Abstract

The academic study of the seven-headed sea beast symbolism in the Apocalypse has proceeded along contemporary historical lines since the modern period. This approach seeks to locate the meaning of this symbolic reference within the historical context from which the book derives. While it remains true that careful historical analysis has advanced our understanding of the world in which the seer of Patmos lived and wrote, a strictly contemporary historical focus threatens to confine the significance of this apocalyptic symbol to the environs of the first century. In seeking to recover the theological and contemporary relevance of this symbol as a critique of imperial ambitions, this thesis argues for a reading strategy which locates the Book of Revelation foremost in the context of "canon." Such a reading stance illuminates the meaning of the symbolic beast in relationship to the deep intertextual and theological history which the final book of the Bible shares with the canonical corpus of Christian Scriptures.