"Medieval Treatments of the 'Mark of the Beast’ (666)"

[drafted originally (starting October 2014) for the Ann Matter Festschrift, but disrupted by a “tiny” stroke I suffered in November 2018, thus not finished in time for the volume that appeared in August 2019 as The End of the World in Medieval Thought and Spirituality (Springer, 2019), edited by [Jessica Boon](https://religion.unc.edu/_people/full-time-faculty/boon/), Eric Knibbs and Erica Gelser]

STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION, 30 August 2019]

Revelation 13.16-18 (also 14.9-11, 16.2, 19.20, 20.4) speaks about a certain "mark" that will be

necessary for normal activities in the last times, consisting of the name or number of "the beast"

(introduced in Rev. 13.1ff.) inscribed on one's right hand or forehead. The number is then given as "666" (or 616 in some texts). In post-Reformation times, Protestants often identified "the beast" as the Pope. This paper explores how that "mark" was interpreted in the centuries prior to the Reformation.

Content of relevant passages in Revelation

9.4 - And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

13.1 - And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea,

having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

13.11 – And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb,

and he spake as a dragon. 12 And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. 13 And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, 14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by [the means of] those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. 15 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. 16 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: 17 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number [is] Six hundred threescore [and] six.

14.1 - And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty [and] four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

14.9 - And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive [his] mark in his forehead, or in his hand, 10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: 11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

15.2 - And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory

over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, [and] over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

16.2 - And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and [upon] them which worshipped his image.

19.20 - And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

20.4 - And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and [I saw] the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received [his] mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

[get Greek texts and keywords; and Latin, Syriac]

The Classical Greek word *charagma* (χάραγμα), translated as *mark* (of the beast) in Revelation 13.16 also means *stamped money, coin* or the *impress* on the coin.

Peter M. Head “SOME RECENTLY PUBLISHED NT PAPYRI FROM OXYRHYNCHUS: AN OVERVIEW AND PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT,” TYNDALE BULLETIN 51.1 (2000) 15f. P. Oxy 4499 (P115). [re the 616 variation]

http://98.131.162.170//tynbul/library/TynBull\_2000\_51\_1\_01\_Head\_OxyrhynchusPapyri.pdf

Resources:

Wikipedia articles -- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Number\_of\_the\_beast [excellent]

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\_beast\_%28Revelation%29

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antichrist [not the same topic, but related]

Weisstein, Eric W. "Beast Number." From *MathWorld*--A Wolfram Web Resource. http://mathworld.wolfram.com/BeastNumber.html [mathematic theories]

Sam Storms http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/june-6--2006:-some-observations-on-the-number-of-the-beast--666-

David Thom, *The Number And Names Of The Apocalyptic Beasts* (1923)

Just, Felix (2 February 2002). "666: The Number of the Beast". Retrieved 6 June 2006 [xxx]

Walter B. Cahn, "The Portrait of Muhammad in the Toledan Collection" [online]

in Reading Medieval Images: the Art Historian and the Object

ed. E. Sears and T. K. Thomas (U Mich Press 2002)

Wilhelm Bousset, The Antichrist Legend (1896; reprint, Altanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999,

online), 200-202 (on the “mark” – but only 11f. on the number 666 = Nero, contra Gunkel);

Bernard McGinn, Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages, 2nd ed. (New York:

Columbia University Press, 1999);

Vladimir Moss, The Book of the End: *An Interpretation of the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian* (2005 online)

Roger Gryson, “Les commentaires patristiques latins de l’Apocalypse,”

Revue théologique de Louvain 28 (1997): 305-37;

E. Ann Matter, “The Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis,” and John Williams, “The Apocalypse Commentary of Beatus of Liébana,” in Emmerson and McGinn, eds., The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 38-50, 217-33;

Emmerson, Antichrist in the Middle Ages (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981);

Francis X. Gumerlock, Patristic Commentaries on Revelation [online] "third through eighth centuries"

[Maureen Tilley, 01no2014 mtilley@fordham.edu] Another source on the Antichrist is the North African *Liber Genealogicus* in Mommsen's *MGH Auctores Anitquissini*, vol. 9 *Chronica Minora Saec. IV. V. Vi. VII*. In the various editions over time the identity of the Antichrist is changed. As Geiseric is approaching Carthage where the chronicle is written, he is the Antichrist. When he is occupying Carthage, the chronicle entry is changed. Perhaps some secondary literature on the *Liber* will be helpful but I don't have anything at hand.

La version *Florentini* n'est pas en reste, ayant calculé que les noms de Genséric [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genseric] et celui d'Anthemius [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthemius] représentaient le nombre de la bête dans l'Apocalypse (666) = http://www.encyclopedie-universelle.com/beatus-liebana13.html

[Gordon Plumb] You might look in Rosemary Muir Wright, Art and Antichrist i9n Medieval Europe, Manchester UP, 1995. Pp.36-7 have remarks on Muhammad be4ing identified as a type of Antichrist (by Alvarus of Cordóba) and a ninth century life of the4 Prophet uses the alleged death date of 666 as a sign that he was the Apocalyptic beast of Rev. 11.11.   [Stephen Morris] I recall Andrew of Crete as the author of one commentary on the Apocalypse. as well.

http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/june-6--2006:-some-observations-on-the-number-of-the-beast--666-

“There are some few who have wished to take the number 666 chronologically. In a.d. 1213 Pope Innocent III called for a new crusade because he held that Muhammadan [Islamic] power was destined to last for six hundred and sixty-six years, and at that time that period was near to an end. Certain others have taken it to refer to the six hundred and sixty-six years between Seleucus in 311 b.c. and the emergence of Julian the Apostate in a.d. 355. Finally, it has been suggested that the reference is to the year a.d. 666, in which year, it is said, Pope Vitalian decreed that all public worship should be in Latin” (*Evangelical Times*, 70 [1958], 295).

Earliest texts and views (up to Constantine-Athanasius-Augustine):

Irenaeus – 666 is the numerical equivalents of the letters of the name 'Latinos' or 'Titan'

Irenaeus writes: "That is, six times a hundred, six times ten, and six units. [He gives this] as a summing up of the whole of that apostasy which has taken place during six thousand years... Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 28, 30. Three names were suggested by Irenaeus (@ 200 a.d.), all of which have the numerical value of 666. "Euanthas" (but no one knows who or what "Euanthas" means), "Teitan" (this could refer either to the Titans who rebelled against the gods, of which the Antichrist is thus thought to be an antitype; or Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 a.d., notwithstanding the fact that Teitan is not the verbal equivalent of Titus), and "Lateinos," (which supposedly stands for the Roman or "Latin" empire itself, understood as collectively opposed to Christ and his Church).

Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235)

Origen (d. 253) and Others [scholia\commentaries]

Victorinus of Pettau (260)

Tyconius (380)

Didymus the Blind (d. 398)

Jerome (398) – his name will be 666, that is, six hundreds, six tens and six units. For him alone will be concentrated all the abomination that existed until the flood because of the apostasy of the angels.

Augustine

Certain have found the number of the beast in the name of Julian the Apostate

schismatics tried to extract the number 666 from the name of Patriarch Nicon

Eastern and Western Orthodoxy to the Rise/Awareness of Islam (ca 700):

Ecumenius (518)

Caesarius of Arles (537)

Primasius of Hadrumetum (540)

Apringius of Béja (548)

Cassiodorus (580)

Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia (d. 614) – St. Andrew says: 'If it were necessary to know his name, the seer would have revealed it; but it was not pleasing to the grace of God that this baneful name should be written in the Divine Book.'

Pseudo-Jerome, Pseudo-Isidore (c. 600)

In the second half of the sixth century or in the seventh century, an anonymous author wrote

De monogramma [Roger Gryson, ed. CCSL 107:146-57], an explanation of the number of the beast

in Revelation 13:18.

Paterius (7th c.)

Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria (7th c.)

Arethas of Caesarea (Greek: Ἀρέθας; born c. 860-after 932) in his Commentary on Revelation [(scholia) on the Apocalypse, for which he made considerable use of the similar work of his predecessor, Andrew of Caesarea [Greek: Ἀνδρέας Καισαρείας; 563 – 637; the oldest Greek patristic commentary on that book [ET 2011] – since his predecessor Oecumenius isn't counted as a “father”]. It was first printed in 1535 as an appendix to the works of Oecumenius (early seventh century, or the late sixth century)] gives seven names: **Lampetis** (*the lustrous one*), **o Niketes** (victor, *the winner*), **Teitan (from Irenaeus)**, **Palai baskanos** (*ancient sorcerer*), **Kakos Odegos** (*bad guide*), **Alethes Blaberos** (*really harmful*), and **Amnos Adikos** (*unjust lamb*) each of which gives a total of 666. [42]

*Andrew of Caesarea, Commentary on the Apocalypse*, translated by Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, Fathers of the Church series, Catholic University of America Press, volume 123, 2011. This book also contains an extensive and informative introduction to the person of Andrew and the commentary.

* Eugenia Constantinou, *Andrew of Caesarea and the apocalypse in the ancient church of the East: Studies and Translation*. PhD thesis, Quebec: Université Laval (2008)

*Guiding to a Blessed End: Andrew of Caesarea and His Apocalypse Commentary in the Ancient Church,* Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, The Catholic University of America Press, 2013.

*Commentary on the Apocalypse* (Fathers of the Church), 2006, Oecumenius, John N. Suggit, tr., Catholic University of America Press, ISBN 0-8132-0112-8 ISBN 9780813201122. Review by Marc De Groote, Byzantion 78 (2008), 488-498.

Hippolytus, Pseudo-Ephraem, Pseudo-Epiphanius, Isidore of Seville (d. 635), and Bede

all interpreted Revelation 11-13 in their writings about Antichrist.

Victorinus of Pettau gives the names **Teitan**, **Antemos** (*opponent*), **Diclux** (*double-dealer*) and **Genserikos**; the last he calls Gothic. As it is plainly Genseric, the Vandal king, who captured Rome in 455 AD, the passage as whole can not go back to Victorinus, who belonged to the 3rd century. It is not, however surprising that the commentary should be brought up to date, after Genseric became notorious through the sack of Carthage or of Rome. Of the other names in Victorinus only **Diclux** needs mention. It is said to be the Latin counterpart of Teitan and by reckoning each letter at its value in Roman numerals, the total of 666 is again given.[ Victorinus considers the 666 of verse 18 as the computation of letters, each of which comprise the equivalent number, of an assortment of possible names.

Beatus (c. 730 – c. 800) , a Spanish monk, gives eight names among which are **Damnatus** (*Damned*), **Antichristus** (*Antichrist*), and **Acxyme** (*for aichime or achine=666*). The numerical interpretation of Antichristus is based on the order of letters in the Latin alphabet, a = 1 to x = 300, but the accusative must be taken and spelled Antechristum.

From the Rise/Awareness of Islam to the Reformation (c 1550):

Islam - Quran “and when the word is fulfilled concerning them,

We shall bring forth a Beast of the Earth to speak unto them

because mankind had not faith in Our revelations” [Q 27:82].

“the task of the Beast will be to distinguish the believers from the non believers...

it will draw a line on the forehead of every muslim believer whereby his face will become

bright and luminous.” [Abu Huraira / Tirmidhi, by Sheik Ahmed Ali in “Major Signs before

the Day of Judgement”]

Bede (710) = a human, not a devil/demon

Ambrose Autpert (778)

Beatus of Liebana (786) see below

De enigmatibus ex Apocalypsi Johannis (8th c)

John of Damascus

Paul Alvarus Indiculus Luminosis (Muhammad)

(anon) Adnotatio Mammetis Arabum principis (Muhammad = antichrist predecessor)

Peter the Venerable (Mohammad)

Other Commentators on Revelation

Hebrew terms equivalent to 666:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Therion\_%28Thelema%29#The\_Number\_of\_Therion\_and\_the\_numerology\_thereof](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Therion_(Thelema)" \l "The_Number_of_Therion_and_the_numerology_thereof)

[[08/30/2019: see other drafts – is this a “notes” file?]]