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Lotta Valve

Åbo Akademi University

The Old Testament Background of the Two Witnesses in Revelation 11:3–13

I Introduction

The description of "the two witnesses" in Revelation 11 has drawn to itself considerable scholarly attention during many decades, especially because scholars have been interested to chart the traditions behind this account. The importance of the text is above all tied with its peculiar eschatology, and many commentators suspect that older Jewish material very probably lurk in the background of the story. The parallels with pseudepigraphic writings have been in special focus in research, beginning with Wilhelm Bousset's work some 120 years ago[1] and continued very vividly at least to the 1970s.[2] Modern scholars are usually of the opinion that the description of the witnesses points to Elijah and Moses, whereas a virtually unanimous patristic tradition mentions Elijah and Enoch, in accordance with the pseudepigraphic texts where these two past-time heroes appear together. There are, however, a few dissenting voices in the early patristic writings, which deserve mention. It appears rather evident that one of the witnesses must allude to Elijah; but the identity of the other one is not quite so clear. In this paper, I hope to give some new insights to this topic.

In my short contribution, I thus present the most common solutions to certain problems in the text, above all concerning the identity of the witnesses, and highlight a few further issues which I think need reconsideration. David Aune has in his monumental three-volume commentary on the Book of Revelation (1998) very exhaustively examined this text, its grammatical problems, manuscript variants and patristic commentaries, as well as discussed its parallels and possible tradition-historical background.[3] In my survey into the research history of this chapter, I have not encountered any more recent research that would bring significant new perspectives to the subject; and therefore, I will mostly comment on Aune's commentary and the patristic discussion (that he also refers to), adding references

[1] Wilhelm Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judenthums des neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1895) = *The Antichrist Legend: A Chapter in Christian and Jewish Folklore* (London: Hutchinson 1896).

[2] E.g. Richard Bauckham, "The Martyrdom of Enoch and Elijah: Jewish or Christian?" *JBL* 95 (1976) 447–458; Matthew Black, "The 'Two Witnesses' of Rev. 11:3f. in Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Tradition," in: E. Bammel, C. K. Barrett & W. D. Davies (eds.), *Donum Gentilicium: New Testament Studies in Honour of David Daube*, Oxford: Clarendon 1978, 227–237.

[3] David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B, Nashville: Thomas Nelson 1998, 575–632.

to a few other works such as the perceptive commentaries of Richard Bauckham.[4] If someone knows new research relevant to the subject, I would be most grateful! This said, I shall now turn to the text and its specific problems. I first examine the indications about the identity of one witness as Elijah, which the text itself instantly offers, and then discuss the identity of the other witness. In chapter III, I highlight some further aspects of the OT background and discuss how the growth of the tradition should be viewed.[5] Finally, I sum up my thoughts.

II Textual clues about the identity of the witness(es) as "Elijah regressus"

Verse 11:3

The two witnesses are introduced quite abruptly in 11:3, and many scholars posit that verses 1–2 (concerning the commandment to measure the temple, and thus probably dependent on Ezekiel 40–42) do not really belong together with the account about the witnesses beginning at verse 3. According to Aune's opinion, which I deem quite reasonable, both verses 1–2 and 3–13 include traditional Jewish material, tied together by the mention of the 1260 days / 42 months.[6] The time span is also equal to 3,5 years, and according to the tradition recounted in Luke 4:25 and James 5:17, this was the time which the drought caused by Elijah lasted, even though the period mentioned in 1 Kings 18:1 was three years (or slightly less, as God's word came to Elijah "in the third year"). It is thus probable that John[7] knows the same tradition which Luke and James mention, and that this time span should be taken as a hint at Elijah.

As Aune points out, the articular phrase τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσίν μου seems to suggest that the reader is supposed to know who the two witnesses are.[8] Indeed, the whole phrasing in Rev 11:3–13 suggests to an attentive reader that traditional material is alluded to.[9] Nevertheless, the author may simultaneously be introducing some new elements when paraphrasing an allegedly well-known background story. Even though the account in Revelation is cast in prose, it is not, in content, altogether different from the poetic allusions to the supposedly well-known but unnamed figures of past times in Wisdom 10, or to the

[4] E.g. *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1993).
[5] My initial intention when proposing this paper was to examine also the question whether the parallels in for example the pseudepigrapha are relevant for understanding Revelation 11:3–13. I however soon realized that a careful examination of pseudepigraphic and patristic material related to the question, and above all the treatment of the issue about the relative chronology and Jewish and/or Christian character of the pseudepigraphic texts, would have led this paper too far afield. At a later date, I hope to be able to address the issue about the growth of the traditions which are reflected in Rev 11:3–13. (For such a methodology, see James Kugel's extensive essay about the development of Levi traditions in Second Temple Jewish literature, "Levi's Elevation to the Priesthood in Second Temple Writings," *HTR* 86 (1993) 1–64.)
[6] Aune, *Revelation*, 598, 602–603, 610–611.
[7] I use this conventional designation for the author of Revelation.
[8] Aune, *Revelation*, 579, 599, 610.
[9] Notice also the articular reference to τὸ θηρίον "the beast" in verse 7; cf. Aune, *Revelation*, 616.

named figures in Sirach's *Laus Patrum* (ch. 44–50). In both these texts, traditional material is surely alluded to, but arranged in a new fashion according to the authors' stylistic preferences. This same notion probably applies to Rev 11:3–13 (and, indeed, perhaps to the whole Book of Revelation).

That the witnesses are wearing sackcloth suggests their connection to mourning and/or penitence (e.g. Joel 1:13; Jonah 3:5–6). Sackcloth may, as perhaps in the case of Isaiah 20:2, probably also be a prophet's garment, when he by his own example exhorts people to mourning and repentance. It has however nothing to do with Elijah's mantle, which was of skin, so the garment itself shows no direct connection to Elijah.

Verse 11:5

It is stated of the witnesses that "fire comes from their mouth and consumes their foes" (πῦρ ἐκπορεύεται ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτῶν καὶ κατεσθίει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτῶν). This is a detail which can very well be connected to Elijah. In the very beginning of Sirach's *Laus* of Elijah, it is said (48:1):

> καὶ ἀνέστη Ηλιας προφήτης ὡς πῦρ καὶ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ ὡς λαμπὰς ἐκαίετο
>
> Then Elijah rose, a prophet like fire, and his word burned like a torch.

It is, in itself, rather common that prophets are somehow connected with the theme of fire, as a metaphor of the words of doom that they utter. In Jer 5:14 the Lord announces an oracle to Jeremiah:

> ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ δέδωκα τοὺς λόγους μου είς τὸ στόμα σου πῦρ καὶ τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον ξύλα καὶ καταφάγεται αὐτούς
> I am putting my words into your mouth as fire, and this people shall be firewood, which it will consume."[10]

It is nevertheless conceivable that Elijah, due to his ability to call down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:38), was associated with fire more than any other prophet and therefore, that John's intention was that his readers should associate verse 5 with Elijah. The parallel in Jer 5:14 is interesting, though, as some patristic interpreters associated the witnesses of Revelation 11 with Elijah and Jeremiah.[11] I deem as conceivable that this idea emerged precisely from a diligent *gezera shava* reading of these LXX and NT texts by these church fathers, even though there might have been other contributing factors as well.

Verses 11:6, 10

That the witnesses "have authority to shut the sky, so that no rain may fall" (οὗτοι ἔχουσιν τὴν ἐξουσίαν κλεῖσαι τὸν ούρανόν, ἵνα μὴ ὑετὸς βρέχῃ) has been regarded as the clearest hint at Elijah in the passage.

[10] Cf. Aune, *Revelation*, 612.

[11] Victorinus of Petovium: "Many think that either Elisha or Moses was with Elijah. However, both of these died. However, the death of Jeremiah was never discovered. Our ancients have handed over the opinion that [the other witness] was in every respect Jeremiah." (*Commentary on the Apocalypse* 11.3; the translation is from William C. Weinrich [ed.], *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament XII, Revelation*, InterVarsity Press 2005, 158. Victorinus then goes on to quote and explain Jer. 1:5 [!] as proof text. Compare Aune, *Revelation*, 600–601.)

Similarly, that the "two prophets had been a torment to the inhabitants of the earth" (οἱ δύο προφῆται ἐβασάνισαν τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) can be connected with this same notion about Elijah as "the troubler of Israel" (1 Kings 18:17). The rejoicing people in 11:10 are adversaries of the two witnesses, as were Ahab and Jezebel for Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 21:20).

Verse 11:12

The two witnesses go to heaven in a cloud (ἀνέβησαν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ), whereas Elijah is taken to heaven in a whirlwind (ἀνελήμφθη Ηλιου ἐν συσσεισμῷ ὡς εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, 2 Kings 2:11). The phrases are, though, succinctly similar so that readers, both ancient and modern, have seen a connection to Elijah's ascension in Revelation11:2.

III Textual clues about the identity of the witness(es) as "Moses or Elisha redivivi/regressi"

Verse 11:4: Lampstands and olive trees

The phrase in 11:4 "These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth" (οὗτοί εἰσιν αἱ δύο ἐλαῖαι καὶ αἱ δύο λυχνίαι αἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου τῆς γῆς ἑστῶτες) defines the two witnesses more closely and may even be an editorial gloss explaining an opinion on who they are.[12] As the topic of my paper, the OT background of the witnesses, is concerned, this phrase is of special importance because of the clear reference to Zechariah 4, especially verse 14. But should this reference be taken to mean that the two witnesses are Zerubbabel and Joshua *redivivi*? Some commentators have suggested this option and thus seen some remote reminiscence to the notion of a priestly and royal Messiah character in the two witnesses of Revelation 11.[13] In my opinion, however, this cannot be the intended meaning in so late a text as Revelation. I believe it is much more probable that the prophecy in Zechariah 4 had, by the time when the Book of Revelation was written, already been reinterpreted in some ways for several centuries after the hope for a Davidic restoration had ceased, and the prophecy had thus been detached from its original reference. And I think that Rev 11:4 offers a rather clear clue of one of the ways in which the two characters in Zechariah 4 possibly had been (re-)interpreted.[14]

The quotation above from Sir 48:1 shows that Elijah was associated with fire and light. The word used for Elijah's words there is λαμπάς "torch," but the same word sometimes also denotes a light, lantern, or lamp; so the semantic range is partly overlapping with the word used in Rev 11:4, λυχνία "lampstand"; and in the LXX of Zech 4:2, also the word λύχνος "lamp" is used (for the lamps that are on the

[12] Thus Aune, *Revelation*, 593.
[13] See the summary of scholarship in Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 273 n. 54.
[14] It is, however, also possible (as always) that the interpretation which I here propose is a novelty created by John. Because of the traditional and perhaps explicatory character of Rev 11:4, I however deem this option as improbable.

lampstands). Therefore, it is conceivable that an ancient interpreter might have thought about Elijah in this instance. But what about the other symbol in Zechariah and Revelation, the ἐλαία "olive tree"?

In Zechariah 4, both Zerubbabel and Joshua are designated with same appellatives, so that no distinction is actually made between them. Both are "olive trees" (4:3, 11) and "sons of oil" (4:14 in the Hebrew text – "sons of richness" in the Greek text), and it is commonly stated that this symbolism is due to the custom that both high priests and kings were anointed with oil (and the symbolism is essentially explained in Zech 4:14 MT). It is rather interesting that neither in Revelation 11, a distinction is actually made between the two witnesses: the description of them and their mission and fate are identical.[15] Therefore, it may be inaccurate to even say that they are somehow Elijah and Moses *regressi* and thus two separate persons; rather, according to the text, the two characters are identical and incorporate traits of both Elijah and Moses.

Elijah could have plausibly been associated with olive oil – not that he himself would have been anointed, but that he was commissioned to anoint both Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha (1 Kings 19:15–16), and in addition, that he provided the poor widow of Zarephath with oil (1 Kings 17:16). The symbolism of an *olive tree* suits actually much better a person who provides *others* with oil than a person who is anointed, and I deem it probable than an ancient exegete (reinterpreting Zechariah's prophecy) reasoned precisely this way. Moses, however, was never associated with any oil. On the other hand, Elijah's successor Elisha could be related with oil in a similar vein as Elijah. He was probably anointed by Elijah (even though this is not explicitly stated in the 1–2 Kings story), and he (or rather, his disciple by his commission) anointed Jehu (2 Kings 9); and, as the perhaps most significant detail, also Elisha provided a poor widow with oil, and more so than his master Elijah (2 Kings 4:1–7). An additional interesting possibility, if the proposed interpretation originated in Greek (or, indeed, is a novelty created by John), is that the phrase αἱ δύο ἐλαῖαι may have been connected with Elijah's and Elisha's names (Ἠλίας and Ἐλισαῖος; Elijah's name usually drops the s-element in an inflected state). True, the correspondence is not exact, but may have been sufficient for a Greek-speaker uninterested of the exact form and etymology of the names.[16]

That the two olive trees and lampstands "stand before the Lord of the earth" (αἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου τῆς γῆς ἑστῶτες) is an allusion to aforementioned Zech 4:14, οἱ δύο υἱοὶ τῆς πιότητος παρεστήκασιν τῷ κυρίῳ πάσης τῆς γῆς. As J. M. Ford points out in his commentary on Revelation, the phrase is often used in the Deuteronomistic account of Elijah and Elisha in the sense of "serve."[17] Especially Elijah's words to Ahab upon his introduction on the scene in 1 Kings 17:1 have probably been quite paradigmatic: "As the

[15] This point is made emphatically by Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 275–276).
[16] A somewhat comparable case is how the fruit of Paradise was in the Latin Middle Ages perceived as an apple, due to the homonymous words *malum* "bad" and *malum* "apple."
[17] J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (AB 38, New York: Doubleday 1975) 171.

Lord lives, The God of Israel before whom I stand, there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding." He uses a similar phrase about himself "standing before the Lord" again at 18:15, whereas Elisha uses the same formulation about himself in 2 Kings 3:14 and 5:16.

Verse 11:6: Water, blood and plagues

The second half of Rev 11:6 has been one of the strongest arguments for seeing the other witness as Moses: "They have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire." These characterizations have been perceived as pointing towards the ten plagues of Exodus, specifically to the first one of turning the water of the Nile into blood (Exod 7:19–24).

However, the Greek text can also be understood as follows, ἐξουσίαν ἔχουσιν ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων στρέφειν αὐτὰ εἰς αἷμα, "They have authority over the waters – to turn them into blood – ." Thus, the phrase can be taken to mean that the two witnesses have authority over the waters; specifically, to turn them into blood, but perhaps also otherwise. This notion applies well to Moses, as he several times in the Exodus narrative showed his (or God's) superiority over the waters, dividing the waters of the Sea of Reeds (Exod 14:21), making the bitter water of Marah drinkable (Exod 15:23–25) and letting out water from the rock at Meribah (Num 20:5–13). But incidentally,[18] also Elijah and Elisha displayed a somewhat similar power over the waters: both prophets were able to divide the waters of the Jordan (2 Kings 2:8, 14). In addition, Elisha, like Moses, healed the bitter waters (of Jericho, 2 Kings 19–22), filled the wadi with water (2 Kings 3:16–20) and made this water appear red as blood (2 Kings 3:22–23). Later, he still made the ax head float on the surface of the Jordan (2 Kings 6:6) and cured Naaman by commanding him to bathe in the Jordan (2 Kings 5). Thus, it can almost be said that of these three characters, Elisha was apparently the one who had greatest "authority over the waters."

The other notion, that the witnesses πατάξαι τὴν γῆν ἐν πάσῃ πληγῇ ὁσάκις ἐὰν θελήσωσιν "[have authority] to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they desire," can also be connected to Elijah and Elisha. The link is not as explicit as with Moses and the plagues leading to the Exodus, where the exact word πληγή is used. In the 1–2 Kings stories both Elijah and Elisha nevertheless have the ability to punish the wicked with some kind of plagues: in Elijah's case, with the drought; in Elisha's case, with smaller but several incidents, as when he cursed the young boys so that the bears tore them (2 Kings 2:24), or struck dishonest Gehazi with leprosy (2 Kings 5:27). In addition, the very same phrase as in Rev 11:6 is used in Elisha's final command to King Joash of Israel to "strike the earth" (with the arrows): πάταξον εἰς τὴν γῆν (2 Kings 13:18).

[18] I am aware of that the parallels are probably not at all incidental from a tradition-historical point of view. However, the question of the relationship between the Moses, Elijah and Elisha cycles in a tradition-historical and Deuteronomistic perspective is difficult and goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusion

The short survey above indicates that the two witnesses bear traits of both Moses, Elijah, and Elisha. It may be that the description of them is intentionally vague, to allow multiple interpretations. The patristic exegesis shows that Elijah, Elisha, Moses, and Jeremiah were sometimes associated with the witnesses. These were the identifications known by Victorinus of Petovium (ca 250–303). The main opinion of the church fathers, at least from the fourth century onwards, was nevertheless that the witnesses were Enoch and Elijah, and this opinion is usually expressed as if it were common knowledge and needed no elaboration.[19] In my understanding, this was an alternative (perhaps slightly later?) interpretation, which emerged partly because of the general popularity of the Enoch literature, and probably partly because of the simple textual "fact" that Enoch and Elijah were the two OT persons who escaped death. In my view, however, Moses, Elijah, and Elisha were the OT personages whom John wanted to refer to in his text. This was also the opinion of the "many" according to Victorinus.

Next, I shall thus illustrate a possible scenario for the emergence of the traditions that are reflected in Revelation 11. This final subchapter of my paper becomes, of necessity, rather sketchy. I have collected more pieces of proof texts to substantiate my case, but time and space do not allow me to explicate the thesis in more detail now. (Some of this material I have paraphrased in the footnotes.) I hope to be able to rework this paper into a more coherent article later, or incorporate my findings into a book where I discuss the wider NT reception of Elijah and Elisha traditions.[20]

IV Possible development of the tradition from the OT to Revelation

I want to first summarize my general line of argumentation: My basic claim concerning the interpretative strategies employed by ancient exegetes, for which I have argued e.g. in my dissertation, is that the *gezera shava* is one of the earliest exegetical techniques. The term denotes an interpretation based on the occurrence of identical words in two (or more) texts in Scripture. Moreover, I argue that the *gezera shava* has often been employed in such a way that the exact forms in the consonantal text in the Hebrew Bible are central for determining the "interdependence" of texts in the eyes of an ancient exegete; often quite regardless of the context. They viewed the consonantal text as sacred, and it appears that one principal component in its sanctity was that it was not easily exhausted by only one reading,

[19] Thus, e.g. Pseudo-Hippolytus, *On the End of the World, the Antichrist and the Second Coming* 21. The eschatological return of Enoch and Elijah, though without a reference to Revelation 11, is found also e.g. in the *Apocalypse of Peter* (2:11–13), Tertullian (*Treatise on the Soul* 50), Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer*. 5.5.1), and Hippolytus of Rome (*Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 43, 46–47; *Commentary on Daniel* 35, 50); for a more comprehensive list, see Aune, *Revelation*, 599–600.

[20] My three-year postdoc project is entitled "Exegetical Background for the Emergence of the Expectation of a Prophetic Messiah Character in Early Judaism and Its Impact on Nascent Christianity and Islam," and during the first year of the project, I have focused much on Elijah and Elisha traditions in the New Testament.

but allowed multiple interpretations based on diligent study of the text. Therefore, the Masoretic vocalization represents only one reading, which perhaps gained the widest support and became "fixed." Scholars who wish to understand the mindset of ancient interpreters should thus detach themselves from the Masoretic vowels and study the consonantal text in its own right. As a consequence, many interpretations that for modern eyes seem rather nonsensical were established over centuries, because homonymous words were often read in an alternative way.[21] I am aware of that not all scholars buy this argument, as it runs quite contrary to modern Western logic; but I think that for example James Kugel has convincingly enough demonstrated that this indeed was how ancient exegetes reasoned. He has been able to demonstrate the exegetical origins of several curious traditions.[22]

I believe that the primary background for the evident "blurring" of Elijah, Elisha, and Moses in Rev 11:3–13 is the probably widely studied and interpreted prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15–22, about the prophet who is to be "like Moses." It is customary to interpret this prophecy with links to the Deuteronomistic traditions about Elijah; but as I discussed above, there are also several very clear links between Moses and Elisha. It was probably also believed that the place where Moses died and was buried, Elijah was taken up, and Elisha was buried, was the same spot, linking these three characters together.[23] Deut 18:15 goes, in the Hebrew text, as follows,

נביא מקרבך מאחיך כמני יקים לך יהוה אלהיך אליו תשמעון

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself; him shall you heed.

Hence, in a certain sense, Elijah and Elisha incorporated traits of this "New Moses" figure, and thus the interpretation of this prophecy ties these three ancient figures together.[24]

The next phase in this chain of interpretation and exegesis was probably the curious connection between Second Isaiah's "Servant" and Elijah; an idea which is visible in Ben Sira's eulogy of Elijah (48:10) and which I have earlier examined in detail.[25] I concluded that the primary impetus for the emergence of this tradition was an innovative *gezera shava* reading of Isa 42:19, a verse that includes the rare word *mal'akî*, which, as I argued, had already earlier become strongly associated with Elijah under the influence of Malachi 3:1, 23. Isa 42:19, a reproach of the blind-and-deaf, stiff-necked Israel, was thus read in a completely new fashion. I proposed several alternative readings, which all may indeed

[21] See Lotta Valve, *Early Modes of Exegesis: Ideal Figures in Malachi as a Test Case* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press 2014), esp. 28–38.
[22] See, for, example, James L. Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob: Ancient Interpretations of the Biblical Story of Jacob and his Children*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006.
[23] Avigdor Shinan & Yair Zakovitch, *From Gods to God: How the Bible Debunked, Suppressed, or Changed Ancient Myths & Legends*, Philadelphia: JPS 2012 (2004), 185.
[24] A thought which however needs further elaboration is also that because one of the Greek variants for Elijah's name is Ηλιου, a Greek-speaking interpreter who was sufficiently familiar with the Hebrew text and alphabet might even had read the word אליו in Deut 18:15 as a reference to Elijah.
[25] Valve, *Early Modes of Exegesis*, 103–114.

have played a role in later reception; but for the ideas reflected in Revelation 11, the following interpretation sounds as the most plausible:

מי עור כי אם עבדי וחרש כמלאכי אשלח מי עור כמשלם ועור כעבד יהוה

Who rose/woke up if not my Servant and plowed/remained silent like my Messenger whom I shall send? Who rose/woke up like **those who are like them**, or rose/woke up as the Servant of the Lord?

The eponymous "Servant of the Lord" in the Deuteronomistic language was of course Moses, as was recognized as early as in Malachi 3:22 (3:24/4:6 LXX). However, also Elijah calls himself "your [the Lord's] servant" in 1 Kings 18:36 and is called "servant of the Lord" in 2 Kings 9:36, 10:10.

The "other character, the "my-Messenger-to-be-sent" was presumably Elijah; but perhaps some ancient exegetes reasoned that he was rather Elisha, due to the statement in 1 Kings 19:19 that Elisha was "plowing" (חרש) upon his introduction on the scene. (This same Hebrew word is not explicitly used in relation to Elijah, even though he "remains silent" e.g. in 1 Kings 19:13.) The other clear thematic links between Moses and Elisha may have reinforced this reasoning. Finally, the notoriously difficult word משלם may have been interpreted in the light of the probably parallel usage in Job 41:25 משלו: "as their equal" or the like.[26] Thus, some person/s who were expected to be like Moses, Elijah, and Elisha were also expected to somehow "rise" or "wake up." Perhaps they were thought to first "rise" in the meaning of "emerge" and then "rise again" in the sense of wake up or be resurrected?[27] I suspect that this interpretation has been one central ingredient in the reasoning, which led to the creation of the rather complex tradition that is reflected in Revelation 11:3–13.[28] There are probably still more contributing texts and factors leading to its emergence, but for now, I leave aside the further examination of the story.

[26] Perhaps partly because of this instance of *gezera shava*, but probably also because of inference from content (*hekkesh*), it indeed appears that the description of Leviathan in Job 40:15–41:26 was interpreted by some ancient exegetes as referring to Elijah and/or Elisha! (These ancient exegetes may have included e.g. the sources used by Ben Sira, who exalts Elijah and especially Elisha into a "semi-divine" status using partly similar language as is found in the description of Leviathan in Job 40–41.) The beast's ability to restrain the flow of the Jordan is mentioned in 40:23, the fire coming out of his mouth is described in 41:11–13 (cf. Rev 11:5), and his "sovereignty over the waters" is generally emphasized (esp. 41:26 LXX). Details in the Septuagint translation could give still further clues supporting this connection. However, because the relationship between the MT and LXX of Job is highly complicated and all more so towards the end of the book, this issue would require a full treatment in another article. I suspect that the Old Greek of Job generally reflects in many parts deliberate midrashic interpretations, rather than misreading of the admittedly very difficult Hebrew text.

[27] As regards the development of the tradition, it may be worth noting that in *LAB* 48 (about Phinehas-Elijah), the sequence of events is slightly simpler than in Rev 11:3–13, whereas in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, it is more complex than in Revelation. Is it possible that some ancient interpreters thought that the number of the "risings" (3) in Isa 42:19 was a significant detail? In some Isaiah manuscripts, the "risings" are only two in number, as the parallelism actually requires the repetition of the word חרש in 42:19bβ.

[28] Influence of early exegesis of Isa 42:19 can be found in surprising occasions. For example *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* chapter 33, entitled Elisha and the Shunamite woman, develops into a discussion on general resurrection but involves also the exhortation to learn *from* the example of noble men, e.g. *Shallum* ben Tikva (משלם) who provided the thirsty with water at the gate of the city. This tradition, in my judgment, must go back to another effort to make some sense of the obscure phrase מי עור כמשלם. Still another rabbinic tradition relates that this very same Shallum was the man thrown into Elisha's grave (2 Kings 13:21). This claim, again, may be another interpretation of the same difficult phrase and a hint at the existence of a tradition (which is probably evidenced by Ben Sira 48:13b, even though many scholars like to emend the text in light of the Greek version) that the one resuscitated was

V Conclusions

In this paper, I have presented some initial thoughts regarding the identity and the Old Testament background of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3–13. I argued that John's intention was probably to present them in terms of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, and I also suggested, as did David Aune, that John possibly was dependent on traditional Jewish material in this story. Because the witnesses are "two prophets" (Rev 11:10) whose characteristics, mission and fate are identical, I deem as probable that the primary reference is to Elijah and Elisha, who were understood to be the "prophet like Moses" of Deut 18:15 and who also otherwise are often mentioned together, both in 1–2 Kings and in reception history.

As I stated above, this paper is only a preliminary effort to untangle certain long-standing tangles in the complex web of intertextual reading strategies employed by the ancient exegetes. Extensive brushing is certainly still needed, but my hope is that one day, the tangles will fall out at least slightly straighter as regards the two witnesses, their prehistory and reception history. It has become clear for me that much is still to be found in this text.

indeed Elisha, not the other corpse. (Both the MT and the LXX, when read literally, are in fact rather ambivalent on this matter; see Shinan & Zakovitch, *From Gods to God*, 185–186).