the theme of preparation for visions in Jewish apocalyptic texts of the period 200 BCE - 200 CE, occasionally covering texts of disputed dating but which are nonetheless related to the proposed investigation. The first part of the text offers a brief discussion of the more important issues as well as theoretical approaches to the theme; the second part deals with the texts themselves, dividing them in terms of the patterns observed and discussing the more significant passages that tell anything about the process of preparation for visions as the authors, or presumed authors of the apocalypses have described by themselves. The work has to take into account the scanty nature of the sources involved, the pseudepigraphic nature of authorship and the process of preservation of the apocalypses. All this ends up offering a picture far from uniform and many unclear references - thus any conclusion about developments along time, patterns to be observed and transformation in the preparation process as related to external compelling events must be taken with great care. The essay concludes with the idea that a certain pattern can be discerned between inductive practices compared in visions where the seer is awake or asleep, but no pattern can be recognized in terms of evolution along time because of the fragmentary nature of the sources (taken as a whole), and the many problems in dating most of the texts involved.



PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE THEME

The aim of this essay is to discuss a specific point regarding Jewish apocalyptic literature, namely preparation for the different visions the apocalyptic visionaries (whoever they may be, or claim to be) are supposed to have gone through. This means that the apocalypses as a whole will not be dealt with here, but mainly the above stated preparations for visions.

In terms of chronology I shall deal with texts ranging from approximately 200 BCE until 200 CE, this being the period when parts of Dn, 1En, 2Br, 4Ezra among other texts have been composed¹. Of course the question arises whether many other texts have not survived, and thus we have no clue about the representativeness of the period selected. However, in terms of what came down to us, the most important texts are situated between the limits set above. I shall also deal with texts that, while clearly not being themselves apocalypses (e.g. the Testaments, 4Br) can shed light on the processes of preparing for visions in the apocalypses "proper", either by being dated in a similar period, or by showing inspirational practices similar enough to justify their inclusion here.

Due to all the questions regarding the conservation and composition of the apocalypses, I shall try to understand the preparation for visions contained in them in terms of comparison with similar practices in the Hebrew Bible, with Christian experiences and with phenomena that may be found in other cultures wholly outside the Jewish-Christian range

¹ Even if, as I said above, this does not at all mean that they have been preserved "purely" and without interpolations since their dates of composition. I will come to the matter of dating again in the next part of this essay.



at the time of the composition of the apocalypses, but which nevertheless may shed some light in terms of the structure of the phenomena observed.

I must also state that the object of this essay are not the visions in themselves and taken as a whole, but the preparations for obtaining them.

Trying to find parallels for phenomena similar to the visions of the apocalypticists² we should look with particular attention to two specific cultures related to Judaism, namely the Greco-roman world and Near Eastern antecedents³.

In terms of "internal" Jewish references, prophets and apocalypticists alike share the idea of a divine compulsion to reveal things to men⁴; the means by which inspiration to say those things was also varied and can be roughly distinguished between the earlier prophets and the classical ones. Instances of the effect of music to prophesize can be found at 1Sm 19:20-24 and 10:5; Elijah "drank the water of the river" in 1Kgs 17:2-6; the spirit that animated the *neviim* is said to be the same as that of Moses (Nm 11:24-30). Parallels to the activity of the prophets can be found throughout the ancient Near East - the remembrance of a *baru*, a Mesopotamian kind of seer, is preserved in Nm 24, concerning Balaam; but the two things

² I use the term here meaning the authors, pseudepigraphic as the texts may be, rather than assuming that the apocalypses were consumed by any definite group or groups of sectarians inside Jewish or Christian groups.

³ This includes having to take note, in further research, of similar phenomena to apocalyptic visions as observed throughout the Hellenistic world - and thus having to cope with the fact that these phenomena may be rooted outside Judaism, although not excluding Jewish parallels, among which those related to prophecy seem to be among the most important. Cf. David Syme Russell. *Divine Disclosure: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. P.21.

⁴ David Syme Russell. *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964. P.158.



that need concern us here regarding apocalypticism are its relations to their ways of gaining inspiration as compared to the prophets.

About the ways of getting inspired, the earlier prophets are conspicuously more violent in their ecstasies than the classical ones - this, however, must be taken with great care as it may be the deliberate result of the compilers trying to depict classical prophecy as "calmer" and thus as distinct from similar pagan practices as possible (i.e. the practice of, say, Isaiah resembles those of pagan diviners less than those of Elijah, in an earlier period)⁵; but as examples we should cite that it was the *ruah* from God that made the "ecstatic" or earlier prophets (cf. Jdg 14:6; 1Sm 16:14). This being the case, it should be noted that the prophetic books themselves seem to be less interested in the process of prophesizing than in the message they convey⁶.

There are few hints about the way the prophets got their inspiration, Ezekiel is apparently the most astonishing example - he claims, in Ez 1-3 that Heaven opened and he had a vision of God. If this happened in the Temple or not is to be debated⁷. Next God gives Ezekiel a scroll, which he eats in order to acquire the gift of prophecy, also something to be doubted that occurred literally. The vision of Jeremiah in Jr 1:11-12 is again difficult to understand, but surely implies a pun in Hebrew between *shequed*, a tree, and *sequed*, "to make clear"; we do not know whether Jeremiah had an actual tree in front of

⁵ For a good discussion on the issue, see Gunnel André. "Ecstatic Prophecy in the Old Testament" in: Nils Holm (ed.). *Religious Ecstasy. Based on Papers read at the Symposium on Religious Ecstasy held at Abo, Finland, on the 26th-28th of August 1981*. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1982.

⁶ Russell, *Method*, p.159.

⁷ André, *op.cit.* p.189.



him, but that is how the word of God was sent to him⁸. Isaiah is likely to have had his vision inside the Temple (Is 6:1,2), but aside from those visual *stimuli* little else can be said - even if we can be sure that the coal did not physically touch his lips, otherwise he could not go on to prophesy. However, all this relates essentially to the messages conveyed and not really to preparation for visions, this being the reason for not discussing the matter further.

We should consider the means of inspiration for the apocalypticists as being rather psychical than physical⁹, i.e. the spectacular examples of chemically-induced visions, as we shall see, being comparatively rarer than visions obtained by more normal means. The references to trances, visions and dreams are much more frequent in the apocalypses than in other revelatory literature in the Old Testament, especially among the prophets. For their importance and due to the very nature of this essay I shall deal basically with the most important apocalypses, namely Dn, 2Br, 4Ezra and 1En (which is not, as a whole, an apocalypse but has large sections which can be considered as such); however, excursions should occasionally be made to texts with strong points in common with the apocalypses, such as the Testaments.

Outside those Jewish prophetic references, the theme of voyages to Heaven or Hell is also well attested in the Greek cultural world: this can be found from Homer to Plato and, as satire, in Lucian of Samosata. These are rather special kinds of visions, but it should be noted that throughout the Hellenistic world visions were regarded as a quite sophisticated means of acquiring knowledge about

⁸ Id. *ibid.*

⁹ Russell, *Method*, p.161.



matters¹⁰ (many could be quoted here, but Josephus and Suetonius will suffice as exponents of the above statements¹¹); on the other hand no essential change can be seen in Greek oracles from VIII BCE to III CE (here to be understood as a variety of the visionary phenomenon)¹². The use of vapors as a means of getting inspiration in the oracle of Apollo, at Delphi, is a particularly famous example of preparation for a visionary process. The Bible gives us some examples of pagan preparatory practices, the prophets of Baal at 1Kgs 18:20 ff being a especially eloquent one.

Although we cannot answer whether the visions obtained are just literary *topoi* or authentic experiences, we should try to see them as being rooted in the real world - i.e. even being clichés they describe a plausible picture. On the discussion about the true or artificial nature of apocalyptic experiences one very bold attempt was made by Russell, affirming that there could be an essential affinity between individuals separated by a great distance in time, this happening due to similarities of different events¹³. This also supposes that diachronic events may be perceived by the individual as simultaneous in a given cultural context - this not implying mental confusion or dumbness on the part of the visionary, but rather a fulfillment of the conditions available to him or her in terms of the range of ecstatic experiences available in a

¹⁰ John J. Collins. *The Apocalyptic Imagination*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998. P.117.

¹¹ See for example Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.399 ff. and Suetonius, *Life of Vespasian* 5.

¹² David Aune. *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983. P.49.

¹³ Russell, *Disclosure*, p.67.



given society¹⁴. The device of pseudonymity may be also related to an assumed *unio mystica* of the seer and the reputed author, although this can never be proved and would also assume the authenticity of the experiences as given.

The visions that I will be dealing with were supposedly obtained in various trance states, which the apocalyptic visionaries are very keen to describe, as compared to their canonical counterparts - prophets, seers and the likes¹⁵. For the purposes of this essay I shall treat "ecstasy" and "trance" as synonyms, while being conscious that some authors may trace distinctions between them¹⁶. I shall treat visions, then, as a particular case of trance, since not all trances purport visions but the reverse not being true - i.e. all the visions dealt with in this essay were clearly obtained in altered states of consciousness, or claimed to have been so. Not every mystical experience should be regarded as ecstatic - in the first one an individual receives personal and intense new knowledge about the Universe; in the ecstasies the emphasis is placed on the mental changes the seer goes through, rather than in the revelation itself¹⁷.

Ecstatic practices, both Jewish and non-Jewish, are sometimes strongly related to divination, and this may be

¹⁴ Id. *ibid.*

¹⁵ This may imply deliberate censorship of the more spectacular or pagan-like aspects of the "canonical trances", although this is by no means certain and may in fact be a false assumption, if we only regard the nature of the visions of Ezekiel.

¹⁶ For a fairly complete state of the discussion until the beginning of the Eighties, see the introduction by Nils Holm. "Ecstasy Research in the 20th Century. An Introduction" in: Nils Holm (ed.). *Religious Ecstasy*, op.cit. The term "ecstasy" seems to have been more common among religion historians, "trance" more favored by anthropologists.

¹⁷ Idem, p.8. Of course it could be altogether different from the point of view of the final consumers of the apocalypses - although we cannot say anything definitive on the matter.



specially important to understand the revelations given to apocalyptic visionaries - these being in themselves practitioners of a kind of divination, where the seer intends to get knowledge about future events, or about their meaning¹⁸. The Hebrew Bible preserved several instances of ecstasies from seers and prophets, as seen above¹⁹.

Besides divination, ecstasies are most obviously related to possession - a taboo theme in the Hebrew Bible and also in the New Testament, but worth while looking at if we are to have a broader picture of the kind of sensation the apocalyptic seers might have gone through in order to get their visions²⁰. While it could be said that possession takes place within the prophets and also in some apocalyptic writings (e.g. 4Ezra 14:40; 3Br 10 etc.) it should be noted that the seer never loses his identity to become one with God, much less with the intermediary angel if this may be the case. This is all the more important if we are to differentiate between physical and psychic means of inspiration in the apocalyptic seers²¹ - it seems that the former tends sometimes to be underlined due to its spectacular aspects, not taking into account that the majority of the experiences described by the visionaries do not involve artificial (i.e. pharmacological or chemically-induced) means of inspiration²². It should be noted that even in one of the most spectacular sequences of visions of

¹⁸ Here too one can see marked differences Old Testament prophecy and apocalyptic - both the promises and the geographical scope of apocalyptic literature being much broader than those of the prophets.

¹⁹ Nm 24:17; it is interesting that the passage attributed to a pagan diviner, Balaam, would have so important messianic connotations much later.

²⁰ Russell, *Method*, Pp.159; 160; 175.

²¹ For a good and already classic discussion on the dichotomy see John Skinner. *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926. P.11 ff.

²² Russell, *Method*, p.161.



an Old Testament prophet, Ezekiel, he never loses his identity so as to be confused or mingled with the deity²³.

In all this we have been considering the visions - and their preparations - as authentic experiences for some reasons listed above. To these I should now add that "apocalyptic literature" was never looked at as a genre in Antiquity; in fact this treatment is quite recent and does not reflect the way the apocalypses themselves were regarded by their public in Antiquity²⁴. So, while the texts do not compose a definite genre, at the same time one will not find a "theory of inspiration" for the apocalypses themselves²⁵. It is interesting that Josephus himself seems to be quite unaware of the distinction, talking quite naturally about two books of Ezekiel - the second one being, presumably, the apocryphal²⁶. I shall use two basic categories, which I think are more useful for the theme of this essay, namely whether the visions were obtained in an awake or asleep state.

The spread of the theme of revelatory dreams - ranging from Mesopotamia to Homer and Virgil should also be noted²⁷. Dreams are sometimes to be confounded with visions in the texts we are dealing with here, but I take the

²³ André, op.cit. p.190. The same author makes the interesting observation that all the cases dealt with - i.e. "classical prophets" in the Old Testament - the seers were alone; in terms of ecstatic practices, for the sake of comparison, it should be pointed out that the pagan prophets of Baal in 1Kgs 18:20-40 are depicted as a group and their self-mutilation in order to get an ecstasy are collectively described.

²⁴ John J. Collins. *Daniel, with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984. P.1.

²⁵ Russell, *Method*, p.158.

²⁶ Josephus. *Jewish Antiquities*. 10.5. Cf. the introduction to the text in James Charlesworth (ed.). *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 volumes. New York: Doubleday, 1983-1985. Vol.1, p.487 ff. It should be noted that the Apocryphon of Ezekiel is not an apocalypse and I have given it as an example of the difficulties regarding ancient identification of pseudepigraphy versus "real" authorship, even for an author as well educated as Josephus.

²⁷ Collins, *Daniel*, p.15.



"nocturnal visions" sometimes described as a special kind of dream - forced by ecstatic practices, by chemical induction or whatever, but being meaningful to the seer in terms of what he purports to be his mission²⁸.

In short, were apocalyptic literature a definite genre, with well-established clichés and practices, we would have an altogether different picture, if there was not the additional problem of the fragmentary nature of the texts that have reached us (i.e. we possibly have only a fraction of the "original" apocalyptic output)²⁹; besides, their often striking parallels to pagan practices argues also in favor of the experiences described being more than mere clichés³⁰, but in this as in other aspects of the discussion between Persian influence on Jewish practices and thoughts the difficulties remain, due to the late compilation of Persian texts³¹ (of course no one should confuse the date of a manuscript with the date of its composition, but still the issue cannot be overlooked). I should deal with the matter in the next part of this essay.

So far I have stressed the need for parallels and the "artificial" element present in the description of the preparation for visions in apocalyptic texts; while having to avoid the "spectacular" element present in many analyses of apocalyptic passages dealing with artificially induced visions, one still has to take note of the main possibilities of understanding the preparation for visions: they can be

1. Physically or chemically induced
2. Induced by prayer

²⁸ Idem, p.8.

²⁹ Russell, *Method*, p.158.

³⁰ Idem, p.223.

³¹ Anders Hultgard. "Ecstasy and Vision" in: Holm, op.cit. p.218.



3. Induced by the seer's reflection on another scriptural passage

This last one, although less appealing in terms of cross-cultural comparisons, may be the most important³². In fact the re-evaluation of earlier passages in apocalyptic texts is one of its most distinguishing features, the most well known of those being possibly the theme of the "seventy years" of Jeremiah read by Daniel³³. The commonly stated allegation of prayer by the visionaries, although not synonymous to scriptural exegesis, seems to be related to it, since it supposes a detailed and first-hand knowledge of things divine, while hallucinations generated by external induction do not (of course it should be regarded as the intimate link between the induction, where it appears, and the vision itself - in other words, the *form* the chemically-induced visions take is dependent on the whole of the cultural references of the seer's worldview).

The next part of this essay shall deal with the preparation for visions in the apocalypses of the defined period, taking into account all that has been discussed above and dealing with those visions as particular cases of ecstatic practices.

³² Russell, *Method*, p.181; Cf. also Christopher Rowland. *The Open Heaven*. London: SPCK, 1982. P.21 ff.

³³ Dn 9:24 ff.



EVALUATION OF THE SOURCES

For the purposes of the analyses of preparation for visions in Jewish apocalypses, one must take into account the nature of the visions themselves: in that sense, I divided them into two basic types, namely visions where the seer is awake and asleep, respectively. Visions asleep sometimes cannot be distinguished from dreams, although this is not important at this stage of the text.

The texts examined are, in their greatest part, of Jewish authorship (although this does not by any means imply that they were consumed only or mainly by Jews), and can be situated, in terms of authorship, roughly between the second century BCE - second century CE. Many of them have their dating so controversial as to vary much more than that - the extreme case involving dates between 200 BCE to XIV century CE (Slavonic Enoch, or 2En). I will come back to the point later.

In the brief survey that follows one must bear in mind that the passages examined do not tell us, at the same time, all that we want to know about preparation for visions - e.g. one passage may tell about the fasting involved, and that the vision obtained was during an awake state, but not whether it was obtained at home or outside. This means that evidence gathered and analyzed here is by no means complete and exhaustive, although the passages collected try to catch every reference to preparation for visions in the Old Testament pseudepigrapha, the New Testament Revelation, and the book Daniel, with occasional references to New Testament apocrypha (6Esd) and to one



Qumran Cave Four fragment (4Q246). The Sibylline Oracles passages have also been taken into account.

The total number of passages found which tell something about preparation for visions is 114. I found two basic forms of dealing with this amount of evidence: firstly taking into account their form (i.e. visions where the seer was in an awake state, or an asleep one, the presence of angels etc.) and secondly in terms of their dating. The two kinds of analyses shall be cross-compared along the text, however any conclusions regarding transformations along the timeline must be dealt with great care when controversial dates of composition are at stake.

Of the total amount of passages examined, 61 clearly involved preparation for visions with an awake seer - 1En 1:2; 91:1; 2En 1:2-6; 3:1; 72:1, 10; 2Br 5:5-7; 6:2; 9; 12:5; 21:1-3; 26; 32:7; 37; 53:12; 55:1-4; 3Br Slavonic introduction; Greek introduction; 1:3 in both recensions; 4Ezra 1:33; 5:14-15, 19-20, 21; 6:35; 9:23-25, 26-29; 12:3; 12:51; 13:14; 14:1-3, 36; ApAbr 8; 15-19; ApSed 2:1-5; Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2; Dn 1:8-21; 2:17-20; 7:15, 28; 9:1-3, 21; 10:1-17; Jub introduction; 1:2-6; MartIs 1:5-6; 2:7-11; Vita 25; 27; LdJb 2:1-3, 6-22; 4Br 4:11; 6:7-16, 15; 7:1; OrSib 2:1, 340; 3:1-7; 5:51; 11:315-320; 13:1, 5 and fr.8 (with other 2 probable, 3Br 9:1-2 in the Greek recension and Dn 8:1; 16); by comparison only 19 were preparations for visions where the visionary was asleep, 1En 13:6-10; 2En 1:2-6; 72:1, 10; 2Br 35-36; 52:7-53; 55:1-4; 4Ezra 3:1-5; 10:29, 59; 11:1; 13:1; GrEzra 1; ApAdam 2:1; Test12, Lv 2; Naph 5-7; Dn 7:1-2; LdJb 1:1 and 4Br 5 (also with 2 doubtful passages, 4Ezra 5:31 and again Dn 8:1; 16). Some of the above may be repeated (e.g. 2En 72:1, 10) because in the same verse the seer may be first wake and then asleep. The remaining 30 leave no clue about the issue.



Preparations involving a domestic setting (i.e. the seer is at home) total 6 confirmed (2En 1:2-6; GrEzra 1; ApAbr 8; Dn 2:17-20; 7:1-2, 15 and 28) and 1 probable (2En 3:1); specific geographical locations related to the preparations come to 10 confirmed (1En 13:6-10; 2Br 5:5-7; 47-48:1; 3Br Greek introduction; 4Ezra 1:33; 3:1-5; 9:26-29; Rev 1:9-17; Dn 10:1-17 and Jub 1:2-6), and natural locations such as mountains, unnamed rivers and the like another 5 (2Br 6:2; 55:1-4; 3Br Slavonic introduction; 4Ezra 14:1-3 and MartIs 2:7-11). In 7 passages special locations are needed as a full part of the seer's preparation for the visionary experience (such as the River Dan in 1En 13:6-10; the cave at the valley of Kidron in 2Br 21:1-3; under a tree in 55:1-4; the river Tigris in Dn 10:1-17; Mt Sinai in Jub introduction; a mountain in MartIs 2:7-11 and a tomb in 4Br 4:11). Tombs are mentioned only twice (both in 4Br, 4:11 and 7:1), and the presence of angels or otherworldly beings as part of the preparation occurs 31 times in the passages examined (1En 1:2; 2En 3:1; 72:1, 10; 2Br 6:2; 55:1-4; 3Br Slavonic introduction; 1:3 in both recensions; 4Ezra 5:31; VisEzra 1; ApAbr 12:12; ApZeph A:1; Test12 Lv 2; TestJob 2-3; Test3 TestAbr recA 10:1; recB 10:3; TestSol 26:6; Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2; 18:1; 21:9-11; Dn 8:1, 16; 9:21; 10:1-17; 4Q246 I; Vita 25; 26; 4Br 4:11; 6:7-16, 15; OrSib 11:315-320 and 13:1).

In terms of the induction to get the visions, I sorted out the evidence in 4 main categories: fasting, chemical induction, induction by prayer and by sexual abstinence. By "chemical induction" I understand the explicit alleged ingestion, by the seer, of some mind-altering substance, identified or not - such as the case with the fire-colored water drunk by Ezra - or the abstinence from items that may, biologically or from the seer's point of view,



interfere with the process of the revelation of hidden things to him (such as Daniel's avoidance of meat and wine at Dn 1:8-21).

Of these, the latter is by far the least important in the passages evaluated, with 2 confirmed references (1En 83:2; Vita Prophetarum 4) and one possible (OrSib 2:340). On the other hand, induction by prayer as part of the process of getting a vision seems the most popular practice in the passages examined - references to this amount to 19 confirmed (1En 13:6-10; 39:9-14; 2Br 21:1-3; 26; 38; 47-48:1; 48:25; 54; 4Ezra 3:1-5; 9:23-25; GrEzra 1; VisEzra 1; Dn 2:17-20; 9:1-3; 21; Vita 25; VitaProph 4; LdJb 2:6-22 and 4Br 6:7-16) and 2 possible quotations (3Br 9:1-2 in the Greek recension; Fragment 8 of the Sibylline Oracles). Second in popularity comes fasting with 14 confirmed references (3En 15B:2; 2Br 5:5-7; 9; 12:5; 21:1-3; 47-48:1; 4Ezra 5:19-20; 21; 6:35; GrEzra 1; ApAbr 12:12; Dn 9:1-3; 10:1-17 and MartIs 2:7-11); chemically induced visions, spectacular as they may appear, occurred only 6 confirmed times in the sources (4Ezra 9:23-25; 26-29; 12:51; 14:38-48; Dn 1:8-21 and MartIs 2:7-11), with unconfirmed references in one instance (4Br 5, when Abimelech still feels sleepy after a 66 years nap and complains, on waking up, that he may got lost because of following an unusual road to Jerusalem; the figs he was carrying are not only intact but even drip milk - all this pointing to a dream strange enough to make us suspicious of chemical inducement, although this is nowhere stated).

Although this essay shall deal only with preparation for visions and not with the visions themselves, I felt it necessary to take into account passages where the effects of the vision on the visionary are described, for this entails also knowledge about the processes of preparation



themselves as they are related to the use of the senses. In fact I divided the sensory data about the preparation for visions into 3 main groups, namely specific sensory details (in 15 passages this was observed, 2Br 21:1-3; 48:25; 3Br 1:3 in both recensions; 4Ezra 3:1-5; 5:14-15 10:29; Rev 1:9-17; 10:8-11; Dn 7:15; 28; 10:1-17; Vita 26; 27; LdJb 2:1-3; OrSib 3:1-7 and 5:51), and the essentially vocal or visual character of the experience described by the visionary.

Regarding this last issue, basically visual experiences total 32 passages (1En 13:6-10; 52; 70; 3En 1:1; 2Br 6:2; 21:1-3; 35-36; 52:7-53; 55:1-4; 4Ezra 10:29; 11:1; 13:1; VisEzra 1; ApAbr 15-19; ApAdam 2:1; TestJob 2-3; TestAbr recA 10:1; recB 10:3; 6Esd 28-34; Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2; 10:8-11; 18:1; 21:9-11; Dn 2:17-20; 7:1-2; Jub 1:2-6; MartIs 1:5-6; Vita 26; 27; LdJb 1:1 and 4Br 4:11) while essentially vocal ones amount to 30 (1En 1:2; 83:2; 91:1; 2En 3:1; 72:1; 10; 4Ezra 1:4; 33; 5:21; 9:26-29; 14:38-48; GrEzra 1; ApAbr 8; 32:6; ApEl 1:1; ApSed 2:1-5; Rev 1:9-17; 14:1-2; 18:1; 19:1; Dn 10:1-17; 4Br 6:15; 7:1; OrSib 2:1; 340; 3:1-7; 5:51; 11:315-320; 13:1; 13:5 and fr.8), thus presenting an evenly distributed picture if we remember that another 52 provide no data available to them on that issue. Two passages were at the same time vocal and visual, both occurring in Rev (1:9-17; 18:1).

When we first compare the data available about the timeline development as related to the type of vision (i.e. with the seer awake rather than asleep), no clear picture emerges: of the confirmed passages where the visionary is described as being awake, 11 can be dated with security from the second century BCE: 1En 1:2; 39:9-14; 83:2; 91:1 (1En being a late Second Temple text, whose emphasis on dualism and the theme of the righteous against the wicked



attest its late date, being possibly due to Persian influence; the reference to the Son of Man in 1En 62:6 also points to that direction, as well as the references to the Maccabean revolt and martyrs in chapters 89-90, disguised as sheep); Dn 1:8-21; 2:17-20; 7:15, 28; 9:1-3; 9:21; 10:1-17 (Daniel may have a primitive core regarding the short stories of its protagonist, but in the form that it comes to us should be considered as contemporary to the Maccabean Revolt or a bit later; this can be seen in the references to the four world empires, being the Hellenistic kingdoms the last part; the reference to the resurrection of the dead, likely to be related to the martyrs of the Revolt; and the presence of Antiochus Epiphanes); Jub intro and 1:2-6 (the book of Jubilees should be earlier than the earliest fragments from Qumran, and CD 26:2-4 depends on it; on the other hand, assuming that Qumran reflects a definite rupture with the priestly establishment in Jerusalem, Jub should be earlier since no clear-cut distinction of the kind is to be found there).

4 passages with the visionary awake can be dated with precision from I CE - Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2 (the kind of tribulation referred to the Church should ascribe it to the persecutions of Nero or Domitian); MartIs 1:5-6; 2:7-11 (the tradition that ascribed death by sawing to Isaiah is already present in Heb 11:37; the notion of martyrdom on similar lines can be seen in 2Mc 6:18-7:42; 4Br, if dated from the beginning of I CE, depends from MartIs 1-5).

Another 5 texts with the seer awake can be dated from the period between I-II CE, namely ApAbr 8:15-19 (the Apocalypse of Abraham should be later than 70 CE, for it describes the fall of the Temple) and 4Br 4:11; 6:7-16; 6:15; 7:1. 4Br tells us about the vineyard of Agrippa I, king from 41 CE - cf. 4Br 3:14; 21; 5:22; talking about the



destruction of the Temple, it should be later than 70 but earlier than the Second Revolt in 132 CE, for the destruction of the Temple and the end of the sacrifices are quite important throughout chapters 1-4 - not giving the impression of a recent, traumatic event as would be the case if it had been written just after 70. Its world history view, in which God destroys the chosen people for their own sins, is remarkably similar to that of Josephus and 2Br.

4Ezra, which contains passages with the visionary awake can be ascribed to the beginning of II CE, in any case before the Bar-Kochba revolt: 4Ezra 1:33 (this introductory passage, dealing with "the Son of God, whom they confessed in the world", 2:47, being clearly Christian); 5:14-15; 5:19-20; 5:21; 6:35; 9:23-25; 9:26-29; 12:3; 12:51; 13:14; 14:1-3 and 14:36 (these chapters from 4Ezra can be dated from the end of I CE, in any case before the Bar-Kochba revolt; the author refers to "thirty years after the fall of Jerusalem"; the book of Daniel is explicitly reinterpreted, and this entails also references to Rome and to the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors; the theme of the four world empires must also be later than Daniel, since in 4Ezra the last world monarchy should be Rome). The same dating can be ascribed to the preparatory passages in 2Br where the seer is awake (2Br 5:5-7; 6:2; 9; 12:5; 21:1-3; 26; 32:7; 37; 53:12 and 55:1-4; 2Br can be dated from the end of I CE, surely after the fall of the Temple, since it deals with the theme of the celestial beings leaving the Temple - also found in Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.300 and Tacitus, *Histories* 5.13 -; the idea that the fall of the Temple is the mere consequence of the Jews' own faults is also remarkably similar to the point of view of Josephus).



3Br can be ascribed to a period ranging anywhere between II-III CE (3Br Slavonic introduction; Greek introduction; 1:3 in both recensions and possibly 9:1-2 in the Greek text; 3Br seems to depend on the Apocalypse of Paul, from II CE, or from a common source; the reference to a "Temple in Heaven" also points to a date later than 70, when Jerusalem was already destroyed.).

The rest of the passages with the visionary depicted as awake are either clearly later or cannot be dated with enough precision to take part on the proposed evaluation of pattern according to a timeline. These are 2En 1:2-6; 3:1 and the unclear reference at 72:1, 10 (Slavonic Enoch having manuscripts not earlier than XIV CE, with no hints of earlier strata, and no earlier text quotes it); Vita 25 and 27 (the Life of Adam and Eve should be later than 400 or 500 CE, reflecting older traditions; it should be noted that the theme of the fall of Satan was already known to Mohammed but the theme is not to be found in the Greek text) and LdJb 2:1-3; 2:6-22 - the Ladder of Jacob being possibly the most difficult of the passages assessed to date, since no hint of dating can be found in the text itself. All the Sibylline Oracles passages assessed describe the seer as awake, and their problems of dating and of interpreting are many.

Passages of preparation for visions where the seer is asleep are distributed more unevenly: 3 in II BCE (Test12 Lv 2; Test12 Naph 5-7; the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs should be later than 250 BCE, since its authors use the Septuagint; Syria appears as the last world empire, and thus it should be considered as earlier than the Maccabean Revolt; and Dn 7:1-2), 4 to I CE (2Br 35-36); 52:7-53; 55:1-4), 8 to the period I-II CE (ApAdam 2:1 this is a likely date for the Apocalypse of Adam, since it



refers to the eruption of Vesuvius in 79; 4Ezra 3:1-5 and possibly 5:31; 10:29; 10:59; 11:1; 13:1 and 4Br 5).

Other passages with the seer asleep are of a later date or cannot be dated precisely, namely GrEzra 1 (the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra is dated by scholars from 150 to 850 CE, the first date necessary because of its dependence on 4Ezra and the last due to a reference to it in the Council of Nicephorus); 2En 1:2-6; 72:1, 10 and LdJb 1:1.

When comparing the types of induction versus the type of vision - i.e. awake / asleep - the following picture emerges (the total is much smaller than the complete sum of all the passages analyzed, for the reason already stated - there is not always a clear reference): fasting is referred to 7 times in relation to preparation for visions where the seer is awake (2Br 5:5-7; 9; 12:5; 21:1-3; 4Ezra 5:19-20; 21 and 6:35), while only once in their asleep counterparts (GrEzra 1); chemically induced preparations appear 5 times (4Ezra 9:23-25; 26-29; 12:51; 14:38-48 and Dn 1:8-21) in visions with the visionary awake, but only one dubious reference where he is asleep (4Br 5); prayer appears as an important part of preparation 9 times (2Br 21:1-3; 26; 4Ezra 9:23-25; Dn 2:17-20; 9:1-3; 21; Vita 25; LdJb 2:6-22 and 4Br 6:7-16) plus 2 possible references in awake visions (3Br 9:1-2 in the Greek recension and OrSib fr.8), but only 3 in asleep experiences (1En 13:6-10; 4Ezra 3:1-5 and GrEzra 1); finally, sexual abstinence has only one doubtful quotation (OrSib 2:340) on awake visionary experiences, and none in asleep visions.

Peculiar behaviour of the seer (such as trembling, prostration, deep troubling of the mind) and specific use of senses, including the basically vocal or visual character of the experience versus the kind of vision give us the following picture: in visions with the seer awake,



peculiar behaviour appears 11 times (2Br 21:1-3; 3Br 1:3 in both recensions; 4Ezra 5:14-15; Rev 1:9-17; Dn 7:15; 28; 10:1-17; Vita 27; LdJb 2:1-3; OrSib 3:1-7 and 5:51) against only one for asleep experiences (4Ezra 3:1-5); basically vocal revelations occur 20 times in awake experiences (1En 1:2; 91:1; 2En 3:1; 72:1; 10; 4Ezra 1:33; 5:31; 9:26-29; ApAbr 8; ApSed 2:1-5; Rev 1:9-17; Dn 10:1-17; 4Br 6:15; 7:1 and of those, 8 only in the Sibylline Oracles, namely OrSib 2:1; 340; 3:1-7; 5:51; 11:315-320; 13:1; 5; fr.8) against 2 in asleep visions (GrEzra 1 and possibly 2En 72:1; 10, which is also cited as of the "awake" kind); finally, essentially visual experiences are evenly distributed in the assessed evidence, 11 in visions with the seer in an awake state (2Br 6:2; 21:1-3; 55:1-4; ApAbr 15-19; Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2; Dn 2:17-20; Jub 1:2-6; MartIs 1:5-6; Vita 27 and 4Br 4:11) and 9 in asleep visions (1En 13:6-10; 2Br 35-36 and again 55:1-4; 4Ezra 10:29; 11:1; 13:1; ApAdam 2:1; Dn 7:1-2 and LdJb 1:1). Regarding the explicit need for a special place to experience a vision (as something different from the precise citing of places - like the seer sitting under a tree to rest, in 2Br 55:1), awake visions outnumber asleep ones 6-2 (2Br 21:1-3; 55:1-4; Dn 10:1-17; Jub intro; MartIs 2:7-11 and 4Br 4:11 vs. 1En 13:6-10 and again 2Br 55:1-4).

But the most astonishing picture emerges when we consider the presence of angels or supernatural beings in the preparation for visions (this is difficult to separate from the visions themselves; however, since many of those appearances occur at the beginning of the process of getting a vision - when not its very explanation - I think it reasonable to link them to the process of preparation). Here, the sources show 17 times the presence of otherworldly entities as part of the preparation for awake



visions (1En 1:2; 2En 3:1; 72:1; 10; 2Br 6:2; 55:1-4; 3Br Slavonic introduction; 1:3 in both recensions; Rev 1:9-17; 4:1-2; Dn 9:21; 10:1-17; Vita 25; 4Br 4:11; 6:7-16; 15; OrSib 11:315-320 and 13:1), while only 3 asleep visions show their presence (Test12 Lv 2; 2Br 55:1-4 again and 4Ezra 5:31). Once the reference is sure but coincides with their being present at a vision that is unclear (2En 72:1; 10;), and once it is doubtful in unclear visions (Dn 8:1; 16).

So far I have dealt with the quantitative aspects of the passages involved; of course, their levels of explicitness, relevance and enlightening to the theme vary accordingly. It would make no sense to discuss visions awake or asleep as a whole, but rather in the way they have been compared above.

In terms of visions during sleep, the most important passages are 4Ezra 3:1-5; 10:29; 10:59; 13:1; TestLv 2 and TestNaph 5-7. Dn 7:1-2 should also be considered here.

Concerning visions with the seer in an awoken state of mind, some of the best-known passages are 1En 13:4; 2Br 55:3; Jub 14:1; ApMos 2:2 and 4Ezra 5:37.

For passages basically visual, which are, explicitly or implicitly, to be understood as dreams, see Dn 10:9 and specially 2Br 53:1 (the "apocalypse of the clouds": "And I saw a vision. And behold, a cloud was coming from the great sea. And I was looking at it, and behold, it was entirely filled with black water [...] And because of my fear I awoke") as well as 2En 1:6.

The theme of "enlarged vision", i.e. the notion that the seer has a privileged vision regarding things of the otherworld, a parallel idea can be found already in Nm 24:2 ff.: "Balaam looked up and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. Then the spirit of God came upon him, and he uttered



his oracle, saying: "The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is clear, the oracle of one who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, who falls down, but with eyes uncovered: how fair are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! [...]".

Allusions to physical or pharmacological induction of trances are much more straightforward: those kinds of stimuli as divided in the above categories give us the following examples:

Fasting emerges in passages like Dn 10:2-3; 2Br 5:7; 9:2: 12:5; 21:1. The effect obtained by fasting seems equal to any other of the inductions here described: however, 2Br is particularly remarkable for the number and frequency of the fasts Baruch goes through. In that apocalypse fasting has an unparalleled importance.

Chemical induction related to the visionary present the most "paganizing" reference to the means for inspiration found among the apocalypticists (i.e. the passages that most resemble pagan practices of artificial ecstatic practices)³⁴; this may be so for the same reason that "classical prophets" have a "calmer" ecstasy than their pagan counterparts, i.e. for editorial reasons. One of the best stances for the idea is to be found at 4Ezra 9:26 ff. - "So I went, as he directed me, into the field which is called Ardat; and there I sat among the flowers and ate of the plants of the field, and the nourishment they afforded satisfied me. And after seven days, as I lay on the grass, my heart was troubled as it was before. And my mouth was opened, and I began to speak before the Most High [...]". There seems to be a parallel, if in different settings and intentions, between the cup that maddens the nations in Jr

³⁴ See the article of Hultgard. "Ecstasy and Vision" op.cit. p.218 ff.



25:15-16; 4Ezra 14:38-42 - "And on the next day, behold, a voice called me, saying, 'Ezra, open your mouth and drink what I give you to drink'. Then I opened my mouth, and behold, a full cup was offered to me; it was full of something like water, but it's color was like fire. And I took it and drank [...]". Similar drinks appear in Persian literature, e.g. *Bhaman Yasht* 3:7-8, when Zoroaster "drinks" the water he acquires the wisdom of Ahura Mazda. Similarly, Vishtapa has an experience quite equivalent in the *Dinkard* 7:4.84-86 where mention is made to a mixture of wine (or *haoma*) and hemp with *henbane* (a poisonous and stinking herb, similar to the belladonna); opposition to those practices may have generated their replacement in the later BY. The *Book of Artay Viraz* also mentions visions obtained from wine mixed with hemp, and for the preparations of the seer cf. ch. 2.25-28. However, we should not conclude from this information that the techniques of ecstasy remain the same for apocalypticists and Persian mystics, no matter how logical this presumption may seem initially³⁵.

A bit less appealing but equally, if not more, important are references to special diets as equivalent to chemical induction - e.g. Dn 1:12-17: "Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations, and deal with your servants according to what you observe." So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations. So the guard continued to withdraw their royal rations and the wine they were to

³⁵ Hultgard, op.cit. pp.222-223.



drink, and gave them vegetables. To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams". See also 4Ezra 12:49-51. There is a possible analogy, here, to the idea of the manna that fed Israel in the desert³⁶.

Special places appear throughout apocalyptic literature (Daniel has his visions in Babylon, Ezra lies in the field) but more significantly in 2Br 6:1; 55:1 ("And it happened that when I had finished the words of this prayer, I sat down there under a tree to rest in the shadow of its branches. And I was astonished, and I pondered in my thoughts about the multitude of the goodness which the sinners who are on earth have rejected from them [...]"; 77:18-19; TestAbr 2. A *baru* as early as Balaam could also have his insights related to a certain spot: "Now Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, so he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness " (Nm 24:1).

A last mention must be made to a most common element in preparation for visions, which is prayer. This is a difficult issue to handle, because prayer is so important in every aspect of daily life among Jews³⁷ (and Christians), it may be just a commonplace theme pervading every mystical revelation of the times, thus not indicating any kind of special preparation - as opposed to the much more radical practices of long fasting, ingestion of certain foods or going to specific places, named or not, in order to receive a revelation. Prayer may be common in apocalyptic preparation for visions because of its

³⁶ Russell, *Method*, p.171.

³⁷ E.P. Sanders. *Judaism. Practice and Belief 63 BCE - 66 CE*. London/Philadelphia: SCM Press/Trinity Press, 1992. P.202 ff.



diffusion, and thus should not be taken into account as a special means of preparation from the seer.

On the other hand, the frequency of allusions to prayer forbids their dismissal as a commonplace resource, stylistic or otherwise.



CONCLUSION

Some conclusions should be drawn from what has been examined above, for all the problems regarding consumption, copying and dating of the apocalypses themselves. However, after taking these precautions, some interesting issues arise, which can be taken as provisional conclusions of the investigation.

First of all, the theme of preparation for visions is related to the one of authorship - whether the authors were real ecstasies who in fact went through the experiences described or the visions - and their preparations - just a stylistic commonplace, the picture of the preceding pages presents, as a whole, a very different picture from divination and ecstasies as described in the Old Testament³⁸. The apparent absence of "symbolic acts"³⁹ as are so often found among the prophets is striking: the apocalyptic visionaries, whether their experiences are authentic or not, seem to live in a much more lonely world, in which acts publicly performed which may have a social or political impact are apparently irrelevant⁴⁰. It is arguable that, were the device of pseudonymity a mere

³⁸ This does not exclude parallels, which seem specially important in the case of the Sinaitic revelation to Moses.

³⁹ E.g. the 50 km run of Elijah that showed something "superhuman" to be with him, a spirit or *ruah*. Hosea married a whore, symbolic of Israel. With the "symbolic acts" the prophet aimed at a better, fuller understanding of his message; the symbolic act seems to have the same properties as the prophetic word.

⁴⁰ On the theme, an acute observation is made by John Ashton, drawing on the parallels between Jewish visionary experiences at the time of Paul and Shamanism: cf. *The Religion of Paul the Apostle*. New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2000. P.33.



stylistic *topos* the imitation of Old Testament prophetic or scribal figures should be much more mimetic.

In terms of patterns observed, it is striking that the proportion of awake visions as opposed to the ones asleep or in dreams is overwhelming. The presence of chemically induced ecstasies, interesting and cross-cultural comparison appealing as it may be, is comparatively small as opposed to more "traditional" resources such as fasting and prayer. The presence of angels or otherworldly beings as part of the preparation is also virtually non-existent in visions asleep; the prevalence of the awakened visions together with this indication points to the visionaries being conscious of the process they have triggered (if the experiences described are in fact authentic), this being a common feature with Old Testament prophecy - the apocalyptic visionary, like his prophetic counterpart, does not lose his identity by "becoming one with the deity", but much on the contrary, the differences between the processes themselves show a striking diversity among the apocalyptic visionaries themselves, whether the experiences are authentic or not.

The conclusions arrived to do not relate to Collins' well-known taxonomy between historical and voyage apocalypses⁴¹. No significant distinction can be made between the two in terms of preparation for visions - this meaning that resources for comparison and cross-cultural studies have to be sought elsewhere. While the classification proposed by Collins offers a useful taxonomy in terms of the content of the visions, the basic distinction between a "history-meaningful" apocalypse and an "otherworldly" one seems quite useless in terms of preparation for the visions. On the other hand, a study

⁴¹ Collins, *Daniel*, p.2.



which should include closely related phenomena in the period (e.g. the "prophets" described by Josephus, New Testament literature) would be most useful, but impossible in the current limits of this essay.

As a final conclusion, I would like to stress that, from the pieces of evidence that have come down to us, the relevance of visions where the visionary is in an awake state of mind is overwhelming compared to visions during sleep; chemical induction is much less common than other types of preparation and sexual prescriptions, which seems to undoubtedly form such an important part of legal prescriptions in the Pentateuch, are almost absent from the preparation for visions in the evidence assessed.



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