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Roger Gryson, ed., *Tyconii Afri Expositio Apocalypseos*. Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 107A. Turnhout: Brepols, 2011. Pp. 386. \$341, cloth.

For decades scholars of early Christianity have awaited a reconstruction of Tyconius of Carthage's *Exposition of the Apocalypse* from the late fourth century; and Gryson's edition in the Corpus Christianorum Series Latina accomplished just that. After 102 pages of introductory material in French, pages 103-228 contain the Latin commentary from Rev 1:12-22:20. The last third of the volume contains Gryson's notes, a Scripture index, and an edition of the fragments of that commentary found in a manuscript at Turin. This review will examine the reconstruction of the commentary, discuss the interpretation of the Book of Revelation by Tyconius, and suggest questions for further research.

A layman from Donatist North Africa, Tyconius wrote the commentary about the year 380. Commentators of later centuries widely but cautiously used it as a reference for interpreting the mysterious visions contained in the Apocalypse. Unfortunately, like many biblical commentaries of the patristic age, it did not survive. Fragments of it were found in manuscripts in Budapest and Turin, but they contained only a portion of the commentary and the latter showed evidence of interpolation. However, commentators on the Apocalypse in the sixth through eighth centuries, such as Caesarius of Arles, Primasius of Hadrumetum, the Venerable Bede, and Beatus of Liebana, quoted Tyconius' commentary so frequently that patristic scholars over the last half century—including Eugenio Romero-Pose, Gerald Bonner, and Kenneth Steinhauser—have proposed the possibility of a fairly complete reconstruction of it. In 1987 Steinhauser (*Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius*, 267-316) created, up to that point, the most complete verse by verse guide for its reconstruction, showing where Tyconius' comments on the Apocalypse could be found in the various early medieval commentaries. Since then, nearly all of the early medieval commentaries that contain fragments of Tyconius have been critically edited, several by Gryson himself, further enhancing the accuracy of such a project. In the 1990s Romero-Pose was slated to provide an edition of a reconstructed commentary of Tyconius for Corpus Christianorum, but passed away before accomplishing that Herculean task, now completed by Gryson.

In addition to the aforementioned commentaries Gryson also used for his reconstruction, the commentaries on the Apocalypse by Cassiodorus, pseudo-Jerome, Ambrose Autpert, Theodulph of Orleans, the so-called *Reference Bible*, and an unedited gloss on the Apocalypse found in a tenth-century manuscript at Cambridge. In a 1953 article, Ildefonso Gomez mentioned that the Apocalypse commentary in PL 100 attributed to Alcuin, and the homilies on the Apocalypse by Smaragdus in PL 102, utilized Tyconius. However, Gryson does not seem to have used them. Also, according to Gryson, Tyconius' comments on Rev 1:1-11 were not able to be reconstructed. This differs from Steinhauser, who thought Tyconius' comments on Rev 1:9 could be found in Bede and Beatus.

A recent dissertation by David Robinson entitled “The Mystic Rules of Scripture: Tyconius of Carthage’s Keys and Windows to the Apocalypse” (Toronto: University of Saint Michael’s College, 2010) argued that when Tyconius commented upon the Apocalypse he applied all seven rules of biblical interpretation contained in his *Liber regularum*. Therefore, I will not reiterate those rules and their application to the commentary, but rather provide a few observations concerning Tyconius’ method of interpretation.

One of the most glaring features of Tyconius’ commentary is recapitulation. As early as 260, Victorinus of Pettua recommended that the reader of the Apocalypse not look for temporal order in the visions. John, he concluded, after briefly describing something, often returned to that subject and repeated it in more detail or from a different perspective. Tyconius also saw the visions recapitulating, including those visions symbolizing an end-time persecution of Antichrist (on 15:1), a time of future peace (on 18:1), and the Last Judgment (on 20:11). There is much to commend about Tyconius’ observation of such repetition in the Book of Revelation. For, if the visions in Revelation are viewed as progressing chronologically, one can easily see in that biblical book three battles between Christ and Antichrist (from Chapters 16, 19, & 20), and four Second Comings of Christ for the Last Judgment (in Chapters 6, 11, 19, & 20).

Tyconius often used the analogy of Scripture principle, which says that other more clear passages of the Bible can help shed light upon the obscure ones. For example, on why the saints receive “a new name which no one knows except the one who receives it” (2:17), Tyconius brought to bear Matt 13:11—*To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom, but to them it has not been given*. On 3:7 where Christ is described as one “who opens and no one shuts, shuts and no one opens” Tyconius cited Luke 13:27, which informs us that the Lord will shut the door to the kingdom on hypocrites saying: *I do not know where you are from. Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity*. The ascension of the two witnesses (11:12) he saw as a symbol of the ascension of the church in 1 Thess 4:17; and the binding of the dragon in 20:2 he believed signifies the “binding of the strong man” (Matt 12:29) that occurred at the first coming of Christ.

Tyconius explained that John had used a synecdoche—a part for a whole—in his comments on 6:13; 11:13; 13:7; and 20:2. Sometimes Tyconius expressed that a vision had a double fulfillment. For example, the 1260 days signify for him both the whole time from the Lord’s passion to the end of the world and the time of future peace. Sometimes he provides two acceptable interpretations of a passage, such as on “the crown of twelve stars” (12:1), which he thought could refer to either the twelve apostles or the twelve tribes of Israel. However, giving several explanations for one passage is rare for Tyconius in comparison to how often the early medieval Apocalypse commentaries give multiple interpretations of certain phrases. Sometimes, but not very often, Tyconius appealed to the Greek. His old Latin version of the Apocalypse had the number of the beast in 13:18 as 616. The three Greek letters which make up the number, he said, are an imitation of the “Chi-Rho” monogram for Christ. Such adoption of the sacred name he understood as part of Antichrist’s attempt at equality with God.

In several places Tyconius made application from the visions of the Apocalypse to the situation he faced in Roman North Africa (on 3:10; 6:8; 9:10, 14; 10:11; 14:5, 7). According to him, Africa in his time had seen an “abomination of desolation” as well as deaths by sword, famine, and beasts, probably referring to the imperial persecution of the Donatists. For him, the trials localized in fourth-century Africa foreshadowed the worldwide persecution that will take place under Antichrist in the eschaton. (on 6:8)

Another main feature of Tyconius’ *Expositio* is what might be called an ecclesiastical interpretation of the Apocalypse. In fact, Tyconius probably merits the place of father of that approach in the West, so common in the early middle ages, but superseded in the thirteenth century by more continuous-historical readings of the Apocalypse. Abandoning futurist and millenarian interpretations of the Apocalypse common in the centuries before him, Tyconius interpreted the visions of John primarily as signifying theological and moral truths for the church between the first and second advents of Christ, an approach similar to contemporary “idealist” interpretations of Revelation. For Tyconius the angel of the church at Ephesus is symbolic of the church itself (on 1:20). In 5:6 the “seven spirits of God sent into the whole world” are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit that God distributes to his church. On 6:5, the black horse signifies false brothers in the church. On 7:4-8 the 144,000 are a symbol of “the whole church.” The star falling from heaven in 8:10 signify people falling away from the church; and the two witnesses (11:3) symbolize the church prophesying in two testaments. About those “sitting on thrones” and reigning for a thousand years (20:4), Tyconius argued that the present participle “sitting” (*sedentes*) shows that their reign is in the present not the future. Similarly the first resurrection (20:5) “is in this life through forgiveness of sins.”

Also in Tyconius, the world is divided into the body of Christ and the body of the devil (on 6:8). “The church is the city of God” (on 14:8). “For, there are two cities in the world, one of God and one of the devil, one rising out of the abyss, the other out of the heavens” (on 17:18). The body of Christ is then divided, probably too rigidly, into a left part and a right part (e.g. on 2:18-21); and some portions of the visions of the Apocalypse Tyconius applied to one part and not the other. It should be noted that although life in the present church dominates his interpretation of the Apocalypse, this approach did not entirely preclude him from seeing references in the Apocalypse to future events like the general resurrection, final judgment, and eternal rest (e.g. on 10:7).

While such an ecclesiastical interpretation has the benefit of making the Book of Revelation relevant for the faithful of all times—not just for the book’s original recipients nor simply for believers during the last tribulation—it tends to divorce the Apocalypse from the social, religious, and political setting of the first-century churches of Asia Minor. Often Tyconius does not give an historical understanding of the passage, but immediately jumps to what the vision signifies. To be fair, this may have been intentional. Perhaps he thought that every reader knows what horses, stars, angels, and trumpets are, but that his readers needed to know what they signify.

At some places the commentary is useful for ascertaining what others in early Christianity believed. For example, on 3:10—*the hour of testing coming upon the whole world*—Tyconius noted that some think “the Antichrist will be a persecutor in only one place.” He was probably referring to the beliefs of the Donatists (with whom he had a falling out, but never joined the Catholics), who had a tendency to restrict all things Christian, including the final persecution of the Church, to believers in Africa. On 11:12 he spoke of those “who think that the two witnesses are men and ascend to heaven in clouds before the coming of Christ.” Tyconius rejected that interpretation, common among his millenarian predecessors, because 1 Cor 15:23 says that the resurrection of *all* the saints will be *at* Christ’s coming, not before it.

The comment attributed to Tyconius on 17:10 has relevance to the dating of the Apocalypse. Scholars today continue to debate the historical setting of the Apocalypse, and the two main positions are one in the 60s and the other in the 90s of the first century. Concerning external evidence from patristic sources, Irenaeus held that John was exiled to Patmos by Domitian (81-96 AD). This was repeated by Eusebius and eventually became the dominant view. However, a few later Syriac sources—a hagiographical work on John and a preface to Revelation in the Harklean version of the Peshitta—claimed that John was exiled by Nero (54-68 AD).

Rev 17 records a vision of a beast with seven heads. An angel then tells John that the seven heads *are seven kings: five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come* (17:10). Some scholars believe that this passage holds a key to ascertaining the date of the Apocalypse; it is simply a matter of understanding which king or emperor was reigning at that time, corresponding to “one is.” According to Tyconius:

FIVE HAVE FALLEN, ONE IS, ANOTHER HAS NOT YET COME, AND WHEN HE WILL HAVE COME, IT IS NECESSARY FOR HIM TO REMAIN A SHORT TIME, that is, Gaius Juilius Caesar the first, the second Augustus under whom the Lord was born, the third Tiberius under whom He died, the fourth Claudius under whom the famine in the Acts of the Apostles happened, the fifth Galba, the sixth Nero, the seventh Otho about whom he said ‘he has not yet come, and when he will have come, it is necessary for him to remain a short time,’ that is, in a figure of the revealed Antichrist; for he reigned for three months and six days.

Despite the omission of Gaius Caligula and the error in the order of Nero and Galba, Tyconius put Nero in the sixth place, the king referred to in 17:10 as “one is.” Those who argue for a Neronian dating of the Apocalypse may view Tyconius as an early witness for their position. However, many modern scholars who argue for an early date for the Apocalypse also believe that the visions in the Apocalypse are prophecies about the imminent Roman-Judean war of 68-70. So it should be noted that nowhere that I have seen in Tyconius’ commentary does he see a fulfillment of John’s prophecies in the first century destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

Now that a critical edition of Tyconius’ *Expositio* has been created, all editions and translations of early medieval Apocalypse commentaries will want to take it into

account to ascertain if, and to what extent, they depended upon Tyconius. Also, its publication is sure to stimulate further research, including some questions which have already been discussed in secondary literature, but merit re-visitation now that a nearly complete reconstruction of Tyconius is available. How and at what passages did Tyconius use Victorinus? Regarding a subject of some debate, did Jerome use Tyconius when he redacted Victorinus or did he not? To what extent, if any, did Augustine's eschatology in Books 19-21 of his *City of God* depend upon Tyconius' commentary? Did Quodvultdeus of Carthage (c. 450), author of *On the Promises and Predictions of God*, and Julian of Toledo (d. 690), author of *Foreknowledge of the World to Come*, use Tyconius' Apocalypse commentary, and if so what passages from it? Now that we have Tyconius' commentary, how does the description of that commentary by Gennadius of Marseilles (c. 495) in his *On Illustrious Men* match up?

Brepols simultaneously published Grysons' French translation of the commentary in paperback, which sells at a much more reasonable price (\$88) than the Latin edition. I hope that an affordable English translation of Tyconius' commentary will be forthcoming in one of the major on-going series of early Christian writings. Gryson is to be commended for his reconstruction of Tyconius' *Expositio Apocalypseos*, for through his careful labor a lost gem of patristic biblical exegesis has been found.

Francis X. Gumerlock
Providence Theological Seminary
Colorado Springs, Colorado