

MAKING MEN IN REV 2–3:  
READING THE SEVEN MESSAGES IN THE  
BATH-GYMNASIUMS OF ASIA MINOR\*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Addressed to communities of the faithful living within seven cities in ancient Asia Minor—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodikeia—the messages of Rev 2–3 tell of community conflicts and offer images that evoke the realia of the ancient world. The messages are tantalizingly concrete in a book more commonly known for its abstract and fantastic imagery. As a result, Revelation scholars often highlight connections between the messages and the ancient locations to which they refer, using the messages, dictated by the Son of Man, as tools for understanding the lives and identities of Revelation’s original audiences. This has occasionally taken a literalistic turn as scholars align textual images with specific archaeological finds or ancient traditions. In contrast, more recent scholars have advocated a more dynamic approach to engaging ancient material cultures in relation to the text, suggesting that both material objects and texts participate in the discursive frameworks in which they are embedded. In this vein, I suggest reading the seven messages of Rev 2–3 in conversation with the bath-gymnasiums of first-century urban Asia Minor, situating these within a larger conversation about

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\* This essay is dedicated to my friend and colleague Dennis Smith, whose love of life and family knows no bounds. I met Dennis by participating in COMCAR, an organization that has contributed greatly to my understanding of the material cultures in which the writings of the New Testament are embedded. I presented the main ideas for this essay as part of the 2013 COMCAR trip to Turkey, and I am appreciative of the feedback I received from other participants.

the construction of masculine gender in the Roman world. In so doing, it is possible to see how the messages participate in imagining a masculine ideal, a victor whose endurance leads to reward in a New Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. SHIFTING OUR APPROACH TO REVELATION AND REALIA

The messages of Rev 2–3 are often thought of as grounding the book of Revelation in the realities of the ancient world, partly based upon the fact that they are addressed to communities located in cities whose ruins scholars can still visit, see, and experience. In light of this, there is a long tradition of drawing specific connections between these messages and archaeological remains or pieces of material culture.<sup>2</sup> In *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, originally published in 1904, classical archaeologist and New Testament scholar Sir William Ramsay famously paired detailed descriptions of the cities of Revelation, drawing upon ancient texts, archaeological resources, and his own experiences in Turkey, with discussions of the corresponding messages. This approach is based upon his assumption that John “imparts to [the letters] many touches, specially suitable to the individual Churches . . . showing his intimate knowledge of them all.”<sup>3</sup> Ramsay suggests, for instance, that the Son of Man’s promise to give the faithful of Smyrna a “crown of life” evokes depictions of a personified Smyrna wearing a mural crown, while he connects the promise of white robes to those in Laodikeia to the wool production for which the city was well known.<sup>4</sup> The detail of Ramsay’s associations makes it

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1. The language of “making men” comes from Maud W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). I explore some ideas related to this essay in a forthcoming piece, “Gender and Identity in John’s Apocalypse,” in *The Oxford Handbook of New Testament, Gender, and Sexuality*, ed. Benjamin Dunning (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

2. Craig R. Koester, “The Message to Laodicea and the Problem of Its Local Context: A Study of the Imagery in Rev 3.14–22,” *NTS* 49 (2003): 407–24; Steven J. Friesen, “Revelation, Realia, and Religion: Archaeology in the Interpretation of the Apocalypse,” *HTR* 88 (1995): 291–314. See also Robert M. Royalty, “Etched or Sketched? Inscriptions and Erasures in the Messages to Sardis and Philadelphia (Rev. 3.1–13),” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 447–63.

3. William Mitchell Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse*, 2nd ed. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1906), 39.

4. *Ibid.*, 275.

easy to understand how some scholars in a field that once aspired to scientific surety would find these connections appealing. In addition, the “local allusions,” as Craig Koester calls them, drawn by Ramsay and those who follow in his wake, such as Colin J. Hemer,<sup>5</sup> firmly situate the text within its ancient context, an important thing for those scholars seeking to qualify or complicate popular readings of Revelation as a blueprint for the end times.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the appeal of identifying local allusions, more recent scholars, including Koester and Steven J. Friesen, highlight these types of interpretations as idiosyncratic and historically problematic.<sup>7</sup> Friesen notes that many of these connections reflect accidents of history, as associations are made between the text and those archaeological finds simply available to the New Testament scholar. For example, the connection sometimes drawn between John’s reference to “Satan’s throne” and the altar of Zeus and Athena in Pergamon (2:13) is most likely due to the altar’s availability to European biblical scholars, according to Friesen, since its foundations and friezes “were hauled off and displayed in the Pergamon-Museum in Berlin.”<sup>8</sup> Even though this interpretation of 2:13 has grown out of favor with many Revelation scholars, it persists in some sources, especially resources aimed at lay audiences. Thus, despite noting that the reference is disputed, Craig S. Keener offers the “the famous huge throne-like altar of ‘Zeus the Savior,’ whose sculptures included serpents” as a possible allusion behind John’s image.<sup>9</sup> Once an allusion such as this has been drawn, it becomes difficult to dislodge, as it becomes a part of the interpretive tradition surrounding Revelation.

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5. Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1986).

6. See, for instance, the commentary on Revelation by Grant R. Osborne (*Revelation*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002]). Osborne discusses his own “conversion” from reading Revelation primarily as a prophetic text describing modern events to reading the text as addressing its historical context as well as having modern relevance. Osborne’s commentary, like Ramsay’s earlier work, prefaces each message of Rev 2–3 with discussions of the historical situation of each city. These include attention to archaeological and material elements of the cities.

7. Koester, “The Message to Laodicea.”

8. Steven J. Friesen, “Satan’s Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation,” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 359.

9. Craig S. Keener, *Revelation: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, NIV Application Commentary, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 122.

Similarly problematic and persistent is the tendency to assume that metaphors within Revelation's messages are particularly significant within the city named, rather than exploring the more general and, perhaps, mundane reading. For example, the reference to a pillar that cannot be removed from the temple (3:12) is described by Gregory Beale as something that "would have been appreciated by the Philadelphians, since their city suffered from earthquakes more than any of the other cities addressed."<sup>10</sup> However, a number of the cities of Revelation experienced earthquakes, including the earthquake of 17 CE that required massive rebuilding, part of which was funded by Tiberius. Surely, most people in the region could appreciate an image of stability.<sup>11</sup> Another persistent local allusion involves linking the reference to the Laodikeians as being lukewarm and in danger of being vomited out of Christ's mouth (3:16) to assumptions about the city's water being lukewarm. The city's supposedly tepid water is often compared to the water of the nearby Hierapolis, where there are still striking white mineral deposits that can be seen from afar and that are the result of the city's thermal pools. Stories of the bad Laodikeian water abound in modern commentaries on Revelation. Keener, referencing the thermal springs of Hierapolis, implies that the Laodikeians may have found heating the tepid water from their aqueducts a "drudgery" and, therefore, that the reference has something to do with the inhabitants' lack of reliance on Christ.<sup>12</sup> Brian K. Blount takes the local allusion in another direction, drawing upon scholars who suggest that, because Laodikeian water was piped in from Hierapolis, it was medicinal tasting and nauseating. Thus, the water was something people often wanted to spit out.<sup>13</sup> As Koester points out, however, textual and material evidence suggests that Laodikeian water was obtained, like other cities, through an aqueduct supplied by local springs.<sup>14</sup> The water would have been neither more ill-tasting nor more tepid than water from other cities in the area. The problem, however, is bigger than one of misinformation. Rather, as Koester notes, "quests for local allusions often allow the expressions in Revelation

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10. Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 294.

11. Royalty, "Inscriptions and Erasures," 451.

12. Keener, *Revelation*, 158.

13. Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 80.

14. Koester, "The Message to Laodicea," 410.

to exert too much control over the selection and interpretation of material from other sources.... Archaeological and other ancient materials appear as isolated pieces of evidence that are used without adequate consideration of the broader context from which these materials were taken.”<sup>15</sup> The tendency to “fit” an image in Revelation to a particular material object often misses the potential inherent in reading the text in relation to the ancient material world. Rather, as Friesen and Koester argue, material culture helps us appreciate the social structures of the ancient world through which ancient religious discourses were shaped.<sup>16</sup>

While it may seem ironic in an essay titled “Revelation, *Realia*, and Religion,” Friesen argues that scholars of Revelation, as well as biblical scholars in general, should attend to the insights of literary theory as they engage the material world of the biblical texts. Friesen challenges the dichotomy drawn between literary texts and material culture, underscoring that both are products of their social contexts, “crafted by humans in particular historical and cultural settings.”<sup>17</sup> Archaeological materials are as much in need of interpretation and critical evaluation as are texts and are best understood when considered in the fullness of their milieu. Similarly, archaeologist Rosemary A. Joyce and the coauthors of *The Languages of Archaeology* argue for approaching material culture in terms of storytelling and narrative. Highlighting the interpretive nature of archaeological writing, Joyce explains that even in the field the archaeologist narrativizes the objects and structures around her, determining how individual pieces might fit together, both literally and figuratively.<sup>18</sup> Drawing upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Joyce suggests approaching archaeological writing in terms of the utterance, as dialogical speech act. Jeanne Lopiparo, a contributing author to *The Languages of Archaeology*, extends the idea of the utterance to archaeological objects and artifacts, suggesting that these material objects function as “past utterances.”<sup>19</sup> As such, they are

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15. Ibid., 408. Friesen points to the often unstated political and ideological motivations that undergird these interpretations as well, explaining the imperialistic and Orientalist aspects of Ramsay’s work in particular. See Friesen, “Revelation, *Realia*, and Religion.”

16. Friesen, “Revelation, *Realia*, and Religion,” 314.

17. Ibid., 308.

18. Rosemary Joyce, Robert W. Preucel, and Jeanne Lopiparo, *The Languages of Archaeology: Dialogue, Narrative, and Writing*, ed. Rosemary Joyce (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 10.

19. Ibid., 71.

always embedded within a discursive context, responding to and reflecting past conversations and, more importantly, they always seek a response, whether it is confirmation, critique, or contestation.<sup>20</sup> That is, material finds should be understood as dialogically constructed, embedded within particular conversations that constitute the social framework surrounding them. Among other things, this means that material finds participate in the social construction of meaning, including the construction of gender.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. GENDER AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Initial forays into the study of gender and archaeology focused upon uncovering the lives of women from the past, much like early feminist biblical interpretation sought to uncover the lives of women behind and within the texts. For archaeology this involved looking for artifacts believed to reveal the work and lives of women—cosmetic bottles, combs, hairpins, and items related to weaving.<sup>22</sup> Material objects were read as signs pointing to gender and were interpreted as indicators of the presence of women in specific spaces, often reflecting assumptions about ancient gender roles and the division of labor.<sup>23</sup> More recently, archaeologists specializing in the study of gender have begun to advocate for engaging material culture more dynamically. Rather than being part of a fossil record of gender, artifacts and architecture are approached as media of social discourse, communicating gender expectations and shaping the ways in which ancient individuals and groups relate to and engage those expectations. Marie L. S. Sørensen explains, “Gender gains material reality and affects individuals and groups as it becomes acted out and experienced through material culture.”<sup>24</sup> It is through the material world that gender becomes realized.

This understanding of gender and material culture pushes the interpreter away from assigning gender to a particular object and toward

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20. *Ibid.*, 9.

21. The idea that things have “social lives” is often attributed to the volume edited by Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

22. Marie L. S. Sørensen, “Gender, Things, and Material Culture,” in *Handbook of Gender in Archaeology*, ed. Sarah Milledge Nelson (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2006), 107.

23. Penelope M. Allison, “Engendering Roman Domestic Space,” *British School at Athens Studies* 15 (2007): 347–49.

24. Sørensen, “Gender, Things, and Material Culture,” 114.

exploring the multiple ways an object can participate in constructing gender. Penelope M. Allison offers the case of unguentaria, the small glass bottles often found in Roman contexts. With traces of kohl and aromatics found in some, these bottles have been read as indications of feminine gender. Visual and textual associations between women and toilet items similarly suggest the connection. In fact, we easily can imagine feminine gender being constructed in relation to these objects, as the cosmetics and oils that might be held in these delicate remnants of the past could adorn the body in ways that helped ancient individuals conform to expectations associated with elite women's femininity in the Roman context.<sup>25</sup> However, we simply cannot know whether a particular bottle or set of bottles might have been used in concert with gender expectations associated with them or in a way that takes these utterances in a different direction altogether. Further, to assume that these bottles communicate solely in relation to feminine gender conventions is problematic, as they could be interpreted as holding medical remedies, which might be used by women or men. Moreover, Allison notes that these small bottles could contain oils appropriate for an elite male's after-bath massage or for anointing a soldier's military regalia.<sup>26</sup> In these ways, idealized masculine identity could be constructed by interacting with these objects as well. Even if these bottles might be more commonly associated with the construction of feminine gender, this is not something contained in the material object; rather, it is through the interaction between bodies and objects that gender is formed and communicated. As Allison offers, "This material culture is not a passive reflection of society, but is an active agent in the structuring of that society."<sup>27</sup>

The idea that material objects participate in the construction of gender aligns with an understanding of gender and sex as performed, an idea most closely associated with the writings of Judith Butler.<sup>28</sup> In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that gender and sex, terms that she resists drawing a stark distinction between, are performed and even created through repeated acts that "congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of

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25. Allison, "Engendering Roman Domestic Space," 346–47.

26. Penelope M. Allison, "Characterizing Roman Artifacts to Investigate Gendered Practices in Contexts without Sexed Bodies," *AJA* 119 (2015): 119–20.

27. Allison, "Engendering Roman Domestic Space," 346.

28. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 7.

a natural sort of being.”<sup>29</sup> This does not mean that individuals choose their gender or sex; rather, sex is constructed through the rigid regulatory frameworks of a given culture. In fact, Butler notes, cultures “regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right.”<sup>30</sup> Thinking about ancient archaeology and material culture in relation to Butler, we can imagine that the spaces and things of the ancient world reflect the assumptions of these frameworks and encourage ancient individuals to act in relation to these frameworks. This is not to say that gender does not change or that it is not transformed. For Butler, gender is malleable and can be transformed through repetition, particularly in communities resignifying gender collectively.<sup>31</sup> While Butler focuses on drag performance, we might, as suggested below, think about how the writings of the early Jesus movement, including Revelation, promote a resignification of gender.

#### 4. MAKING MEN IN THE BATH-GYMNASIUM

Butler’s explanation of gender as performed is helpful for understanding ancient Roman perspectives on gender, which generally reflected the idea of a “one-sex” system.<sup>32</sup> Ancient experts such as Galen and Soranus maintained that all humans were potentially male, females simply being underdeveloped or imperfect males. Galen famously explains:

The female is less perfect than the male for one, principal reason because she is colder, for if among animals the warm one is the more active, a colder animal would be less perfect than a warmer. A second reason is one that appears in dissecting.... All the parts, then, that men have, women have too, the difference between them lying in only one thing ... namely, that in women the parts are within [the body], whereas in men they are outside. (Galen, *Usu part.* 14.6–7 [May])<sup>33</sup>

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29. *Ibid.*, 33. Butler challenges the popular distinction between gender as a cultural/social category and sex as a biological reality, arguing instead that gender is the construct through which the sexes are established. See *ibid.*, 6–7.

30. *Ibid.*, 140.

31. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 216.

32. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 25–35. See also Colleen Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16–18.

33. See also Soranus, *Gyn.* 3.3.

As a result of this biological understanding of male and female, ancient perspectives on gender can be imagined in terms of a scale on which individuals and groups were placed and along which they could move up, toward being more masculine, or down, toward becoming less masculine. One's place on the scale depended upon a variety of physical, social, and moral factors. In addition to the sex assigned at birth, male or female, an individual's status, slave or free and Roman or non-Roman, contributed to whether one was understood as a man, *vir* in Latin. Given the assumption that everyone was, at least before birth, potentially male, women might be understood as "unmen," along with slaves and non-Roman males.<sup>34</sup>

Although they were important, biological and social factors were not sufficient for making a true man, as certain virtues and activities were also necessary. L. Stephanie Cobb explains, "sex and virtue, it turns out, are so integrally related that a person's sex can be determined by his or her personality and character."<sup>35</sup> Even though there were differences of opinion regarding the virtues central to constituting manhood, among the most commonly cited were moderation, wisdom, justice, and bravery.<sup>36</sup> Possession of these qualities was evident in a man's body, through his appearance, posture, and gait.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, cultivation of these virtues was a constant process, as Cobb notes: "Although anatomically sexed males were closer to the perfect state of masculinity, they, too, had continuously to strive to be men.... They were expected to develop masculine characteristics, but *development* is the key; they could, at any moment, fail at the task and slip down the continuum toward femininity."<sup>38</sup>

One of the primary locations associated with the development and maintenance of ideal masculinity in Roman Asia Minor was the bath-gymnasium. Although Romans in the West viewed the classical Greek gymnasium tradition with suspicion, since exercising in the nude might

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34. Conway, *Behold the Man*, 15.

35. Cobb notes this primarily in reference to the physiognomist Polemo, but it is applicable to the broader understanding of sex and virtue in the ancient context. See L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Texts*, Gender, Theory, and Religion, Kindle ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 28.

36. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Emperor and His Virtues," *Historia* 30 (1981): 298-323.

37. Gleason, *Making Men*, 58-60.

38. Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 28, emphasis original.

be erotically charged, it flourished in the East until the third century CE.<sup>39</sup> In the cities of Asia Minor, the Roman bath often was paired with a Greek-style palaestra, a place for exercise and athletics, creating a “bath-gymnasium” complex.<sup>40</sup> These hybrid structures, along with stadiums, theaters, and amphitheaters, were part of a pervasive agonistic culture through which males in Asia Minor established gender, class, and ethnic identities.<sup>41</sup> Pointing to the civic significance of the bath-gymnasium, these sites are found in central urban areas. Ephesus had at least four bath-gymnasium complexes by the second century CE, including the Harbor Baths, which may have been built during the reign of Domitian (ca. 81–96 CE),<sup>42</sup> and Pergamon (fig. 6.1) may have had as many as five during the reign of Tiberius (14–37 CE).<sup>43</sup> Remains of bath-gymnasium complexes also have been found in other cities associated with Revelation, such as Sardis and Laodikeia, as well as other important Asian cities such as Priene, Magnesia, Ankyra, and Miletus.

As in the classical Greek period, during the first century in Asia Minor, the gymnasium was understood as a site primarily for the formation of young men. While women did use the public baths and there may have been mixed-gender bathing, girls were not the primary clientele for gymnasium training, as they were typically being prepared for marriage at the same age young boys were entering the *ephebeia*.<sup>44</sup> Although the age

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39. Zahra Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World: Victory and Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 230–31; Jason König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 47. For a discussion of the decline of the agonistic culture and the gymnasium, see Sofie Remijsen, *The End of Greek Athletics in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 88.

40. Fikret K. Yegül, *Bathing in the Roman World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 155.

41. Onno van Nijf, “Local Heroes: Athletics, Festivals and Elite Self-Fashioning in the Roman East,” in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire*, ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 306–34.

42. Newby, *Greek Athletics*, 229–31.

43. E. Norman Gardiner, *Athletics in the Ancient World* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002), 79.

44. Yegül, *Bathing in the Roman World*, 156. For information on mixed gender bathing, see Roy Bowen Ward, “Women in Roman Baths,” *HTR* 85 (1992): 125–47. Bain notes that there are some games that included contests for girls, and there is some evidence that girls may have been allowed into the gymnasium; see Katherine Bain,



Figure 6.1. Overlooking the palaestra of a bath-gymnasium complex, often labeled the “Upper Gymnasium,” in Pergamon. All photographs by Lynn R. Huber.

of entrance varied, *epheboi* were generally teenage boys from the elite and more middle-class families of Asia Minor<sup>45</sup> who became part of the bath-gymnasium in order to continue their educations after studying grammar and literature.<sup>46</sup> While a teen might only be part of the *ephebeia* for a year or two, with a financial contribution he could continue training within the bath-gymnasium as one of the *neoi*, a class of young men in their twenties.<sup>47</sup> In some settings, such as in Pergamon, different age groups may have used different bath-gymnasium complexes for their training. Entrance into these spaces was a first step toward achieving manhood. An inscribed stele

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*Women’s Socioeconomic Status and Religious Leadership in Asia Minor in the First Two Centuries C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 31. However, Caldwell suggests that exercise was recommended for girls and young women primarily as a recourse for the problem of females’ excessive moisture. See Lauren Caldwell, *Roman Girlhood and the Fashioning of Femininity*, Kindle ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 87.

45. Onno van Nijf notes that in Roman Asia Minor there seem to have been traders and craftsman who participated in gymnasium culture, even though it was primarily intended for cultivating the identities of elite males. See van Nijf, “Local Heroes,” 325.

46. Christian Laes and Johan Strubbe, *Youth in the Roman Empire: The Young and the Restless Years?* Kindle ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 70.

47. *Ibid.*, 71–72; König, *Athletics and Literature*, 47–48.

from Beroia, Macedonia (compare fig. 6.2), references those not allowed to participate in the activities of the gymnasium, including slaves, freedmen, prostitutes, and those who are drunk or insane.<sup>48</sup> These are the people for whom ideal masculinity was not an option.



Figure 6.2. The top of an inscribed stele from Amphipolis, Greece, displaying reliefs of characteristic features valued at a gymnasium—all linked, in this context, with male prowess: the *lekythos* (oil jug), the victor's laurel, the taenia, the victor's palm, the strigil, and the *sphaera* (ball). Like the regulations at Beroia mentioned in the text, this stele is inscribed with ephebic laws, governing everything from the checking of performance and appearance to regulating behavior outside the gymnasium.

Whether devoted to training *epheboi* or *neoi*, the bath-gymnasium was a site designed for the production of virtuous and disciplined young men. Intellectual subjects, such as literature, mathematics, and rhetoric, might be offered in these places, but the primary focus was on physical

48. Loukretia Gounaropoulou and Miltiades B. Hatzopoulos, *Epigraphes Katō Makedonias (metaxy tou Vermiou orous kai tou Axiou potamou)* (Athens: Ypourgeio Politismou, 1998) (EKM 1. Beoria), §1B, ll. 27–29. See David Potter, *The Victor's Crown: A History of Ancient Sport from Homer to Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 132; Roger S. Bagnall and Peter Derow, *The Hellenistic Period: Historical Sources in Translation* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 2008), 78.

exercise.<sup>49</sup> A telling funerary inscription, in the form of a dialogue with the passerby, found in Hadriani, Asia Minor, highlights this. After giving his name, Cladus, and age, thirteen, the dialogue continues, “So you did not like the Muses then?”—Not quite. They did not love me very much, but Hermes cared a great deal for me. For in wrestling contests I often received the praiseworthy garland.”<sup>50</sup> Athletics were valued most by young Cladus and, it seems, to many others in this context, for it was through athletic training that males acquired the virtues that constituted them as men. Sports such as boxing and racing developed endurance, an important quality in a man, and other activities cultivated discipline, physical harmony, and moderation.<sup>51</sup> In a eulogy to a deceased boxer named Melancomas, Dio Chrysostom gushes:

He therefore, recognizing that, of all the activities conducive to courage, athletics is at once the most honourable and the most laborious, chose that. Indeed, for the soldier’s career no opportunity existed, and the training also is less severe. And I for my part would venture to say that it is inferior also in that there is scope for courage alone in warfare, whereas athletics at one and the same time produce manliness, physical strength, and self-control. (*Or.* 29.9 [Cohon, LCL])

It is through the training of the body in athletics that one develops the qualities necessary to become an ideal man.

One way the bath-gymnasium participated in the formation of masculine identities was through the articulation and enforcement of gymnasiarchic laws. These laws regulated the administration of the complex as well as the behaviors and bodies of the *epheboi*. The stele in Beroia provides an example of the content typical of these laws, listing guidelines for electing the *gymnasiarch* (the head of the gymnasium), financing supplies such as olive oil and firewood, and training various age groups.<sup>52</sup> The gymnasiarchic laws, moreover, articulated a set of standards by which the

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49. Laes and Strubbe, *Youth in the Roman Empire*, 71–73, 110–15.

50. IHadrianoi 77; this late Hellenistic or early Roman inscription is translated in *ibid.*, 115.

51. Newby, *Greek Athletics*, 151–54; Laes and Strubbe, *Youth in the Roman Empire*, 75.

52. For an English translation of this law, see Bagnall and Derow, *The Hellenistic Period*, 78. The Greek inscription can be found at the Packard Humanities Institute Inscription Database, <http://tinyurl.com/SBL4522q>.

*epheboi* were to be assessed. Among other things, the laws emphasize the importance of the *epheboi* acting out of obedience and with honor (e.g., not cheating, competing fairly, not giving up one's victory). Guidelines for punishing both misbehaving boys and employees (e.g., trainers) are also noted. Pointing to the importance of these laws and of the *gymnasiarch* for instilling a sense of discipline among the bath-gymnasium clientele, an inscription in Pergamon honors a *gymnasiarch*, Agais, who "rigidly devoted himself to the cause of just behaviour at the gymnasium."<sup>53</sup> These laws were public, according to the Beroia inscription, so that "the young men will feel a greater sense of shame and be more obedient to their leader."<sup>54</sup> In other words, these laws were intended to create, in the sense of Michel Foucault, an internalized gaze regulating the actions, identity, and gender performance of the young men attending the bath-gymnasium.<sup>55</sup>

Additionally, the ideals of the ephebic laws were made visible for *epheboi* through the honorific portraits and statues strategically placed throughout the bath-gymnasiums. In his study of these popular portraits, John Ma notes that statues of donors and gymnasium leaders, such as the *gymnasiarch*, were placed in areas, especially closed rooms, where they were most likely to be seen by the young men frequenting the gymnasium for training:

At first sight, the reason for the location of statues in closed rooms might seem practical, to avoid taking up spaces reserved for violent physical movement. Yet the main effect of locating honorific portraits "indoors" was to impose the presence of benefactors, at bottlenecks in the circulation of persons, in spaces where gatherings and activities occurred, or within spaces specifically designed to create an encounter with the image of the benefactor and heighten the image's impact.<sup>56</sup>

Young men frequenting the gymnasium would come face to face with representations of men, and sometimes women,<sup>57</sup> whom they should emulate

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53. MDAIA 1908.379–81.2, as quoted in Laes and Strubbe, *Youth in the Roman Empire*, 74.

54. Bagnall and Derow, *Hellenistic Period*, 78.

55. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1995).

56. John Ma, *Statues and Cities: Honorific Portraits and Civic Identity in the Hellenistic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 87.

57. The reconstruction of the major bath-gymnasium complex at Sardis, for

on account of their honor or generosity.<sup>58</sup> The people of Pergamon in this way honored Mithridates son of Menodotos, a significant benefactor to the city in general, with a statue in the gymnasium,<sup>59</sup> and the bath-gymnasium of Vedius in Ephesus included two portrait statues of Publius Vedius Antoninus, who was the primary donor for the complex.<sup>60</sup> As Ma explains, “exemplarity leads to social reproduction.”<sup>61</sup>

In addition to the portraits of donors and virtuous citizens, the statuary of the baths often included representations of deities, especially Asclepius and Hygeia (both of whom were associated with health), members of the imperial family, Greek athletes and mythological characters such as heroes or others who overcame in physical struggles.<sup>62</sup> The virtues that were to be instilled through the discipline of gymnastic training were physically and visually manifest in the very structure and decoration of the bath-gymnasium.

Even though we can imagine particular individuals and groups, such as the slaves attending young men in the baths or gymnasium (fig. 6.3), responding to the gendered utterances of the bath-gymnasium in diverse ways, the masculinist gender ideology of these places rings loud and clear. These are places for constructing and claiming a male identity. When visiting the overgrown ruins of the gymnasium in Priene, this is quite evident (fig. 6.4), as one can see abundant—over seven hundred, in fact—examples of *topoi* graffiti written by young men proclaiming their presence at the gymnasium: “Apollonios was here!” “Menandros was here!” “Theophilos was here!”<sup>63</sup>

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instance, was financed in part by two notable local women, Claudia Antonia Sabina and Flavia Pollitta; see Fikret K. Yegül, *The Bath-Gymnasium Complex at Sardis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 166.

58. Newby, *Greek Athletics*, 240.

59. *IGRR* 4.1682; Ma, *Statues and Cities*, 90.

60. Newby, *Greek Athletics*, 240.

61. Ma, *Statues and Cities*, 299.

62. Newby, *Greek Athletics*, 232–35.

63. Claire Taylor, “Graffiti and the Epigraphic Habit: Creating Communities and Writing Alternate Histories in Classical Attica,” in *Ancient Graffiti in Context*, ed. Jennifer Baird and Claire Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2010), 134–35 n. 31. For the actual inscriptions, see Friedrich Hiller von Gærtringen et al., *Inchriften von Priene* (Berlin: Reimer, 1908), 313. This type of graffiti is not unique to the bath-gymnasium, and it is found in other locations where one might want to claim a civic identity, such as the tetrastoon at Aphrodisias. See Luke Lavan, Ellen Swift, and Toon Putzeys, “Material



Figure 6.3. A fourth-century CE mosaic of a slave tending to an athlete, from the private gymnasium at the Villa Romana del Casale, Sicily, Italy



Figure 6.4. Topoi graffiti in the gymnasium at Priene, Turkey

Furthermore, the gendered discourses that occurred in and through the ancient bath-gymnasium, discourses about how to be a true man, spilled

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Spatiality in Late Antiquity: Sources, Approaches and Field Methods,” in *Objects in Context, Objects in Use: Material Spatiality in Late Antiquity*, ed. Luke Lavan, Ellen Swift, and Toon Putzeys (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 14–15.

out of the walls of these monumental spaces and into the agoras, streets, and other civic spaces of the cities of Asia Minor. Monuments and inscriptions documented the victories of those who participated in the numerous festivals and games held throughout the region, including those sponsored by the Council of Asia and by significant urban centers, such as Smyrna, Pergamon, and Ephesus.<sup>64</sup> It is not enough to win, but one must be recognized as victor, according to van Nijf: “the large number of agonistic inscriptions throughout Asia Minor suggests that athletic victory was one of the most powerful and widespread images around.”<sup>65</sup> Funerary altars and sarcophagi could similarly communicate a man’s virtue through the visual depiction of the important prizes he had won during his lifetime, including crowns, wreathes, palm branches, and even moneybags (fig. 6.5).<sup>66</sup>

Depictions of the athlete and the athletic training of the bath-gymnasium within this context are cast mostly in a positive light, although there



Figure 6.5. Sarcophagus of Lucius Septimius Theronides depicting prize crowns, dated to the third century CE, from Patara, Turkey. Now held in the Antalya Archaeological Museum, Antalya, Turkey.

64. Remijsen, *End of Greek Athletics*, 72–73.

65. Van Nijf, “Local Heroes,” 324.

66. Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, “The Victorious Charioteer on Mosaics and Related Monuments,” *AJA* 86 (1982): 65–89; Gregory M. Stevenson, “Conceptual Background to Golden Crown Imagery in the Apocalypse of John (4:4, 10; 14:14),” *JBL* 114 (1995): 257–72.

were some who had different estimations of the value of athletics. Negative opinions ranged from humorous depictions of athletes as a sort of dumb jock to concerns that rewards of athleticism, including glory and wealth, might lead one to neglect the intellectual life. So Galen warned:

The only thing I am afraid of is the activity of the athletes, in case it deceives any one of our young men into preferring it to a genuine art, through offering, as it does, bodily strength and popular fame and daily public payments from the elders of our cities, and honors equal to those given to outstanding citizens. (Galen, *Protr.* 9)<sup>67</sup>

Even though there was concern that the athletic training of the gymnasium might overshadow intellectual matters, König notes that athletics still functioned as a metaphor for philosophical training and the cultivation of virtue.<sup>68</sup> Epictetus, the first-century Stoic philosopher, wrote: “It was for this purpose [living a tranquil life] that you used to practice exercise; for this purpose were used the halteres (weights), the dust, the young men as antagonists” (*Diatr.* 4.4 [Long, BCL]). In this way, the realia of the gymnasium were part of constructing the ideal Stoic man. Similarly, the author of Hebrews calls his audience to envision themselves as spiritual athletes, writing, “with endurance [ὑπομονή], let us run the race [ἀγών] that is set before us” (Heb 12:1).<sup>69</sup> The image of the athlete and the training of the gymnasium would also be appropriated by the authors of early Christian martyrologies as well, portraying their subjects as athletes engaged in training and in contests, receiving crowns and prizes as awards for their victories (e.g., 4 Macc 6:1–12; Mart. Pol. 17).<sup>70</sup> Thus, the image of the athlete and the training of the gymnasium were productive tools for

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67. As quoted by König, *Athletics and Literature*, 2.

68. *Ibid.*, 133.

69. For a discussion of the range of meaning for (ἀγών), which has connotations of contest and struggle, see *ibid.*, 35. The translation is that of the author.

70. Martyrologies also employ the image of the gladiator to characterize Christian virtue. The figure of the gladiator in the Roman world is complex, as gladiators were typically of low social status. However, gladiators were sometimes understood as paragons of masculine virtue, given their courage and their willingness to die. Thus, the image of the gladiator could be deployed as an image of ideal masculinity in a way similar to the athlete. For the purposes of this essay, however, I am focusing primarily on the athlete. For a discussion of the complex masculinity of the gladiator, see Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 46–54.

ancient authors thinking through issues of identity and what it meant to be virtuous.

Even though John does not employ an explicit image of the athlete, aspects of the messages in Rev 2-3 evoke the ways masculinity was constructed in the bath-gymnasium. This does not involve making direct connections, even though there are a few possible allusions to those material worlds. Rather, following the lead of Joyce and Lopiparo, I want to approach these places as part of a discourse about ideal masculinity, utterances to which Revelation's author responds. In the following, we examine the messages of Revelation in light of some of what we know about the material world of the bath-gymnasium.

##### 5. READING REVELATION'S MESSAGES IN THE BATH-GYMNASIUM

Dictated to John by "one like a Son of Man" and evoking the authority of an imperial dispatch,<sup>71</sup> the seven messages of Rev 2-3 stand out from the rest of the narrative. While this has led some scholars to ponder whether the letters were an addition or even circulated independently from one another,<sup>72</sup> this has been dismissed based not only on a lack of manuscript evidence but also on the basis of the number seven intentionally evoking wholeness or completeness. Thus, while ostensibly addressing local issues, as highlighted by Ramsay (see above), the messages would be heard by all the communities. These messages, therefore, are both particular and universal in their scope, and taken together they present to their audiences a shared identity.

Each of these messages follows a highly structured pattern, beginning with a command to John to write to an association or community (ἐκκλησία) of the faithful within a particular city.<sup>73</sup> These commands are

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71. While they are often called the "seven letters," these messages from the Son of Man to the communities do not follow the model of an ancient letter; instead, they bear more similarity to prophetic speeches and to imperial edicts. See David E. Aune, *Revelation*, WBC 52A-C (Dallas: Word, 1998), 124-29.

72. For a discussion of some of the different composition theories of Revelation, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Composition and Structure of Revelation," in *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 159-80.

73. Many versions of Revelation translate ἐκκλησία as "church." This popular translation is misleading for a couple of reasons. First, it might imply a more formal organization than would have existed at the time. Second, it might suggest a church building or a physical space, although at the time Revelation was written, the followers

followed by evocative descriptions of the ultimate author, the Son of Man. The content of each message is introduced with the phrase “I know” (οἶδα), which leads to either praise or criticism of the community’s behavior. For instance, to the community at Sardis the Son of Man announces, “I know [οἶδα] your works; you have the name of being alive, but you are dead” (3:1; NRSV) and to Philadelphia, “I know [οἶδα] your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut” (3:8; NRSV). Finally, each message concludes with an exhortation, “Let anyone who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the communities [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις],”<sup>74</sup> and a promise of a reward to ὁ νικῶν, “the victor.”<sup>75</sup>

While scholars often focus on what these letters reveal about the current situations of the communities, including the conflicts happening within the associations and in relation to others,<sup>76</sup> one of the functions of these letters is to shape the audience’s identity.<sup>77</sup> Repeatedly, the Son of Man tells his audiences that he *knows* their actions and attitudes, their trials and temptations. This ability to know even the innermost conflicts within the communities is facilitated by the fact that the Son of Man, a reference to the risen Christ, is surrounded by seven lampstands that happen to be the seven communities (Rev 1:12, 20; 2:1). According to Revelation’s visionary logic, the Son of Man stands among the communities observing and, presumably, evaluating all that they do. Referencing Foucault’s theorizing about the panopticon, the prison system in which a central guard tower gives the impression of continual surveillance, Harry O. Maier notes the disciplinary function of Christ’s gaze in Revelation. This is far from passive observation; rather, the gaze serves to instill a sense of obedience within the members of the audience—Christ knows whether the communities have

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of Jesus were likely meeting in domestic spaces. Thus, I prefer to use the language of “association” or “community.”

74. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza observes that the reference to the communities or churches at the end of this phrase points to the fact that the messages address the communities as a whole. See Schüssler Fiorenza, “Composition and Structure,” 165.

75. The messages vary on whether the promise to the victor comes before or after the final exhortation. The first three letters reference the victor last.

76. Paul Brooks Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 31–47; Friesen, “Satan’s Throne,” 352–56.

77. This is in line with DeSilva’s treatment of Rev 2–3 as part of the text’s use of honor discourse. See David A. DeSilva, “Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy of the Apocalypse of John,” *JSNT* 71 (1998): 79–110.

been faithful and he will know how they respond to the commands made in the text.<sup>78</sup> The reprimands and instances of praise are designed to change or to reinforce current behavior within the communities.<sup>79</sup> In this way, these messages serve as part of John's effort at shaping and controlling the communal identity of his audience. We might also compare the one like a Son of Man to the *gymnasiarch*, who was the chief administrator of the ancient bath-gymnasium and who monitored the behavior of *epheboi* inside and outside of its walls. Extending this metaphor further, we might imagine that Revelation's author intends these messages, like the gymnasiarchic inscription in Beroia, to be internalized by the text's audience members.

Heard seven times over, "the victor" stands out as the idealized masculine identity to which the audience is called. English translations of Revelation vary in their translation of  $\delta \nuικα\omega\nu$ , often rendering it as "he who overcomes" (NIV, KJV, NASB) or "he who conquers" (NRSV). Translated in these ways,  $\nuικα\omega$  suggests a military action, as Stephen Moore notes,<sup>80</sup> or a metaphorical type of overcoming. Blount highlights the latter meaning, writing, "To conquer is to witness resistantly. Such conquest, however, does not mean that the believer 'wins.' Jesus, after all, was executed because of the revelation he proclaimed.... Conquest does, however, mean that ultimately the believer will, like Christ, through the very act of witnessing, overwhelm the bestial forces of draconian Rome."<sup>81</sup> Reading Revelation in the context of Asia Minor's bath-gymnasium complexes suggests, however, that we hear John's references to  $\delta \nuικα\omega\nu$  as echoing references to the victors of the games and contests associated with these important sites. Inscriptions and honorific statues referencing these victories filled the public places of urban Asia Minor. Van Nijf describes

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78. Harry O. Maier, "Staging the Gaze: Early Christian Apocalypses and Narrative Self-Representation," *HTR* 90 (1997): 131–54.

79. As David DeSilva notes, the messages are a blend of rhetorical strategies that are both deliberative, seeking to change behavior, and epideictic, praising or censuring current behavior. See David A. DeSilva, "Out of Our Minds?: Appeals to Reason (Logos) in the Seven Oracles of Revelation 2–3," *JSNT* 31 (2008): 123–55.

80. Moore does not explicitly reference the use of  $\nuικα\omega$  in the seven messages, but explains in reference to other uses of the term in Revelation that its militaristic meaning is "unmistakable." See Stephen D. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 184–85.

81. Blount, *Revelation*, 52. Gregory K. Beale similarly highlights the ironic nature of the "conquering" implied in  $\nuικα\omega$ . See Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 269–72.

one location, explaining, “There was no escape: wherever you went in Termessos you were confronted with the powerful image of the victorious youth.”<sup>82</sup> This image of the victor does, of course, suggest military conquest as well, for the roots of the athletic training of the gymnasium emerged out of military training.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, this training was not only about developing physical strength; rather, it was arguably more about becoming a virtuous man.

As explained above, athletic training was not only about developing physical strength; rather, it was closely associated with becoming a virtuous *man*, and one of the virtues closely associated with athletics was the ability to endure hardship or to hold fast during a trial.<sup>84</sup> Dio Chrysostom, again, lauds the endurance or hard work (πονέω) of the boxer Melancomas, who was able to fight for a whole day, and even in the heat, noting that this characteristic is worth more than any of his prizes (*Or.* 29.10–11). Endurance is a characteristic of the victor, including the victor imagined in Revelation. Even though other virtues are referenced in Rev 2–3, including love, faith, service (2:19), and purity (3:3), the importance of endurance predominates. Specifically, the term “endurance” or “patient endurance” (ὕπομονή), as it is translated in the NRSV, is mentioned twice in reference to Ephesus. In this message, it is combined with an acknowledgement of the community’s toil or suffering (κόπος): “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance.... I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary” (3:2–3). Endurance is also ascribed to Thyatira and Philadelphia.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, the Son of Man praises the ability of the community in Pergamon to “hold fast” to Christ’s name in the midst of distress (2:13), and some of the people of Thyatira are to hold fast in light of problematic teachings in the community (2:25). The Son of Man also encourages those communities who need to develop an ability to endure. Smyrna, he warns,

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82. Van Nijf, “Local Heroes,” 324.

83. Although the expectations around military service and training had shifted during the Roman imperial period, the militaristic aspect of gymnasium training continued. See König, *Athletics and Literature*, 47.

84. N. Clayton Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1–13 in Its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 64–65; Newby, *Greek Athletics*, 151–54; Remijsen, *The End of Greek Athletics*, 269–70.

85. Endurance is a theme throughout Revelation. See 1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; and 14:12.

is about to undergo testing, so they should not fear suffering (2:10). Since those in Laodikeia are lukewarm, seemingly lacking conviction,<sup>86</sup> the Son of Man threatens to come and “discipline” (παιδεύω) them, clearly evoking the training or *paideia* of the bath-gymnasium.

The victories associated with the ancient bath-gymnasium were traditionally accompanied by prizes, including crowns or wreaths, palm branches, vases, and even money. The victors in Revelation’s messages are similarly rewarded with prizes, some of which parallel those typically associated with the games. Most notable, for instance, is the crown or wreath (στέφανος) of life promised to the victor in Smyrna, which evokes a common reward for athletes.<sup>87</sup> The victors in Philadelphia have apparently already won this prize, as they are instructed not to let anyone seize their crown or wreath (3:11). In a clever play on the tradition of memorializing victory through inscription, the Son of Man promises the victors in the community at Philadelphia that they will become a pillar inscribed with the names of God, Christ, and the New Jerusalem.<sup>88</sup> Other prizes or awards promised by the Son of Man include permission to eat from the tree of life (2:7), freedom from the “second death” (2:11), a white stone with a new name (2:17), authority over the nations and the morning star (2:26–28), being clothed in white robes (3:5), and the chance to sit on God’s throne (3:21). While some of these are quite different from the traditional prizes awarded athletes, the topic of prize-winning evokes the agonistic culture of ancient Asia Minor in which athletes receive rewards for their success.<sup>89</sup>

The differences between the prizes awarded to the victors of ancient Asia Minor and the victors envisioned by John in Rev 2–3 points to the primary way that this text constructs masculinity in response to the material utterances surrounding it. As commentators note, many of the rewards promised in the messages to the communities are items of eschatological import, foreshadowing the community’s life as the New Jerusalem.<sup>90</sup> The promise made to the victors in Laodikeia, that they will share the throne with God, points to the time when those who have been faithful to the

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86. Blount describes the community as lacking “zeal” (*Revelation*, 82).

87. Stevenson, “Conceptual Background,” 258–59.

88. Royalty, “Inscriptions and Erasures,” 454.

89. Although Revelation does not use the term *πρόκειμαι* (“to set before”), which is Croy’s focus, the discussion of prize imagery here is helpful for understanding how widespread the imagery is (Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 66–67).

90. For example, Schüssler Fiorenza, “Composition and Structure,” 165.

Lamb will be resurrected so that they can reign with Christ (20:4–6); the new name inscribed on the white stone given to the victors in Pergamon suggests the new names worn by those who follow the Lamb (14:1; 22:4); and the tree of life promised to those in Ephesus grows in the New Jerusalem described at the conclusion of John’s vision (22:2). Moreover, the white robes promised to the victors in Sardis (3:5) will appear again when they are given to those souls under the heavenly altar who have been slaughtered for the Word of God (6:9) and to the 144,000 who have “come out of the great ordeal” (7:13–14). In this way, some of the rewards promised by the Son of Man suggest that endurance is demonstrated by holding fast and remaining faithful even to the point of death (14:12–13). Ironically, being the victor entails what many might understand as being conquered (e.g., 13:7).<sup>91</sup>

Returning to the idea that the remains of archaeological and material cultures are utterances seeking a response, in the messages of Rev 2–3 we hear echoes of the conversations about ideal masculinity conveyed in and through the bath-gymnasiums of Roman Asia. Repeated references to “the victor,” along with specific descriptions of the rewards given to those who endure, evoke the agonistic culture fostered in these important civic spaces and suggests the possibility that Revelation imagines audience members whose identities are shaped in relation to these monumental buildings. Revelation’s voicing of these discourses, moreover, highlights the importance of endurance, a virtue also valorized among athletes. In this way, the Son of Man’s appeals to those who would be victors parallel the discipline voiced by the *gymnasiarch* and the gymnasiarchic laws. Like those laws, calls to endure, hold fast, and to remain faithful are ideally internalized by “the one who reads aloud and ... those who hear” the messages dictated to John (1:3). While we might note that the messages of Revelation do not seem to envision a physical contest or battle, as noted above, others in Revelation’s context employ these images metaphorically. John is in keeping with those Stoics and other early Christian authors who will use athletic imagery to envision a life of virtue. Eventually, however, early Christian authors will be more explicit in resignifying the gendered performances shaped by the agonistic culture of the Roman world, as they begin to use

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91. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 269.

the imagery to interpret the deaths of those killed for their faith.<sup>92</sup> In Revelation, however, we only see the beginnings of this shift in discourse.

Finally, while it is easy to understand the impulse among many to ground the text of Revelation in the seeming surety of the material world, we know the physical remains of the past are as much in need of narrativizing as the textual and discursive. The “stones and bones” of Asia Minor can help us envision Revelation’s milieu; however, this requires a move away from drawing connections to possible local allusions and toward using the material world to help us imagine the social, cultural, and religious discourses with which the text converses.

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