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Solomon and 666 (Revelation 13.18)*

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The present article argues that 666 in Rev 13.18 is best related to the notice of Solomon receiving 666 talents of gold (1 Kgs 10.14 // 2 Chr 9.13), which is, in turn, an important notice of this king's wayward and unjust practices: his inordinate wealth, exploitation of his own people and eschewing of God's law.

Keywords: 666, mark of the Beast, Solomon

The origin of this number is not yet clear.[1]

1. Introduction

The number of the Beast according to Rev 13.18, 666 (ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ),[2] has long posed problems for interpreters. The number was mysterious as early as the second century when a writer like Irenaeus proves uncertain

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1 R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John: With Introduction, Notes, and Indices, also the Greek Text and English Translation* (2 vols.; International Critical Commentary; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920) I.367 n. 1.

2 The variant 616 (εξακοσιαι δεκα εξ [χις']) is well known (𝔓[115], C, Ir[mss]). Also attested is 665 (εξακοσια εξηκοντα πεντε, 2344). See the apparatus in NA[28] (p. 765). The reading favoured in the text of NA[28] is found in A (χξς' 𝔓[47] 046, 051, 1611, 2329, 2377 𝔐); Ir Hipp (NA[28] p. 765). For further discussion and explanation of the different grammatical forms of εξακοσιοι that are attested, see D. E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16* (WBC 52B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998) 722. More generally, see H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. edn; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959) 102–6 (§§347–54). For recent studies, see K. Kirchmayr, 'Das sexagesimale System als Schlüssel zu Zahlen in der Offenbarung des Johannes', *SNTU* 35 (2010) 35–50; P. J. Williams, '𝔓[115] and the Number of the Beast', *TynBul* 58 (2007) 151–3; and K. Kirchmayr, 'Die Bedeutung von 666 und 616 (Offb 13, 18)', *Bib* 95 (2014) 424–7.

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as to its meaning.[3] But, like any other good crux worth its salt, the mystery of 666 has not stopped the floodgates of interpretation; if anything, it has encouraged interpreters to offer a veritable myriad of options, many of which are highly speculative.[4]

2. Interpretive Options

While there is no one interpretation that commands universal consensus, the majority of recent commentators appear to agree that the text refers to a specific individual – this is why, so the argument goes, the number is said to be 'a human number' (ἀριθμὸς ... ἀνθρώπου).[5] Most interpreters go on to agree that

3 In *Against Heresies* 5.30, Irenaeus offers *Euanthas*, *Lateinos* and *Teitan* as possibilities. See Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 770; R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 264; Charles, *Revelation*, I.364; and esp. J. Kovacs and C. Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 157: 'According to Irenaeus, the number indicates that the Beast sums up and concentrates in himself all the apostasy that has taken place in the 6,000 years of the world's history (*AH* V.28.2). The three 6's also demonstrate that he will recapitulate Nebuchadnezzar, whose statue had a height of 60 cubits and a breadth of six cubits, and also the 600 years of Noah, when the flood came as a punishment for apostasy (*AH* V.29.2). The 6's stand for "the recapitulations of that apostasy, taken in its full extent, which occurred at the beginning, during the intermediate periods, and which shall take place at the end" (*AH* V.30.1, ANF I.558).'

4 In addition to the literature already cited, see R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993) 384–407 for discussion and a selection of options. Cf. G. R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 363: 'Perhaps no verse in the Bible has received more prolonged speculation than 13:18. The number of the Beast down through the centuries has been linked with literally hundreds of different possibilities. On the whole, John's opening observation, Ὧδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν (*hōde hē sophia estin*, this demands wisdom) has been totally ignored in the heedless rush to link 666 with all kinds of strange and wonderful suggestions.' Similarly Mounce, *Revelation*, 264, who concludes that John 'intended only his intimate associates to be able to decipher the number. So successful were his precautions that even Irenaeus some one hundred years later was unable to identify the person intended. An additional 1800 years of conjecture have not brought us any closer to an answer.' For Irenaeus, see the previous note.

5 The other option, entertained by some, is that the number would be somehow *non*-human (supernatural?). See Charles, *Revelation*, I.364–5 for earlier scholars who held to such a perspective. 'But', Mounce writes, 'exactly what a nonhuman number would be or why it should enter this context is not at all clear' (*Revelation*, 264). Charles, too, finds 'the emphasizing of the fact here that the number is such as a man uses is pointless. For the writer to set down any other than an intelligible number would be highly absurd' (*Revelation*, I.365). G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 24 claims that 'the other numbers in Revelation are probably used figuratively without specific reference to one historical reality at one particular point in history. The word ἀριθμός ("number") is elsewhere always used figuratively for an uncountable multitude' (see further, and similarly, ibid., 721–2). W. Mattes, 'Die Chiffre 666 der Apokalypse (13, 18)', *Hermes* 139 (2011) 365–75 thinks the number is related to Greek 'thesis-counting', with the

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666 is best interpreted as the numerical equivalent for this individual's name, with the most popular candidate for the job being Nero. While this consensus is impressive, the problems besetting the equation '666 = Nero' are well known. For one thing, the exact name that equals 666 is not 'Nero' alone but 'Nero Caesar'; for another, this compound name must be transliterated into Hebrew and then spelled defectively (נרון קסר for the expected נרון קיסר)[6] before the calculation can be carried out and 'work'.[7] Perhaps none of these problems are insurmountable, but other issues present themselves – paramount among them the observation that 'the name of Nero was apparently never suggested by the ancient commentators even though his persecuting zeal made him a model

numerical sum of Nero's name (72) a sign of his hubris; 666 is then the total number of Nero's seven names (*Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus*). See M. Oberweis, 'Die Bedeutung der neutestamentlichen "Rätselzahlen" 666 (Apk 13 18) und 153 (Joh 21 11)', *ZNW* 77 (1986) 226–42, for an argument that the number 616 is a meant to be a transcription (*tryw*) of Greek θηρίου; see also J. Roloff, *The Revelation of John: A Continental Commentary* (CC; trans. J. E. Alsup; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 166.

6 But cf. נרון קסר in Mur XVIII, 1 (DJD II.101). See C. R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AYB 38A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014) 597–8 for this and additional evidence for the spelling of קסר.

7 See Charles, *Revelation*, I.367; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 770–1. B. Witherington III, *Revelation* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 177 points out that 'Nero Caesar' may also explain the variant 616, 'because, if the Latin of Nero rather than the Greek form (*Neron*) is transliterated into Hebrew, the numerical value of the name becomes 616' (similarly Charles, *Revelation*, I.367). But see Mounce, *Revelation*, 264 n. 60, who thinks that '616 is better accounted for as a deliberate attempt to identify the Beast with Caligula', whose name totals 616 in Greek. Mounce also finds the defective Hebrew writing of a Greek form of a Latin word to be a complicated situation and thus unlikely (ibid., 264–5). Witherington's reply (*Revelation*, 185 n. 306: 'The objection of R. H. Mounce … cannot stand because this same defective spelling has been found at Qumran') is only slightly helpful and hardly definitive. Moreover, Mounce himself notes this evidence (*Revelation*, 264 n. 81; see also Charles, *Revelation*, I.367). For more discussion, see Beale, *Revelation*, 24, 718–21, who deems the use of a Hebrew system of gematria unlikely. Contrast Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 771–3; Koester, *Revelation*, 538–40, 596–9, 605–6; and Roloff, *Revelation*, 165–7, among others, who are quite certain that gematria is being used. More generally, note Beale, *Revelation*, 721: 'the large number of conflicting solutions argues against a literal calculation method as ever yielding the right interpretation'. Beale favours an approach that sees the numbers as having 'figurative significance' or symbolising 'some spiritual reality' without ever involving 'any kind of literal gematria calculation (e.g. twenty-four elders, seven seals, the 144,000, three and a half years, two witnesses, seven heads, ten horns)' (ibid.). Whatever the case, it should be noted that these figures are often derived from the Old Testament in some way. For yet another, but not totally unrelated, perspective, note Kirchmayr, 'Das sexagesimale System', who thinks that 666 designates the number seventeen and means 'Antigod'.

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of the Antichrist'.[8] One further observation should be underscored: despite the wording of Rev 13.17, it is not entirely clear that Rev 13.18 *requires* that the number is an *individual's actual name*. That is to say, while v. 17 does say that the Beast has a name and that its name has a number (τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θηρίου ἢ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτου), v. 18 does not make a connection between 666 and the Beast's name explicit, which it might very well have done, with only a very slight alteration that substituted ὄνομα for ἀριθμός, as follows:

> ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ θηρίου, ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν ...
>
> ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ θηρίου, ὄνομα γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν ...

However, since Rev 13.18 does *not* read ὄνομα, one may legitimately doubt if the number in question has to correspond to a name proper ... or to a proper name.[9] Perhaps, to use Robert H. Mounce's terminology, 666 is more 'a symbol than a cryptogram'.[10]

3. Another, Old (Testament) Option: Solomon and 666

The purpose of the present article is to (re)introduce into the discussion of 666 a text from the Old Testament that may be pertinent, but which seems to have gone largely underappreciated, if not fully unknown. Of course, the deep

8 Mounce, *Revelation*, 265. Both Koester, *Revelation*, 540 and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation* (NTC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 395 point out that Nero is not suggested as an option until the 1830s. But cf. Koester, *Revelation*, 535 on Victorinus (d. 304), who noted similar traits between the Beast and Nero; and see further F. X. Gumerlock, 'Nero Antichrist: Patristic Evidence for the Use of Nero's Naming in Calculating the Number of the Beast (Rev 13:18)', *WTJ* 68 (2006) 347–60, who believes that evidence for an identification with Nero exists already in the fifth-century North African text *Liber genealogus*. On an exclusive identification with Nero, note the caution of J. L. Mangina, *Revelation* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010) 167: 'But why should we identify the beast with a character from the mid-first century? John's vision is of a coming terror, not a figure from the past.'

9 Contra Witherington, *Revelation*, 177: 'It is the enumeration of a name.' Cf. ibid., 185: 'The mark is said to be the name of the Beast or rather the number of his name.'

10 Mounce, *Revelation*, 265. For symbolic sense, see also A. Valdez, 'El número 666 y las Doce Tribus de Israel', *RevistB* 68 (2006) 191–214; C. Olivares, 'Elementos para descifrar el 666: una propuesta', *DavarLogos* 8 (2009) 31–58; and, much earlier, A. Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine: Commentary on the English Text* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964) 158, who favours a 'punning' use of the number over a 'cryptogram use'. For an intriguing cryptographic analysis, see Charles, *Revelation*, I.365–7 (quoting J. A. Smith *viva voce*).

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dependence of the Apocalypse on the Old Testament is widely acknowledged,[11] but curiously, even studies that are attentive to intertextual allusions with the Hebrew Bible are mostly silent about such matters in the case of Rev 13.18.[12] An exception is the work of G. K. Beale that draws on an earlier study of Austin Farrer inviting the idea that an occurrence of 666 within Israel's history might be usefully considered. In Beale's words:

> The mention in 1 Kgs. 10:14 of 666 talents of gold accumulated by Solomon may also be in John's field of reference. The 666 talents are mentioned immediately after Solomon has reached the peak of his kingship. After telling of such greatness, 1 Kings immediately tells how Solomon broke a series of God's laws for kings (Deut. 17:14–17) by multiplying gold, horses, chariots, and foreign wives, and by becoming involved in idolatry (1 Kgs. 10:14–11:13). Consequently, the 666 from 1 Kings would have served as an excellent candidate for a number to symbolize the perversion of kingship through idolatry and economic evil.[13]

Farrer is far more certain on the matter than Beale. He calls the number of the Beast 'the darkest' and 'most notorious' of the riddles of Revelation.[14] To understand it, he writes,

> [w]e must turn ... to the history of Solomon, which is its source. Solomon is a type of Christ, but he is a type of Antichrist also. Almost every type has this doubleness ... Solomon built the temple, then proceeded to apostatize at leisure. The throne of David shook, the kingdom was divided, and messianic glory did not return for a thousand years.
>
> The story of the good Solomon continues as far as the visit of the Queen of Sheba ... From the queen's departure onwards the King breaks the law of kingship [i.e. Deut 17.14–20] clause by clause ... The damnable number [of 666 talents of gold] appears in the very next verse after the withdrawal of Sheba (1 Kings x, 14). The root of all evil begins the King's downfall. St John's use of Solomon's history as a source-book of numbers makes it virtually certain that he found the number of the Beast here.[15]

11 See, *inter alia*, G. K. Beale and S. M. McDonough, 'Revelation', *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 1081–1161, and the literature cited there.

12 Note e.g. that NA[28] does not provide any allusions to the Old Testament (or allusions of any sort) in the margins to Rev 13.18, only cross references to Rev 15.2 and 17.9.

13 Beale, *Revelation*, 727, with reference to A. Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of John's Apocalypse* (Boston: Beacon, 1968 [1949]) 256–7. Beale also draws attention to Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold in Dan 3.1: 'whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits' (cf. Irenaeus in n. 3 above).

14 Farrer, *Rebirth*, 251, 256.

15 Ibid., 256–7.

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It is our contention that Beale's and Farrer's observations regarding the possible influence of 1 Kgs 10.14 on Rev 13.18 are basically correct but can be profitably expanded and made even more interpretively productive.

The text of 1 Kgs 10.14 is paralleled in 2 Chr 9.13; the two verses are practically identical in MT: ויהי משקל הזהב אשר־בא לשלמה בשנה אחת שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שִׁשִּׁים וְשֵׁשׁ ככר זהב.[16] In LXX, too, the verses are nearly identical:

> καὶ ἦν ὁ σταθμὸς τοῦ χρυσίου τοῦ ἐληλυθότος τῷ Σαλωμων ἐν ἐνιαυτῷ ἑνὶ ἑξακόσια καὶ ἑξήκοντα ἓξ τάλαντα χρυσίου. (1 Kgs 10.14)

> καὶ ἦν ὁ σταθμὸς τοῦ χρυσίου τοῦ ἐνεχθέντος τῷ Σαλωμων ἐν ἐνιαυτῷ ἑνὶ ἑξακόσια ἑξήκοντα ἓξ τάλαντα χρυσίου. (2 Chr 9.13)

In whichever version, the verse can be translated as follows: 'And the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold.' For sake of comparison, the numerical forms may be set side-by-side:

Rev 13.18		ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ
1 Kgs 10.14	שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שִׁשִּׁים וְשֵׁשׁ	ἑξακόσια καὶ ἑξήκοντα ἓξ
2 Chr 9.13	שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שִׁשִּׁים וְשֵׁשׁ	ἑξακόσια ἑξήκοντα ἓξ

Obviously the similarities are striking, with the numerical forms very nearly identical.[17] The similarities are even more striking because 666 is an unusual figure, virtually unique.[18] The questions that present themselves, then, are as

16 The only difference is that 2 Chr 9.13 uses a plural construct form of 'talent': ככרי זהב for 1 Kings' singular ככר זהב.

17 According to A. E. Brooke, N. McLean and H. St. J. Thackeray, *The Old Testament in Greek*, vol. II: *The Later Historical Books* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935) 245, one MS (a_2) reads εξακοσιαι and quite a few (Abd*i*pxc_2e_2) omit the και before εξηκοντα with three (𝔄𝔈𝔖 = Armenian, Ethiopic and Syro-hexaplar), adding και before εξ in 2 Kgs (3 Kgdm) 10.14. Similarly, in LXX 2 Chr 9.13, a few MSS (abe$_2$𝔄) read και before εξ (ibid., 494). Such variations are minor and indicate that not much is at stake in slight variations of spelling or in the presence or absence of the conjunction.

18 666 does occur once more, in Ezra 2.13, which tallies the sons of Adonikam (אדניקם = Αδωνικαμ) as 666 (שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שִׁשִּׁים וְשִׁשָּׁה = ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ) in number. In very late post-biblical literature the number 666 is also found in the *Treatise of the Vessels* (*Massekhet Kelim*), the date and provenance of which are highly uncertain, but which 'must have been composed sometime between late antiquity and the seventeenth century' CE according to J. R. Davila, 'The Treatise of the Vessels (*Massekhet Kelim*): A New Translation and Introduction', *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, vol. I (ed. R. Bauckham, J. R. Davila and A. Panayotov; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013) 393–409, at 396–7. The pertinent passage (VII) is as follows (ibid., 406–7): 'The fine stones and pearls and silver and gold that King David set aside for the great House were a thousand thousand talents of silver and a hundred thousand talents of gold. And (there were) the trees of the gold

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follows: why would an allusion to Solomon be at work with 666 in Rev 13.18 and what would the effect of such an allusion be?

The language of an allusion 'being at work with' in the previous sentence is somewhat vague but intentionally chosen. We do not believe that '666 = Solomon' in the way that '666 = Nero' for so many New Testament scholars. Rather, we wish to suggest that the highly unusual, statistically infrequent number 666 serves at this point to activate a connection between Revelation and the wider narratives about King Solomon in a metaleptic fashion not unlike that described by Richard B. Hays in his works on echo in the New Testament.[19] Two things in particular should be emphasised.

First, the specific verse in 1 Kings 10 concerns *the inordinate wealth* of Solomon – wealth that is, moreover, gained by means of *exploitation of Solomon's own people* and his *eschewing God's law (divine revelation)*. Indeed, the placement of 1 Kgs 10.14 is strategic, for it invites the reader to consider how Solomon generates such a lavish revenue stream. A survey of the narrative of 1 Kings reveals that Solomon organises a carefully controlled and substantial infrastructure with administrative centralisation, but among the most controversial of his initiatives is *forced labour* (מַס, 1 Kgs 5.27), the same infamous term that is used for the Israelite labour-gangs imposed by Pharaoh in Exod 1.11.[20] This clear echo of Egyptian servitude has the effect of comparing Solomon's burgeoning regime to the tyranny of Pharaoh, and it is difficult to escape the inference that a proportion of Solomon's wealth is generated precisely through similar, if not

of Parvaim which used to produce fruit of six hundred and sixty-six myriad talents of fine gold that was underneath the Tree of Life in the Holy Garden. All these were revealed to Hilkiah the scribe, and he transmitted them to Shamshiel the angel, who shall keep them until the King, David, shall arise, and he shall transmit into his hand the silver and the gold, with the gold that Solomon volunteered, and with them talents of gold and fine stones that are without price. All these were hidden and made secret and kept from before the army of the Chaldeans in the place that is called Borsif.'

19 See R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), esp. 1–33; idem, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), esp. 1–14; and idem, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), esp. 1–16. See also *JTI* 11/1 (Spring 2017), an issue devoted to Hays' work on the Gospels, esp. the guest editorial by C. K. Rowe, 'Learning from *Echoes* II: Richard B. Hays on Scripture in the Gospels', *JTI* 11/1 (2017) 1–3, and Hays' response to the essays: R. B. Hays, 'Continuing to Read Scripture with the Evangelists: A Response', *JTI* 11/1 (2017) 85–99.

20 See, *inter alia*, the discussion in R. S. Nam, *Portrayals of Economic Exchange in the Book of Kings* (BIS 112; Leiden: Brill, 2012) 137–9, who rightly notes the editorial change in 2 Chr 2.16 vis-à-vis 2 Kgs 5.27 that 'reflects the need to preserve the Chronicle[r]'s vision for a nostalgic Solomon portrayed during Persian times, rather than one who oppresses the Israelites' (137).

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identical, means of coercion.[21] Perhaps less well known, but equally troubling and illuminating, is Solomon's reconfiguration of Israel's traditional tribal allotments into more favourable tax districts, usually governed by appointees with ties to the royal family (see 1 Kgs 4.7–19). This implies that the king's lavish table in Jerusalem is supplied at the expense of ordinary Israelites, and the recounting of Solomon's nepotism at this point must be viewed as a subtle critique of his increasingly oppressive policies.[22] More obvious and well known is Solomon's rampant predilection for intermarriage, first revealed in his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter in 1 Kgs 3.1 but then shockingly unveiled in the disclosure of 700 wives of royal birth in 1 Kgs 11.1–3 from a legion of surrounding (and forbidden) nations.[23] These partnerships no doubt created a network of alliances that produced Solomon's military–industrial complex, replete with the acquisition of horses from Egypt – surely symbols of a war machine – in clear violation of Deut 17.16–17. Finally, it should be emphasised that 666 talents of gold are received *annually* by Solomon, and, combined with his ancillary revenue streams, this stockpiling of gold is likewise in contravention of Deuteronomy 17. Collectively,

21 2 Kgs 9.20–4 is often cited as evidence that the Israelites are *not* turned into slaves at this point, but for the complexities of the matter see D. Jobling, '"Forced Labor": Solomon's Golden Age and the Question of Literary Representation', *Semeia* 54 (1992) 57–76, esp. 62. One might also note the prominent role of corvée labour attributed to Nabonidus compared to the relief programme recounted in the propagandistic Cyrus cylinder (see A. L. Oppenheim, 'Cyrus', *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (ed. J. B. Pritchard, new edn with a foreword by D. E. Fleming (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) 282–4). Finally, note W. Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016) 66: 'If … we read the Solomon narrative with any sense of irony, we may recognize that the "innocence" and "wisdom" of Solomon are presented so that the reader may come to see that he is in fact reckoned not as innocent or as virtuous, but as an eager accumulator of wealth with an endless, covetous desire for more.' Brueggemann goes on to note that 'everything is of gold; Solomon is the Midas of ancient Israel!' (ibid.). See further ibid., 68–9 on Solomon's taxation, use of forced labour, and Brueggemann's summation: Solomon's 'heart was turned away from the neighborly covenant; life was reduced to the pursuit and accumulation of commodities at the expense of vulnerable neighbors'. For a more extended treatment, see W. Brueggemann, *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon of Human Achievement* (Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), esp. 124–38. A speculation: given the contrast, in Revelation, between 666 and the 144,000, might the latter somehow evoke mistreated Israelites, if the former evokes Solomon?

22 See J. G. McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology: Genesis-Kings* (LHBOTS 454; London: T&T Clark, 2006) 152–3.

23 See M. A. Sweeney, 'The Critique of Solomon in the Josianic Edition of the Deuteronomistic History', *JBL* 114 (1995) 607–22 and J. T. Walsh, 'The Characterization of Solomon in 1 Kings 1–5', *CBQ* 57 (1995) 471–93. As pointed out by one of the anonymous reviewers of this article (who has our thanks), there could be connections here between Solomon's sexual excess and the 'whoredom' of Babylon (see Revelation 17; cf. 19.2).

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the above considerations form a highly suggestive allusion for the economic corruption described in Revelation 13.[24]

Second, the language of wisdom and discernment that one finds in Rev 13.18 is quite at home in the traditions about Solomon and his wisdom. The legendary wisdom of Solomon, one might recall, is a divine bestowal in 1 Kings 3 that is given when God offers the new monarch a choice of gifts: 'Give to your servant an understanding mind in order to judge your people, to discern good from evil, because who is able to judge this great people of yours?' (1 Kgs 3.9). Yet it should be noted that, in context, this gift of wisdom is arguably framed as a kind of test of Solomon, since, along with wisdom, God also grants Solomon wealth and a long life. Solomon is ostensibly being tested, therefore, to see how he will use this wealth and whether he will remain faithful to God for his entire life. Numerous interpreters, not to mention the narrative of 1 Kings, agree that Solomon did *not*, in fact, use these gifts well, and his persistent ignoring of the divine voice (e.g. 1 Kgs 6.11–13; 9.3–9) clouds his legacy as the nation's great temple-builder. Then too there is the fact that the temple is not the only cultic installation sponsored by Solomon. Immediately after the disclosure of his foreign wives, 1 Kgs 11.7–8 narrates that Israel's monarch erects shrines for Chemosh and Molech – notorious deities from neighbouring countries who, according to the biblical authors at least, required human sacrifice from their devotees.[25] Finally, one should note that the temple is not the most impressive construction project that Solomon undertook: his own palace is considerably larger and took almost twice as long to build (compare 1 Kgs 6.2, 38 with 1 Kgs 7.1–2).

How, exactly, Solomon deceived the faithful of Israel with his syncretistic practices and corruption of religion (and disappointed YHWH in the process) is beyond the scope of the present argument. Instead, we would simply submit that the economic duress and religious malfeasance that seem both patent and

24 Considerations such as these demonstrate that connections made by scholars like Beale and McDonough ('Revelation', 1130) between Daniel and Revelation may also hold true for Solomon – namely, the presence of difficult times 'brought about by an evil king who persecutes the saints … [and who] deceives others into acknowledging his purported sovereignty, and convinces them to spread the deception' – even if the latter formulation may be a bit too strong for 1 Kings. For the place of money in Revelation 13, see D. Furlan Taylor, 'The Monetary Crisis in Revelation 13:17 and the Provenance of the Book of Revelation', *CBQ* 71 (2009) 580–96.

25 Of course, the veracity of such insider reports about outsider religious practice has been doubted. For discussion, see, *inter alia*, A. R. W. Green, *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* (ASORDS 1; Missoula: Scholars, 1975); J. Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (UCOP 41; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); *idem*, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup 265; London: Sheffield Academic, 2000) 209–16; and K. Finsterbusch *et al.*, eds., *Human Sacrifice in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Numen 112; Leiden: Brill, 2007).

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endemic in Solomon's empire combine to provide a rather clear picture of deeply distorted kingship that results in social fissure and political chaos. It is not difficult to see, therefore, how Solomon's own rapacious – dare one say, beastly – total of 666 talents of gold that came annually to this monarch could become a powerful image in Israel's memory, ripe for appropriation in Revelation 13.

To sum up to this point: Solomon's legendary riches come in no small way at the expense of his people and as a result of despotic monarchic rule. The unusual and memorable number 666 that is used in 1 Kgs 10.14 as a kind of summation of this kind of despotism activates, for the reader who knows it (cf. Rev 13.18: Ὧδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν), the exploitive economic practices of Solomon since these are also at work – and in spades – in the evil empire of the Beast.[26]

4. Counter-evidence? Solomon in Second Temple Literature

Despite the apparent cogency of the preceding argument connecting Solomonic despotism with Revelation's 666, a possible objection might be raised in light of Solomon's profile in some Early Jewish texts of the Second Temple Period. The above discussion, following the narrative flow of Kings, views Solomon in a rather negative light, but there is much that is favourably reported about Solomon in Kings (and especially Chronicles!); these positive elements seem to have been especially attractive in later traditions from subsequent periods and cannot be passed over in silence. The importance of Solomon's wisdom, for example, begins already within the pages of the Old Testament itself where Solomon is associated with texts such as Proverbs (see Prov 1.1; 10.1; 25.1; cf. 30.1; 31.1), Ecclesiastes (see Qoh 1.1–2.26) and the Song of Songs (see Song 1.1; 3.9–11; 8.11–12). But Solomon's proverbial sagacity is also found in abundant supply in the Wisdom of Solomon, the Psalms of Solomon, the

26 Cf. Koester, *Revelation*, 605–6 on the three steps of gematria: (1) discern the person's traits from the context; (2) think of a specific person who fits those traits; and (3) see if that person's name fits the number. He continues: 'In Revelation … the context provides help' with this tricky endeavour and so '[r]eaders using gematria to solve John's riddle must first look at the portrait of the beast. They are to think of a beast that wears diadems and wields authority over the world, that speaks blasphemy and persecutes the faithful' (606). For more on empire in Revelation, see e.g. E. S. Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 86–97; R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (NTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 35–9; G. Carey, 'Finding Happiness in Apocalyptic Literature', *The Bible and the Pursuit of Happiness: What the Old and New Testaments Teach Us about the Good Life* (ed. B. A. Strawn; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 203–24, esp. 217–19; and the essays in *Int* 63.1 (January 2009), an issue devoted to 'Revelation as a Critique of Empire'. Note also Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 265–79, on the inhumane and destructive economic activities of the empire in Revelation, such that the polemic of the book 'is against wealth that is situated in the autonomy, self-sufficiency, and arrogance of Rome' (278).

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Odes of Solomon and the Testament of Solomon. Solomon's profile is generally quite positive in these latter texts, where he is, somewhat surprisingly, known not only for his wisdom but also for his skill as an exorcist.[27] The Greek title to the Testament of Solomon, for instance, is as follows:

> Testament of Solomon, Son of David, who reigned in Jerusalem, and subdued all the spirits of the air, of the earth, and under the earth; through (them) he has accomplished all the magnificent works of the Temple; (this tells) what their authorities are against men, and by what angels these demons are thwarted.[28]

Solomon's connections to exorcism are not limited to pseudepigraphic texts, however, but are also attested in other sources as well.[29]

27 For this motif, see further and more extensively the following works: L. R. Fisher, 'Can This Be the Son of David?', *Jesus and the Historian* (ed. F. T. Trotter; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 82–97; D. C. Duling, 'Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David', *HTR* 68 (1975) 235–52; *idem*, 'The Therapeutic Son of David: An Element in Matthew's Christological Apologetic', *NTS* 24 (1977–8) 392–410; G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (WUNT II/54; Tübingen: Mohr, 1993) 18–19; J. H. Charlesworth, 'Solomon and Jesus: The Son of David in Ante-Markan Traditions (Mark 10:47)', *Biblical and Humane* (ed. L. B. Elder *et al.*; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996) 125–51; P. A. Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King: From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition* (JSJSup 73; Leiden: Brill, 2002); L. Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick: A Study of Jesus as the Son of David* (WUNT II/170; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 97–103; and J. Dvořáček, *The Son of David in Matthew's Gospel in the Light of the Solomon as Exorcist Tradition* (WUNT II/415; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) 33–63. Note also P. Busch, 'Solomon as a True Exorcist: The Testament of Solomon in its Cultural Setting', *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage and Architect* (ed. J. Verheyden; TBNJCT 16; Leiden: Brill, 2013) 183–95; and R. D. Miller, 'Solomon the Trickster', *BibInt* 19 (2011) 496–504, who writes (502): 'Solomon, too, becomes best known in post-biblical tradition as one magically powerful. This tradition is well-known in the Quran, but is explicit as early as the *Sefer HaRazim* (ca. AD 400). Even in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Solomon possesses his famous magic ring (11QPsAp^{a} 1:1–6), the purpose of which is originally exorcistic (cf. Josephus Ant., 8; *Testament of Solomon*, ca. AD 350; *Questions of Bartholomew* 4:21, 2nd–5th century AD). Wisdom 7:21 describes Solomon as possessing "hidden wisdom." Although much in this book is traditionally sapiential, defining wisdom as in Proverbs or Sirach, in Wisd 7:15–22, Wisdom is almost magical. Solomon has "sure knowledge" of "the powers of spirits" (v 20) and the "actions of the elements" (v 17), Gk. στοιχεία, a term taken from Hellenistic magical texts.'

For more on 11Q11, 'an exorcisory ritual…probably ascribing to David and Solomon the usage of divine names against the demons', see Michael Mach, 'Demons', *EDSS* 1:189–92, esp. 191; and Émile Puech, '11QPsAp^{a}: Un ritual d'exorcismes: Essai de reconstruction', *RevQ* 14/15 (1990): 377–408.

28 Translation from D. C. Duling in *OTP* I.960.

29 E.g., various Aramaic incantation bowls and, most famously, Josephus, *Ant.* 8.2.5. See also the works cited in n. 27 above, esp. the thorough reviews found in Novakovic, *Messiah* and Dvořáček, *The Son of David*.

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Be that as it may, while these traditions are intriguing, and definitely paint Solomon in a more positive light, we do not deem them, especially the Solomon-as-exorcist tradition, definitive or sufficient to counter the negative portrayal found in the Book of Kings. Neither are these other traditions pertinent for the present discussion of Rev 13.18 for several reasons. First, the *date* of the pseudepigraphic texts greatly complicates their consideration as likely antecedents and/or progenitors of the material in Revelation. So, for example, the Psalms of Solomon may well be first-century BCE,[30] but the Odes of Solomon are typically dated to the late first to early second century CE,[31] with the Testament of Solomon dated some time between the first and third centuries CE.[32] Second, quite apart from the question of date, the very different *content* of these Solomonic texts indicates that they cannot be demonstrated to be more influential on the Apocalypse at Rev 13.18 than the material from Kings (and Chronicles) discussed above. The most pertinent material, perhaps, might be the traditions found in the Testament of Solomon, but there is no positive mention of Solomon – as an exorcist or otherwise – in Revelation.[33] Most telling of all, on the matter of distinctive content, is that none of these positive texts about Solomon mention 666. Third, it must be recalled that the kind of echoing or metaleptic activity posited here between Solomon and 666 in Rev 13.18 *generates* or *activates connections* between the texts in question but *does not require one-to-one correspondence* in every detail. And so, fourth and finally, the relationship between 666 and Solomon *need not and should not be construed as inflexible*, let alone be misunderstood as one of complete identity or total identicalness. As G. K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough rightly note,

30 See e.g. R. B. Wright in *OTP* II.639–70; S. P. Brock, 'The Psalms of Solomon', *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (ed. H. F. D. Sparks; Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) 649–82, at 651; and G. B. Gray, 'The Psalms of Solomon', *APOT* II.625–52, at 627–30.

31 See J. H. Charlesworth in *OTP* II.725–71 and J. A. Emerton, 'The Odes of Solomon', *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, 686.

32 See D. C. Duling in *OTP* I.935–87 and M. Whittaker, 'The Testament of Solomon', *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, 735. Cf. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, 18: 'The writer seems to be so familiar with, and reliant upon the New Testament that it is most probable that the Testament of Solomon was written by a Jewish Christian depending on various traditions including the New Testament.' See also ibid., 19: 'Scholarly opinion has followed McCown who argued that the Testament of Solomon should be dated in the early third century AD, yet incorporating first century material. Thus the Testament of Solomon is an important witness primarily to exorcism in a part of the post-Apostolic Church with reflections of earlier times.' More recently, see T. E. Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon: Tradition, Conflict and Identity in a Late Antique Pseudepigraphon* (LSTS 52; London: T&T Clark, 2006).

33 Additionally, the association with Solomon is, in at least some of these cases, altogether unclear. See e.g. Emerton, 'The Odes of Solomon', 684–5; S. Holmes, 'Wisdom of Solomon', *APOT* I.518–19, 525.

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> John is exhorting [the] saints to spiritual and moral discernment, not intellectual ability to solve a complex math problem … Consequently, the proper spiritual application of the 666 to wicked rulers and compromising institutions, as well as to false teachers, will reveal to believers their seductive and imperfect nature.[34]

Insofar as 666 is not a mathematical problem to be solved, so also the connections between the Beast and Solomon need not 'compute' in every detail.[35] Instead, there must be a 'proper spiritual application' which will recognise the points of connection and, where absent, the lack thereof. It is clear, in any case, from Kings that Solomon ends his career as a wicked ruler, in large measure because of the compromising institutions that he himself instated which proved to be both seductive and deleterious. We concur, therefore, with Beale and McDonough when they write that 'an interpretive approach must be rejected that attempts only a literal calculation of the number 666 in an effort to identify only one historical individual'.[36] Of course, not all scholars would agree at this point,[37] and so, not surprisingly, Beale and McDonough go on to qualify their judgement: 'Nevertheless, an individual *could* be the embodiment of evil at any particular period of history, and Christians would need spiritual wisdom to discern the danger that such a person posed.'[38]

34 Beale and McDonough, 'Revelation', 1130. Similarly Beale, *Revelation*, 24, 720, 723, 726.

35 This explains why Solomon's 666 could activate negatively in the Apocalypse, but other parts of the Solomon tradition could function positively in other Second Temple literature. It also explains why the connections with Solomon are not exhaustive or otherwise comprehensive. The Beast makes war on the saints and is known for military prowess; it corrupts worship and receives worship; it is an outsider, not an insider – these qualities do not all (nor easily) 'map' onto Solomon, though some do. A connection with Solomon also does not obviate connections between the Beast and the material in Daniel 7 (or other texts). Perhaps one might say, especially via metalepsis, that the Beast's description in Revelation activates a great host of texts and traditions, with 666 a detail that is especially resonant with Solomon. It remains possible, too, that Revelation might be targeting a specific human ruler (like Nero) while nevertheless still activating a wide range of pre-existing material. Compare, analogously, the argument by D. T. Stewart, 'Leviticus 19 as Mini-Torah', *Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature: The Legacy of Jacob Milgrom and Beyond* (ed. R. Gane and A. Taggar-Cohen; RBS 82; Atlanta: SBL, 2015) 299–323. (We thank Greg Carey for discussions on this point.)

36 Beale and McDonough, 'Revelation', 1130.

37 See, *inter alia*, Mounce, *Revelation*, 26: 'The reference is undoubtedly to some definite historical person'; and Charles, *Revelation*, I.365–6: 'the name of the man … is for the time the name of the Beast. This conclusion is of paramount importance in the interpretation of the verse as a whole … The Beast and the man are identical. In other words, the Beast is for the time incarnated in a man.' See further ibid., I.365 n. 1.

38 Beale and McDonough, 'Revelation', 1131 (emphasis added); similarly Beale, *Revelation*, 726.

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5. Conclusion: Solomon in the Echo Chamber

The latter remark highlights the two-way nature of the texts within 'the echo chamber of Scripture':[39] by means of the number 666 Solomon's despotism is woven into the Beast's overall depiction in Revelation, even as the scale of the Beast's evil reverberates backwards, to the Old Testament's presentation of Solomon, in order to cast that king's economic practices in an almost (dare one say it?) apocalyptic light. If, that is, the reader has understanding (cf. Mark 13.14 // Matt 24.15–16) – or, to put it in the specific terms of Rev 13.18, if the reader is wise because 'this calls for wisdom' (Ὧδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν).[40]

To be sure, the present study and the connections between 666 and Solomon it has raised do not resolve all of the questions that adhere and will continue to adhere to the mysterious number of the Beast. As R. H. Charles said a century ago, 'even when every care is taken there remains a hypothetical element in every solution that is offered'.[41] More recently, Ben Witherington has stated that 'the veiled nature of such gematric games allows John's text to have a certain multivalency'.[42] One may agree (or disagree!) with Charles' and Witherington's specific conclusions about 666 (Nero, in both cases) and still acknowledge that every solution is hypothetical – or, perhaps better, that the mysterious number of 666 may well be multivalent in the end if not also by design. If Irenaeus was unclear about 666 already in the second century, the twenty-first century can be no more certain. We wish only to (re)introduce Solomon, that iconic and yet heavily ironic king of Israel,[43] into the mix of candidates for the job – or at least as one of the antecedents that layer the Beast with allusion, image and trace. It would seem that wisdom (σοφία) and discernment (νοῦς) about Solomon indicates that he, too, has something to contribute to the mysterious number of Rev 13.18.

39 To borrow from M. M. Thompson, 'Hearing Voices: Reading the Gospels in the Echo Chamber of Scripture', *JTI* 11 (2017) 37–48.

40 According to Farrer '"Here is wisdom" should mean "This is where wisdom comes in"' (*Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 157). Cf. Rev 17.9; also *SibOr* 1.137–46, esp. 1.137, 141 and 145–146. For Koester, *Revelation*, 606, '[t]hose who succeed in doing the calculation join the community of those who have wisdom (13:18), which in this context means discerning the Nero-like qualities of the ruling power' – or, perhaps better, the Solomon-like qualities.

41 Charles, *Revelation*, I.364.

42 Witherington, *Revelation*, 179.

43 To borrow from the subtitle of Walter Brueggemann's *Solomon: Israel's Ironic Icon of Human Achievement*.

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