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**THE "CLOTHED" WOMEN IN THE BOOK OF  
REVELATION (REVELATION 11,19-12,18; 17,1-18).  
EXEGESIS AND DUAL INTERPRETATION**

**- PHD THESIS SUMMARY -**

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**Keywords:** Revelation, woman, dragon, Mary, mother, Agrippina, Church, symbol, dual

The textual tradition of the Book of Revelation is unique. The apocalyptic text is represented by four distinct textual categories: (1) the "ancient" texts, comprising 15 witnesses; (2) the Koine texts, with 130 witnesses; (3) the Andreas texts, amounting to 85 witnesses; and (4) the Complutensian texts, with 27 witnesses. The transmission of the final canonical book of the New Testament through these four textual types renders the reconstruction of the original version of Saint John's writing from Patmos virtually impossible.

The pericopes describing the "clothed" women (Rev 11:19–12:18; 17:1–18) are sparsely attested in the major papyri and manuscripts. Only Codices Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus preserve the text of chapters 12 and 17. The uniqueness of the apocalyptic textual history is further highlighted by the Koine and Andreas types, which are preserved within manuscript commentaries. The commentaries of Oecumenius, Andreas, and Arethas transmit the text of these chapters with only minor deviations from the ancient and Complutensian versions.

The linguistic "errors" and "strange" symbols represent a distinctive characteristic of the final book of the New Testament canon. These so-called "mistakes" are not the result of inattentive copyists. Rather, they were deliberately employed by the author of Revelation to encode the message of the visions received on Patmos. Only the discerning reader—"the one who has understanding"—can decipher the meaning of John's Revelation. The linguistic peculiarities in chapters 12 and 17 unveil apocalyptic figures constructed through dual symbolism.

The classification of the pericopes concerning the "clothed" women into macro-sequences and microstructures reveals the organized and coherent structure of Revelation 12 and 17. The integrity of these two chapters is sustained through the unity of their themes and protagonists. Moreover, the macro- and microstructures concerning the Woman "clothed with the sun" (Rev 11:19–12:18) and the Woman "clothed in scarlet" (Rev 17:1–18) reveal the construction of apocalyptic figures through the method of dual symbolism. Thus, the identity of the female figures may be unveiled through an investigation of this symbolic duality, whereby the protagonists simultaneously represent both collective entities and individual persons.

The author's own translation of the pericopes describing the "clothed" women emphasizes the "divine passive" found in the texts of chapters 12 and 17. This divine passive is the

expression employed by Saint John to disclose God as the ultimate agent of the action. Although God is not explicitly named as the acting subject, He is the “invisible” author of the events described in the narratives of the Woman “clothed with the sun” and the Woman “clothed in scarlet”.

The Romanian translation offered in this doctoral thesis highlights the differences between the biblical editions used by the officially recognized Christian denominations in Romania. These variations are minor and do not alter the meaning of the Greek text. Rather, they reflect the translators’ preferences for specific verbal tenses and synonymous expressions, aimed at faithfully rendering the sense of the original.

The exegesis of Rev 11:19–12:18 reveals the profound connection between the Ark of the Covenant in the heavenly Temple and the Woman “clothed with the sun.” This connection is emphasized by the verb ὁράω (“to see”; rendered as ὁφθῇ in the text) and the celestial “signs” (Rev 11:19; 12:1). With the opening of the Temple, both the Ark and the Woman are revealed. The celestial conflict between the Dragon and his angels and the Archangel Michael and his angels mirrors the parallel conflicts: the Devil’s struggle against the Woman and the male Child she bears, and his battle against the heavenly hosts who call the saints “brothers.” On earth, the conflict unfolds between the Dragon and the Woman, and later, between the Dragon and the Woman’s offspring. Additionally, the microstructural exegesis affirms the thematic and symbolic unity through which the identity of the Woman “clothed with the sun” is further developed and analyzed in Chapter III of this thesis.

The exegesis of chapter 17 uncovers the antithesis between the Woman “clothed in scarlet” and the Woman “clothed with the sun” from Revelation 12. It also illustrates the narrative and symbolic continuity of the Beast across Revelation 13 and 17. The scarlet-clad Woman is entangled in conflict with the saints and martyrs of God, but ultimately, after the kings of the earth are vanquished by the Lamb, they turn against her. In contrast to the Woman “clothed with the sun,” who is delivered by God, the Woman “clothed in scarlet” is abandoned to destruction by those who were once her allies in the war against the Church of Christ.

The tradition of interpreting apocalyptic texts witnessed significant development during the first ten centuries of Christianity. The hermeneutics of the “clothed” women in Revelation 12 and 17 is rooted in both the Latin and Greek patristic traditions, which developed independently. The ancient and early medieval Latin tradition primarily offers a collective identity for the “clothed” women.

The oldest surviving Latin commentary on the Book of Revelation belongs to Saint Victor (d. 304), Bishop of Petovium. Saint Victor shares the ecclesiological interpretation of the Woman “clothed with the sun” proposed earlier by Saint Hippolytus (d. 235), Bishop of Rome. According to Saint Victor, the Woman in Revelation 12 represents the ancient Church of the Patriarchs, the Prophets, and the Holy Apostles, while the Woman in Revelation 17 symbolizes the Roman Senate, which issued anti-Christian legislation.

The North African commentator Tyconius, often accused of Donatist sympathies, exerted a profound influence on all subsequent Latin Fathers who composed commentaries on the Apocalypse. For Tyconius, the Woman “clothed with the sun” represents the “Mystical Body of Christ”—namely, Israel and the Church—which gives birth to Christ anew each day. The association of the Christian community with the Woman “in travail” of Revelation 12 became the standard interpretive framework among ancient and medieval Latin-speaking Christians. In Tyconius’ vision, the Woman in Revelation 17 embodies the City of the Devil—home to all those who defy the will of God.

Later Latin commentaries generally followed the interpretive line established by Saint Victor and Tyconius. The only Latin commentary that offers a dual interpretation of the Woman “clothed with the sun” is that of Theodulf, Bishop of Orléans. For Theodulf, the identity of the Woman in Revelation 12 is both ecclesiological and Mariological: she is simultaneously the Church and the Virgin Mary.

The ancient Greek tradition, by contrast, offered a dual identity to the Woman in Revelation 12 from the outset. The earliest interpretation is attributed to Saint Methodius (d. 311), Bishop of Olympus, who read the figure in ecclesiological terms. The mariological reading of chapter 12 was developed in the earliest extant Greek commentary, authored by the Byzantine Oecumenius, who identifies the Woman “clothed with the sun” as the Mother of God. In his commentary, the Woman of Revelation 17 is viewed as a collective character bearing dual significance: she is both ancient Rome, already punished by God, and the new Rome—Constantinople.

The mariological interpretation recorded by Oecumenius was embraced by Eastern and Oriental Church Fathers between the fourth and sixth centuries. All Eastern and Oriental writings from this period that have survived identify the Woman of Revelation 12 with the Virgin Mary.



The commentary of Saint Andrew, Bishop of Caesarea—published in the seventh century—achieved widespread reception among Greek-speaking Christians. To this day, his commentary is recognized as the standard Orthodox interpretation of the Book of Revelation. Saint Andrew explicitly rejects the mariological reading and returns to an ecclesiological interpretation of the Woman in Revelation 12, affirming that she represents the tradition of the Church. He likewise rejects the identification of the Woman “clothed in scarlet” with ancient Rome. Instead, in Andrew’s commentary, the Woman in Revelation 17 symbolizes all sinful people who have become spiritually desolate.

Saint Andrew’s commentary shaped the trajectory of all subsequent medieval interpretations in the East and Orient. Nevertheless, the mariological reading of the Woman in Revelation 12 was never fully abandoned by the Eastern Church. As a result, several modern patristic interpretations continue to identify the Virgin Mary with the Woman “clothed with the sun.”

The ecclesiological interpretation was preferred by both Latin and Greek Fathers out of caution, so as not to conflict with the Church’s doctrine of the supernatural birth of Christ from the Virgin Mary without labor pains. Since Revelation 12 describes the Woman enduring the “pangs of childbirth,” most Fathers were hesitant to associate this figure directly with Mary. This caution was taken to an extreme by Saint Neophytos of Cyprus (d. 1214), who not only rejected the ecclesiological reading but even identified the Woman of chapter 12 as the mother of the Antichrist—an anti-mariological figure.

Modern Orthodox commentaries largely follow the interpretive tradition of Saint Andrew. The Woman “clothed with the sun” is viewed as the Church. Only the American priest Lawrence R. Farley proposes a dual interpretation, identifying the Woman as both the Church and the Virgin Mary. The Woman of Revelation 17 is identified with ancient Rome and all malevolent persons who persecute the Church in every age.

Contemporary Orthodox writings—although less widely received among the faithful and biblical scholars of various local Churches—tend to identify the Woman of Revelation 12 with both the Virgin Mary and the Church of Christ. The Woman “clothed in scarlet” is interpreted as a collective figure representing sinful humanity—those who do not fulfill the will of God.

Heterodox commentaries published in Romania offer a collective reading of the female figures. The Woman of Revelation 12 is interpreted as either the Church, Israel, or the first-

century Messianic community. The Woman of Revelation 17 is seen either as ancient Rome or as those who, in every generation, persecute the Church of Christ.

Interpretations of the “clothed women” in the Book of Revelation have been profoundly shaped by the reception of Saint John’s Apocalypse within the Eastern Church. The popularity of Saint Andrew’s commentary is largely due to the ecclesiastical authority he held. By contrast, the commentary of the Byzantine Oecumenius—though insightful—was less readily accepted, since its author did not possess formal ecclesiastical authority.

Ancient and medieval commentators were generally reluctant to offer a mariological interpretation of the Woman in Revelation 12 out of concern for preserving the Church’s dogma regarding the supernatural birth of Jesus Christ—namely, that the Virgin Mary bore the Child without experiencing labor pains. Nevertheless, early Christians in the East and Orient did not abandon the identification of the Mother of God in Revelation 12. Throughout this interpretive tradition, the Woman in Revelation 17 was consistently seen as symbolizing ancient Rome and any metropolis in which the inhabitants defy God’s will and persecute the Church.

The uniqueness of the text of Revelation is underscored by its linguistic “errors” and the abundance of symbolic language. Saint John encoded the visionary message he received on Patmos through textual irregularities and rich symbolism that define both the characters and the apocalyptic action. The principal figures in Revelation 12 and 17 function as both collective entities and historical individuals. Accordingly, the protagonists of the Apocalypse are constructed through the method of dual symbolism.

Dual symbols simultaneously represent individual historical persons and collective identities. These historical individuals serve as exemplary models—or anti-models—for the communities they symbolize. Thus, the Woman “clothed with the sun” in Revelation 12 is the Virgin Mary as an individual character. She is the fulfillment of all prophetic anticipations regarding the mother of the Messiah and serves as a model of faith and perseverance for persecuted Christians. As a collective figure, the Woman “clothed with the sun” represents the Church. Persecuted believers are called the brothers of Christ and the spiritual offspring of Mary; for them, the Mother of God embodies the ideal of faithful discipleship.

The Woman “clothed in scarlet like fire” is constructed in antithesis to the Woman of Revelation 12. As an individual character, her fate echoes that of Agrippina the Younger, the mother of Emperor Nero. As a collective figure, the Woman of Revelation 17 represents anti-Christian

political rulers and malevolent individuals. The “great city” is thus portrayed in deliberate contrast to the Church, which is the heavenly city.

Saint John constructs the female figure of Revelation 12 using the method of dual symbolism. The Woman “clothed with the sun” is the “great sign” revealed upon the “opening” of the heavenly Temple and the “appearance” of the Ark in heaven—accompanied by lightning, thunder, voices, earthquakes, and great hail (Rev 11:19–12:1). She is enthroned in heaven, clothed with the sun, crowned with twelve stars, and is the mother of the Messiah. The ancient Serpent persecutes her, and his failure fills him with wrath. The great Dragon then wages war on the rest of the Woman’s offspring.

As an individual, the Woman of Revelation 12 is the Virgin Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ. She is the one in whom all the prophecies concerning the Messiah’s mother find fulfillment. Saint John describes her in celestial glory. Though she was persecuted on earth by the ancient Serpent—through the decree of King Herod and the agony she endured at the Cross—she was preserved by divine providence and ultimately triumphed, receiving the crown of life. Thus, the Mother of God is the New Eve, whose Son brings salvation to humankind and triumphs over the Devil. Like Rachel, Mary is the mother of the New Israel, against whom the Devil now wages war. Furthermore, the Virgin Mary is the Queen of Heaven and the New Ark of the Covenant—symbols of holiness and divine presence.

For the recipients of the Book of Revelation, the Mother of God stands as a model of life and faith. The image of the Virgin Mary is closely associated with the New Israel; therefore, as a collective figure, the Woman “clothed with the sun” represents the Church. The Woman’s portrayal echoes the dream of the Patriarch Joseph in the Book of Genesis. Joseph’s life foreshadows both the life of the Savior and the destiny of the Church. Though Christians endure persecution on earth, they dwell in the desert prepared by God. The wilderness becomes the place of divine encounter and providence. The Church is sustained by God, and the Lord is coming soon. This imminent return of Christ was anticipated with hope by the early Christians, since the description of the Woman in Revelation 12 reveals the joy awaiting them in the Kingdom of God. Like the Virgin Mary, they will receive the crown of life and will reign with the Lord Christ, provided they keep His commandments and bear witness to Jesus, even at the cost of their lives.

The early Christians interpreted the identity of the Woman both ecclesiologically and mariologically. The ecclesiological interpretation gained wide acceptance in the Latin tradition of Apocalypse hermeneutics. In the Greek tradition, both readings were received by early Christians.

The Byzantine commentary of Oecumenius reflects the caution of Greek and Latin Fathers in offering a mariological reading of the Woman's identity. Many feared that such an interpretation would violate the Church's doctrine concerning the miraculous, pain-free birth of Christ from the Virgin. Nevertheless, the Eastern Church did not abandon the mariological interpretation. For Eastern Christians, identifying the Virgin Mary with the Woman "clothed with the sun" was not heretical, since the text of Revelation is richly symbolic.

Moreover, the "birth pangs" of the Messiah's mother are interpreted symbolically—as an image of the Virgin Mary's sufferings at the Crucifixion of her Son. At the Cross, the Mother of God becomes the Mother of all the living. Like Rachel—who mourns her persecuted children in the Book of Jeremiah and the Gospel of Matthew—Mary is the mother of all persecuted Christians in the Apocalypse. The remnant of her seed is oppressed by the Devil, but the Church is protected by divine providence. In the end, the Devil is vanquished by the Savior, the Son of Mary, and the faithful rejoice in the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

The Woman of chapter 17 is constructed in deliberate antithesis to the Woman "clothed with the sun." The female figure "clothed in scarlet like blazing fire" was identified by early Christians with ancient Rome and the malevolent individuals who persecute the Church. Her description reveals a dual symbol: as a collective figure, she embodies ancient Rome, anti-Christian political rulers, and sinful humanity. In contrast to the Virgin Mary, the Woman "clothed in scarlet" is interpreted as Agrippina the Younger, mother of Emperor Nero.

The description of the Woman in Revelation 17 echoes the life of Empress Agrippina. Saint John employed the myths of *Nero redux* and *Nero redivivus* in constructing both the apocalyptic Beast and the Woman "clothed in scarlet." Although Agrippina governed the Roman Empire alongside her son and co-constructed a formidable imperial propaganda machine, her fate was ultimately tragic. She was hated by Rome's leadership and murdered at the command of her own son—whom early Christians identified with the apocalyptic Beast.

Empress Agrippina Julia serves as an anti-model for early Christians. The author of the Book of Revelation drew upon her life to personify Babylon, ancient Rome, and all those who persecute the Church. The fate of Rome and of those who carry out the will of the Devil mirrors that of Nero's mother. The "inhabitants of the earth"—depicted in contrast to the saints and martyrs of the Lord—share the tragic end of Agrippina Julia. By contrast, the faithful—those who keep God's commandments and bear the testimony of Jesus even unto death—shall rejoice in the Kingdom of Christ, like His Mother, who reigns alongside her Son in heaven.

In conclusion, the author of Revelation employs the method of dual symbolism in constructing the characters of chapters 12 and 17. The “clothed women” represent both collective entities and individual figures. The Woman “clothed with the sun” symbolizes the Church and serves as an image of the Mother of God, who stands as a model of faith and perseverance for Christians. The Woman “clothed in scarlet” represents ancient Rome and the wicked, who persecute the Church of Christ, and functions as a symbol of Agrippina Julia, mother of Emperor Nero—an anti-model for believers. The interpretation of these two women provides the hermeneutical key to deciphering the apocalyptic text. Thus, Saint John’s writing from Patmos is a book of hope for persecuted Christians. Historical individuals serve as models or anti-models for the members of the Church. The fate of the protagonists reveals both the tragic end of those who fulfill the Devil’s will, and the salvation of the faithful who do the will of God. The coming of the Lord Christ is imminent, and the saints and martyrs shall dwell in the New Jerusalem—the great heavenly city—and shall reign together with the Lord Jesus Christ.