The song of the Lamb because of the victory of the Lamb

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ABSTRACT
The doxological 'song of Moses... and the song of the Lamb' (Rv 15:3-4) plays a major role in formulating the theological message of the Apocalypse of John. In an intertextual appropriation of Ex 15 andDt 32, concerning the song of Moses, is made it contributes to understanding the relationship of messianic war and eschatological exodus traditions in Revelation. Investigation into the background of the song of the Lamb takes the researcher to the Old Testament (LXX), Tobit, 1 Maccabees and the Tosefta Targum on 1 Samuel 17 where David is called a lamb and Goliath the lion and bear. The Messiah as annointed descendant of David, pictured as Lamb, according to Revelation, conquered the beast, symbolically representing Goliath. Even the length (6 cubits) and number of toes (6) of Goliath may contribute to more interesting conclusions.

1 THE QUESTION AT STAKE
Any description of how the theological message of the book of Revelation is formulated, has to take serious notice of the key role being played by the doxological song in Rv 15:3-4. It is known as ‘... the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb...’ (NIV). This song serves as an introduction to the final seven plagues (Rv 15:1-16:21) as the unfolding of God's wrath. The narratological function of the song is to strenghten the faithful by assuring them of God's great deeds in the past.

In celebrating the victorious and redemptive activities of God the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb are mentioned. That brings us to the purpose of this investigation, namely the description of the possible relationship between messianic war traditions and eschatological exodus traditions as background to understanding the Lamb-Christology of the book of Revelation. The intertextual appropriation of textual tradition plays an important role in the narrative of Revelation. Therefore, the possible appropriation of the song of Moses from Ex 15:1-18 and Dt 32:1-43, as well as the background to ἔρνιον will be investigated. The results should yield a better understanding of Rv 15:2-4 as well as answer the question about the relationship between the war and exodus traditions.
2 THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE SONG OF THE LAMB

2.1 The song of Moses

The function of the doxological hymn in Rv 15:3-4 is to celebrate the victory over the beast. It resembles the song of Moses as, according to tradition, presented by either Ex 15 or Dt 32. This raises the question which of the two songs, or both, should be taken as background to the hymn in 15:3-4. The answer to this question may be helpful in the further clarification of the song of the Lamb. The introductory announcement: καὶ ἔδωκεν τὴν ὄρνην Μωϋσέως τοῦ δοῦλου τοῦ θεοῦ is to be analysed. It is not found verbatim in the LXX of Ex 15 or Dt 32. In Ex 15:1 (LXX) we read: Τότε ἴσαν Μωυσῆς καὶ οἱ νισὶ Ἰσραήλ τὴν ὄρνην ταύτην... In Dt 31 and 32 (LXX) the verb ἔδω is not found. Instead, we read τὰ ἁμαρτα τῆς ὄρνης ταύτης (Dt 31:19, 30) and ἡ ὄρνη αὐτή (Dt 31:19, 21, 22; 32:44). In the direct context of the song in Dt 31 and 32 Moses is not called ὁ δοῦλος τοῦ θεοῦ, but in Neh 10:29 (2 Esdr 20:29) we read that the law was given in the hands of Μωυσῆ δοῦλον τοῦ θεοῦ. Dn 9:11 (Theod) calls Moses ὁ δοῦλος τοῦ θεοῦ. In Dn 9 and 10 (Theod) we find even more resemblances to Rv 15:3-4 (cf Alblas 1993:216). Dn 9 concentrates on the restoration of Jerusalem which makes one think that Rv 15 may also be hinting at the restoration of the spiritual Jerusalem because of the victory over the beast.

Some more references to the song of Moses (and Miriam) in Ex 15:1-18 are found in Rv 11:17b, 18: καὶ ἐβασιλεύσας. Καὶ τὰ ἔθνη ὃργισθησαν,... Compare that to Ex 15:11 (LXX): ἠκούσαν ἔθνη καὶ ὃργισθησαν (cf Du Rand 1994:27). It seems clear that no explicit quotations of Ex 15 in Rv 15 can be indicated. This does not mean that the content matter of Ex 15 is not to be found in the book of Revelation. The words in Rv 11:11 remind the reader of Ex 15:16: Καὶ φόβος μέγας ἐπέπεσαν ἐπὶ τοὺς θεωροῦντας αὐτοὺς (cf Harris 1988:64).

The second song of Moses in Dt 32 (LXX) contains traceable, even direct allusions to Rv 15:3-4 (cf Du Rand 1993:318). The clearest example without any doubt is found in comparing Rv 15:3 with Dt 32:4:

Rv 15:3

μεγάλα καὶ βασιλατά τὰ ἔργα σου,...
δίκαιοι καὶ ἀληθινοί αἱ ὁδοὶ σου,...
ἄτι μόνος ὅσιος,...

Dt 32:4

θεοὺς, ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ,
καὶ πάσαι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ κρίσεις δίκαιος καὶ ὅσιος Κύριος.

It is of importance to note that the same sequence of the words ἔργα, ὁδοὶ and ὅσιος occurs in both Dt 32:4 and Rv 15:3,4. That brings us to the
provisional conclusion that explicit references to Rv 15 are indeed to be found in Dt 32. This correlation is mirrored in the meaning. Dt 32 fits semantically into the framework of Rv 15:3-4, where the conquerors of the beast sing a doxology as a witness against their recent oppressors. The song of Moses in Dt 32 is contextualised within the framework of an ideological struggle (Harris 1988:173). Definite allusions to war motifs can be found in Dt 32 as well as in Rv 15. The same can be concluded concerning the song of Moses in Ex 15 which is a doxology in gratitude for the deliverance, in which war motifs are used. This ideological perspective prefigures the greater deliverance brought about by the Lamb (cf Mounce 1977:286). It is noteworthy that Ex 15 was sung on Sabbath evenings in the synagogue services to commemorate Israel’s deliverance (cf Brenner 1991:19). Moses triumphed over Pharaoh; the risen Jesus Christ over the world (Jn 16:33) and the faithful over the imperial cult, like the conquerors of the beast (Rv 17:14). The perspectives of liberation and restoration are also echoed in Tobit. The expression: ‘Great and marvellous are your deeds...’ (Rv 15:3) is also found in Tobit 12:22 where Tobit and Tobias praise the great deeds of God: τὰ ἐργα τὰ μεγάλα καὶ θαυμάστα τοῦ θεοῦ. In the next chapter, Tobit 13, Tobit prays for the return from exile and the restoration of Jerusalem. In this prayer God is not called King of the nations but King of the ages, the same as the alternative text-critical reading (αἰωνιόν) in Nestlé. The framework of restoration in Tobit is compatible with the roles played by Moses and the Lamb in the (new) exodus of God’s people. One cannot help but see indications hinting at the expectation of the new Jerusalem (cf Tobit 12:16-20).

2.2 The song of the Lamb

The hymn in Rv 15:3-4 is also called the song of the Lamb. The Lamb is carrying out God’s commitment to liberate his people. The word ἀρνίου for lamb refers to Christ 28 times in Revelation. The only other occurrence in the New Testament of ἀρνίου is once in John 21:15, where Jesus says to Peter: ‘Feed my lambs’ (δόσκε τὰ ἀρνία μου, cf Jeremias 1971:339).

It is worthwhile investigating the occurrence of ἀρνίου in the Septuagint, in order to gain some more valuable background information. The word occurs four times, namely in Psalm 114 (113):4, 6; Jeremiah 11:19 and Jeremiah 50 (27):45. In Ps 114 (113) the hills are referred to, skipping like lambs (NIV), and Jr 50:45 warns that the lambs of the Babylonians will be dragged away and their pasture completely destroyed.

The remaining occurrence in Jr 11:19 is remarkable if we accept that the LXX could have influenced the usage of ἀρνίου in Revelation. Jeremiah describes himself as ‘like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter’: ἐγὼ δὲ ὡς ἀρνίον ἄκακον ἀγάμενον τοῖς θύσιοια...
Furthermore, Jeremiah pleads with God to reveal his righteous deeds in verse 20:

\[ \text{Κυρίε κρίνων δίκαιων} \\
\text{δοκιμάζων νεφροίς και καρδίας,} \\
\text{όθεν τὴν παρά σου ἐκδίκησιν ἐξ αὐτῶν,} \\
\text{ὅτι πρὸς σὲ ἀπεκάλυψα τὸ δίκαιωμα μου} \]

This call for righteousness is repeated verbatim in Jr 20:12. God’s answer according to Rv 15:4 is more than conspicuous: ὅτι τὰ δίκαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν.

It recalls the cry of the slaughtered martyrs in Rv 6:9-11. Like Jeremiah they called out for justice and vindication. The resemblance between Jeremiah (LXX) and Revelation is theologically meaningful. It could also have effect on the usage of ὀρνίθων in Rv 15:3-4. The issue at stake is the personification of liberation, embodied in Jeremiah and the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. The conquerors of the beast are rejoicing because of the victory of the Lamb. In the same way Jeremiah praises God for delivering the poor from the oppression of the evildoers. Liberation comes through victory and the victories of Moses, Jeremiah and the Lamb are directed by the righteous God. Possible intertextual appropriation through textual tradition is proved among Rv 15, Jr 11, Ex 15 and Dt 32 (cf Bascom 1985:303).

Another possible allusion to Rv 15:3-4 comes from the Tosefta-Targum on 1 Sm 17 (Alblas 1993:227), in which the Aramaic word 'mr' is not used in the meaning 'word' but 'lamb'. Goliath called David a lamb and himself a lion and later a bear. He said that a lion and bear cannot be overpowered by a lamb but David differed from him. In this poetic part of the Tosefta-Targum two divergent histories are intertwined: the capturing of the Ark by the Philistines according to 1 Sm 4-7:1, as well as the brutal appearance of Goliath against the armies of Saul (1 Sm 17). The victory of the lamb David over the lion and bear Goliath is praised in this poetic fragment (cf Seow 1989:42; Laws 1988:37). The question arises whether this song of praise could have been the background for the doxological song of the Lamb in Rv 15:3-4. Furthermore, is the war between the Lamb and the beast (cf Rv 17:13,14) to be paralleled to the struggle between David and Goliath? The usage of the Aramaic 'mr' for lamb, referring to David in his struggle against Goliath, in this Tosefta-Targum, has awakened a new field of exegetical investigation.

The son of David, the Messiah, is associated with the title lamb in Revelation (cf Rv 5:5; 22:16). Further, the beast coming out of the sea (Rv 13:1) is compared to a lion and a bear, just like Goliath (Rv 13:2), according to the Tosefta-Targum on 1 Samuel 17. Commentaries are eager to trace the background for Rv 13:1-8 only back to Daniel 7 (cf Mounce 1977:252; Beasley-
Murray 1974:211) but the Goliath-model according to the Tosefta-Targum may be considered as possible comparable background as well.

This is probable if one sees the Targums as ancient synagogue sermon notes or even 'as formal renderings of a Hebrew Biblical text with specific key words or phrases added. These "coded" words or phrases represent a condensed form of Jewish oral tradition on the Biblical passage' (Bascom 1985:301). In other words, the so called three-stage textual development (Biblical- Targumic-Rabbinic) is traceable to the synagogue where the Old Testament (eg 1 Sm 17) was read in Hebrew, translated into Aramaic with sermon notes added and finally preached. An example will illustrate this: For the LXX the sea serpent (Ezk 29:3-5; 32:2-4) and Leviathan (Ps 74:13-14) are both known as dragons and both are identified with the snake of Gn 3:1. The interchangeability of terms in both the Masoretic Text and the LXX stresses the function of these beasts as personal manifestations of the evil powers. According to Targumic renderings such evil creatures manifest themselves during the Urzeit and Endzeit. The Apocrypha extend these ideas by separating even Leviathan, which is depicted as the female creature of the water (cf 2 Esdr 6:49-52), from Behemoth which is seen as the male monster from the dry land (cf Syr Bar 29:4). The further consequence is spelled out in the New Testament. In Rv 12:3,9,15,17 we read about the 'great red dragon...the ancient snake who is called the Devil and Satan...' and the beast that emerges from the sea (Rv 13:1-2). The narrator of Revelation wants to identify his dragon with the snake in Gn 3:1 which, according to his interpretation, is Satan. Instead of two serpents or dragons, like in the Targums and rabbinic literature, the evildoer is described by its function. The two beasts (Rv 12:3 and 13:1) are distinguished by their actions rather than by their characteristics (cf Bascom 1985:308). The same could have happened with the Goliath model.

The number six (6) plays an interesting and even a significant role in the Goliath tradition. 1 Samuel 17:4 and 7 describes his length as six cubits and a span and states that his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. In 2 Sm 21:15-22 it is mentioned that this man of great stature had six fingers on each hand and six toes on every foot. Even the song of praise by David after slaying Goliath (2 Sm 22) helps us to see remarkable similarities between the Goliath (beast) and David (lamb) battle and the description of the war between the Lamb and the beast (cf Rv 13; 17:14). The celebration of victory for the faithful and the Lamb resembles David's victory song in 2 Sm 22. It is further mentioned in Rv 13:3, 14 that the beast's heads 'seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed'. According to the Goliath story, David struck Goliath with a stone on his forehead, the stone sank in with the result that Goliath fell flat on his face on the ground (cf 1 Sm 5:3,4).
The resemblances are striking. The associations between Goliath the Gatite and the beast in Rv 13, whose number was 666, are not accidental. In one of the interesting versions of David’s victory over Goliath, according to Sirach 47:4-6, it is stated that David played with lions and bears during his youth and that after his victory over Goliath his people gave him a crown of honour. The conqueror of the beast has many crowns according to Rv 19:12. According to 1 Maccabees 4:30 Judas prayed to God to give him victory over Lysias just like David overpowered Goliath. And after the victory the whole army went to Mount Zion to sing praise songs with harps and cithers. We find the same scheme and vocabulary in Rv 14:1-5. The 144 000 gathered on Mount Zion to sing with harps a new song to celebrate the victory of the Lamb. The role of the Lamb in Rv 14 is more or less parallel to the role of David, according to Judas’ prayer in 1 Maccabees 4:30.

3 THE FRAMEWORK OF THE WAR AND EXODUS THEMES

The struggle between Goliath and David in Targumic and rabbinic literature serves as appropriate background for the struggle between the beast and the Lamb. It fits into the messianic war theme of Revelation. The Messiah, a descendent of David, the anointed king by God, is the military leader of his people. He is anointed to battle against the oppressors to liberate his people and to establish the rule and kingdom of God. In early Christianity Jesus is identified with the Davidic Messiah. In the reinterpretation of these Jewish traditions in Revelation, Jesus as Messiah does not conquer by military battle through national Israel but through the international people of God. Linking the David tradition with the lamb as Messiah was widely accepted. Christ’s self-declaration in Rv 22:16 illustrates this point: ‘I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star’. Allusions to Ps 2 also illumines the Messiah as God’s Son whom He sets as king on Mount Zion to overcome the rebellious nations. The Messiah’s army shares in his victory on Mount Zion. The image of conquering also has militaristic connotations. The Messiah has conquered in his death and resurrection; his followers conquer in the Endzeit and He will finally conquer at the parousia. It is clear that God’s kingdom is established through the process of Messianic war, as described in Revelation.

Another key theme in Revelation is built around the eschatological exodus motif. Through the exodus God liberated his people from oppression in Egypt and led them to their own land by destroying the oppressors in war.
This has become a model for prophetic and apocalyptic salvation in future (cf Bauckham 1993:70). According to Revelation the Lamb, being sacrificed (cf Rv 5:9-10) figures as the central image in the exodus motif. By his blood the Lamb has ransomed a people and made them a kingdom and priests. This echoes the known words of the Sinai covenant in Ex 19:5-6 through which God made the people liberated from Egypt his own people. We should keep in mind that the Passover lamb played no role in Jewish expectations of a new exodus (Bauckham 1993a:71). By way of interpretation, with reference to Rv 5:6,9, John alludes also to Isaiah 53:7 to obtain the connection with the exodus language of Deutero-Isaiah.

Rv 15:2-4 sketches the Christian martyrs, the people of the new exodus, beside the heavenly 'Red Sea', singing a song of praise to God (cf Boring 1986:264). This reminds one of Moses and the people of Israel after their liberation from Pharaoh (Ex 15). By way of conclusion, it can be said that the song in Rv 15 functions to combine the war and exodus perspectives in Revelation. After the background war of David and Goliath, paralleled by the struggle between the Lamb and the beast, the new people of God, proclaiming his kingdom through song, are entering the new exodus of the established kingdom of God on earth. Functioning as the Lamb, the war and exodus motives are integrated to sketch God's kingship on earth as it is in heaven.

WORKS CONSULTED


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