

3. BEFORE SALVATION: THE APOCALYPTIC CHAOS AND THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN HERMENEUTICS

In the reflection about paleochristian circulation of *Dn* “tales”, a specific section deserves to be dedicated to their “apocalyptic” assumption. After having analysed the tradition that links this material with the heart of the ancient *kerygma*, that is *Pascha*, it becomes possible to investigate its use in the elaboration concerning the immediate consequences of Easter and the establishment of the “eschatological time” disclosed by Christ.

The exam of such district of ancient exegesis reveals as a ticklish and delicate argument, since both the definition of the concept of “apocalypse” and the same use of the adjective “apocalyptic” represent a problematic issue. It would result impossible in this context either to present an exhaustive *status quaestionis* on this hoary scientific debate, or to conduct an in-depth analysis on the matter; it is anyway necessary to underline at least two points concerning the approach that will be here assumed:

- 1) the concepts of “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic” will be interpreted in a large, ample sense, extending from Jewish to Christian developments¹, with the objective to highlight the role of Jewish heritage in the formation of Christian “apocalyptic thought”;

¹ The different positions assumed by scholars about the relation of dependence or autonomy of Christian apocalyptic in respect to Jewish one are summarized in E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *The Phenomenon of Early Christian Apocalyptic: Some Reflections of Method*, in D. HELLHOLM, *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and in the Near East*, Tübingen 1983, pp. 295-325, in part. pp. 295-297. About the heritage of Jewish apocalyptic in Christian world see: E. CORSINI, *Apocalisse prima e dopo*, Torino 1981; P. SACCHI, *L'apocalittica giudaica e la sua storia*, Brescia 1990 (Biblioteca di cultura religiosa 35); A.Y. COLLINS, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, Leiden 1996 (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 50), with a reference to the figure of the Son of Man (pp. 139-197); R. BAUCKHAM, *The Faith of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, Leiden 1998 (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 93), including the inspection of a large corpus of Jewish and Christian apocalypses, from *Dn* to *Jn*; J.C. WANDERKAM-W. ADLER (edd.), *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, Assen 1996 (Compendium Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum. Section three: Jewish Tradition in Early Christian Literature 4), a study that “does not represent itself as an examination of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic but rather of the Jewish apocalypses in their Christian settings” (p. 8); P. PRIGENT, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, Tübingen 2004, pp. 22-36 (“The Jewish roots of the book of Revelation”) where the Jewish heritage is studied in connection with single topics such as “the paradise” or “the heavenly Jerusalem”; D.E. AUNE, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*, Tübingen 2006 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 199). For a generic reference to Jewish influence on Christian literature, with some specific allusion to apocalyptic texts see R.A. KRAFT, *The Multifform Jewish Heritage of Early Christianity*, in J. NEUSNER (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism, and other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at 60*, III, Leiden 1975, pp. 175-199. For an overall overview about eschatology in the Second Temple literature see M.E. STONE, *Apocalyptic Literature*, in M.E. STONE (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, Philadelphia 1984 (Compendia

- 2) assuming the paradigm of J.J. COLLINS, who associates the term “apocalypse” to a specific literary genre characterized by features that do not exclusively deal with the theological contents but also with the “way” and the “instruments” of the exposition², the expression will be here unfastened from a specific association with literature and rather ascribed to early Christian expressions in a wider perspective. In this sense, more than considering “apocalypse” as a “genre”, it will be assumed as a “method” of

Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum II/2), pp. 383-441, and G.W.E. NICKELSBURG, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*, Cambridge (Harvard Theological Studies 26). For an introduction and a general panorama about Jewish apocalypse see, among the others, in part. J.J. COLLINS, *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, New York 1987. See also E. NORELLI, *Apocalittica: come pensarne lo sviluppo?*, “Ricerche Storico Bibliche” 7 (1995), pp. 163-200, an attempt to “elaborare un modello conoscitivo tale che permetta di situare in una prospettiva unitaria le apocalissi giudaiche e cristiane antiche” (p. 163), with a specific section dedicated to “continuità e fratture” between “apocalissi giudaiche e cristiane” (pp. 172-177).

² The definition of the concepts of “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic” represents a problematic matter which has not actually obtained a final solution. In his recent study, D.E. AUNE 2006, p. 1, defines “apocalyptic”, as “a slippery term used in at least three different ways: 1) as a type of literature, 2) as a type of eschatology, 3) as a type of collective behavior” (the same reconstruction had been efficaciously offered by W. ADLER, in J.C. WANDERKAM-W. ADLER 1996, p. 5, who remembered how the term was prevalently connected by scholars to three distinct but overlapping categories: “apocalypse as a literary form, apocalyptic eschatology as a theological perspective, and apocalypticism as the ideology of a socio-religious movement”). A mature reflection seems to come from J.J. COLLINS, *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Richmond 1979 (Semeia 14), who tries to “attain consistency and clarity in the use of the term, on the assumption that the single name “apocalypse” should refer to a single coherent and recognizable type of writing” (p. 2). Starting from this premise, he formulates the following definition: “Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature, with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (p. 9). Such interpretation is assumed by D. HELLHOLM, *The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John*, in A.Y. COLLINS (ed.), *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting*, Atlanta 1986 (Semeia 36), pp. 13-64 (see also D.E. AUNE, *The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre*, in A.Y. COLLINS [ed.] 1986, pp. 65-96), who analyses this “genre” under the aspects of “form”, “content” and “function”. In “form”, apocalypse would be a first-person recital of revelatory visions; in “content”, apocalypse involves the presentation of an eschatological dimension; in “function”, it would aim at modifying the readers’ behavior, in conformity with transcendent perspectives. For a reference to the etymologic origin of the terms see M. SMITH, *On the History of ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΠΤΙΚΟΣ and ΑΠΟΚΑΛΥΠΣΙΣ*, in D. HELLHOLM (ed.) 1983, pp. 9-20. About the problems connected with the definition of “apocalyptic” as a genre see L. HARTMAN, *Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre*, in D. HELLHOLM (ed.) 1983, pp. 329-343; more generically, about the definition of “apocalyptic” see also J. CARMIGNAC, *Description du phénomène de l’Apocalyptique dans l’Ancien Testament*, in D. HELLHOLM (ed.) 1983, pp. 163-170; M.E. STONE, in M.E. STONE (ed.) 1984, pp. 392-394; R.E. STURM, *Defining the Word Apocalyptic: A Problem in Biblical Criticism*, in J. MARCUS-M.L. BOARDS (ed.), *Apocalyptic and the New Testament. Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, Sheffield 1989 (Biblical Studies: Gospel Narrative), pp. 17-48. A panorama concerning the history of early studies on apocalyptic is provided by K. KOCH, *Difficoltà dell’apocalittica. Scritto polemico su d’un settore trascurato della scienza biblica*, Brescia 1977 (Biblioteca di cultura religiosa 31). About the problematic concept of “literary genre” in early Christian texts see in part. D. HELLHOLM, *Methodological Reflections on the Problem of the Definition of Generic Texts*, in J.J. COLLINS-J.H. CHARLESWORTH (curr.), *Mysteries and Revelations. Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium*, Sheffield 1991 (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 9), pp. 135-163.

description, exposition and interpretation of end times³. As it will be further underlined, the real specificity of such “method” would be represented by the special role attributed to the constant activity of individuation, elaboration, composition and interpretation of symbolic codes⁴.

A further preliminary issue that has to be sketched here, precisely concerns the object of the research: though representing one of the “books” of First Testament which have more consistently influenced the elaboration of Christian thought, the real “apocalyptic” core of *Dn* typically corresponds with its “visions” section⁵. For this reason, the scholars who have focused on its

³ The definition of “apocalypse as a genre” has the merit to shed light on the essential role played by the “modality of the exposition of facts” in the economy of “apocalyptic” expressions; notwithstanding this, the paradigm presents a principal limit: remaining rigidly linked to the analysis of literary materials, it ends up reducing “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic” to the body of literary techniques and literary patterns. If certainly literature represents the *milieu* in which this “genre” found its privileged expression, it seems necessary for the purposes of the present research to enlarge the perspective: more than representing a “way of writing” – that is a literary genre –, the concepts of “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic” may be adopted to define a peculiar “way of interpreting”, which means a “method”, ascribable to every manifestation of Christian thought, from literature to iconography. Such “method” would be applied in the description of the imminent end of history and the catastrophic events it entails. A sort of passage “from the genre to the method” may emerge from the fluid definition of “apocalypticism” offered by J.J. COLLINS (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, I: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, New York-London 2000, p. viii: “apocalypticism” would actually represent, according to the scholar, the “complex of ideas” to which an “apocalyptic interpretation is applied”. Another reference to the conception of “apocalypse” as a method emerges by J. DANÉLOU 1958, p. 34, who affirms: “En un sens on peut dire que toute la littérature judéo-chrétienne est apocalyptique, si l’apocalypse constitue sa méthode théologique” (see also the chapter dedicated to “l’apocalyptique judéo-chrétienne”, pp. 133-164, where he defines “le moyen d’expression” of “apocalypse” as “catégories théologiques”). In conclusion, it must be underlined that, according to the definition here proposed, such “apocalyptic method of interpretation” can surface from speculations expressing different theologies and different perspectives. As affirmed in J.J. COLLINS 2000, p. viii, the label of “apocalypticism” can be assigned to heterogeneous options: “In modern scholarship apocalypticism has also been related to other terms, especially «eschatology» (teaching about the last things), «millennialism» or «chiliasm» (belief in a coming better age on earth, such as that described in the thousand-year reign of Christ at the end of the Book of Revelation), and «messianism» (hope for a heaven-sent savior who will usher in the better age)”. In other words, this “method” should not be connected to a peculiar socio-ideological movement nor to a particular theological perspective, it rather characterizes, as a sort of *forma mentis*, different perimeters of ancient Christianities and – possibly – different categories of sources.

⁴ See *infra*, p. 119 and n. 81 for examples clarifying the use of this expression. The distinctive instrument of “apocalyptic method” is represented by the use of a strongly symbolical approach. It seems in this sense quite appropriate, though still linked to a merely literary point of view, the formulation of J. CARMIGNAC, in D. HELLHOLM (ed.) 1983, p. 165, who states that apocalypse is a “genre littéraire qui décrète des révélations célestes à travers des symboles”.

⁵ As D.E. AUNE 2006, p. 2, remembers, “The Book of Daniel (actually only *Dn* 7-12), is the only apocalypse found in the Old Testament of Hebrew Bible”. See also J. CARMIGNAC, in D. HELLHOLM (ed.) 1983, p. 165, who affirms that “L’Apocalypse de Jean dans le Nouveau Testament et le livre de Daniel dans l’Ancien Testament sont généralement considérés comme les deux principales réalisations de ce genre littéraire”.

contribution to the formation of Christian apocalyptic thought have not actually tested the possible assumption of “tales” in this perspective⁶.

Literary source reveals a limited number of passages apparently attesting an “apocalyptic assumption” of such “tales”⁷, but notwithstanding the quantitative *datum* it would not seem appropriate to neglect this tradition, both because it presents original solutions touching in some cases the real core of ancient speculations about *eschata*, and because of its geographic diffusion, which contemplates all the extremities of first communities, so that the scarce density of this exegesis appears to be compensated by its wide diffusion. Moreover, the subsistence of a unitary tradition is apparently supported by the fact that all the “apocalyptic” citations of “tales” draw from the same episode: that one of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace⁸.

Though the following reconstruction will try to mention and include the major part of these quotations, the exposition will be particularly centred about the work of Irenaeus of Lyons, who resorts to *Dn* “tales” in his speculation about judgement and salvation, setting them in the frame of his millenarian, “Asiatic” conception⁹.

⁶ Apart from the already cited commentaries of *Dn*, which generally dedicate a section to the “apocalyptic-character” of the text (among them, the most consistent exposition on the argument can be found in J.J. COLLINS 1993, pp. 52-60, who considers the “tales” as an “introduction for the revelations” and stresses the apocalyptic character of the texts; see also ID. 1977), the contribution of “visions” is cited in many studies concerning Jewish role in the formation of Christian apocalyptic thought; see in part. J.C. WANDERKAM-W. ADLER 1996, pp. 201-237. The argument, investigated by J.K. BEALE 1984, is developed in the consistent bibliography about the figure of the Son of Man (see in part. A.Y. COLLINS 1996, pp. 159-197), and in studies dedicated to chapters 7 and 9 (among which see in part. A. LAATO A., *The Seventy Yearweek in the Book of Daniel*, “Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft” 102 [1990], pp. 212-225), whose Christian reception is eminently “apocalyptic”. About *Dn* 12 see G.W.E. NICKELSBURG 2006, pp. 23-54, where the chapter is treated as an “apocalyptic text” concerning “religious persecution”, with further reference to its fortune (it is interesting to notice that the study includes an allusion to *Dn* “tales” in the description of “religious persecutions” and the exaltation of the righteous men, pp. 67-78).

⁷ The interesting passages seem to be the following ones: Methodius Olympius, *De Resurrectione*, ed. G.N. BONWETSCH, GCS 27, pp. 316-317; I 56:3; *IBID.* pp. 327-328; I 62:5; *IBID.* pp. 377-379; II 23:5; Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, ed. A. ROUSSEAU-L. DOUTRELEAU, SC 153, pp. 367-370; V 29:2; Ps. Cyprianus, *De Pascha Computus*, ed. G. HARTEL, CSEL 3/3, pp. 264-265; 17; Victorinus Petavionensis, *Commentarii in Apocalypsim Johannis*, ed. M. DULAEY, SC 423, pp. 108-111; 13:4; Novatianus, *De Spectaculis*, ed. A. SAGGIORO, *Gli Spettacoli. Novaziano*, Bologna 2001 (Biblioteca Patristica 37), pp. 80-83; 10:2. The selection excludes the case of Hippolytus, whose commentary in *Danielem* will be treated as an independent case. A passage of debatable “apocalypticity” is Tertullianus, *Adversus Praxeas*, ed. E. EVANS, *Q.S.Fl. Tertullianus, Treatise against Praxeas*, London 1948, p. 154; 16:6. For an introduction about the text see also C. MORESCHINI-P. PODOLAK, SCAR 3/2b, pp. 435-451 (the latin text of this recent edition is from E. EVANS 1948).

⁸ As it will be clarified *infra*, pp. 118-121, this choice can probably be explained resorting to the same characteristic of the apocalyptic language, which preferably uses a limited number of symbols among which that one of the fire plays a special role.

⁹ See *infra*, n. 17.

An even more interesting consideration emerges from the inspection of iconographic documents: as it will be underlined, the evident lack of “apocalyptic scenes” in the whole panorama of paleochristian documentation does not imply the absence of cases in which the types derived from *Dn* seem to be re-read through an “apocalyptic perspective”, signally when the scene of the furnace is combined with the theme of Noah in the ark. Even though, accepting this interpretation, the apocalyptic reception of “tales” should be considered as much more attested in iconography than in literature, the present exposition will start from the analysis of Irenaeus citations, that provide the necessary hermeneutical key for a further, more precise decode of iconographic documentation.

3.1. A PARADIGMATIC CASE OF “APOCALYPTIC ASSUMPTION”: *DANIEL* “TALES” IN *ADVERSUS HAERESSES*

The use of *Dn* 3 in *Adversus Haereses* can be considered as a paradigmatic case of “apocalyptic reception” of “tales”, since both the contents of the exposition and the hermeneutical method adopted by the author summarize and develop, in the fullest way, all the interpretative trajectories emerging from other documents which assume the story of the Hebrews in the same perspective.

For this reason, it seems necessary to propose a specific analysis of Irenaeus reception, not that much in order to reconstruct in detail the author’s thought, but rather to describe a peculiar, interpretative process that may have consistently characterized the “apocalyptic” assumption of “tales” in paleochristianity, as also confirmed by other significant and geographically spread sources. The following chapter should be therefore conceived as an attempt to present an “exegetical dynamic”, rather than a specific interpretative option.

Irenaeus of Lyons, who probably lived in the second half of the 2nd century¹⁰, can be considered as the *relais* that leads toward Western Christianities the principal coordinates of “Asiatic” theology¹¹, from which he draws the bedrocks of his original elaboration, as they can be reconstructed from his principal work *Adversus Haereses*¹². In the context of his polemic against

¹⁰ As E. OSBORN, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, Cambridge 2001, p. 1 underlines, about this author’s date of birth there is still disagreement, but probably it can be placed between 130 and 140 (the scholar presents a list of the hypothesis formulated by critics). Also his birthplace remains uncertain, but the author, “at the royal court of Smyrna”, “heard and saw Polycarp...the dominant influence of his youth”, and “Against Heresies was written in Lyons” (IBID., pp. 3-4).

¹¹ G. JOSSA *Storia della salvezza ed escatologia nell’Adversus Haereses di Ireneo di Lione*, “Augustinianum 18” (1978), p. 121 and R. CACITTI 1994, p. 124. According to G. PANI, *Il millenarismo: Papia, Giustino e Ireneo*, “Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi” 15/1 (1998), pp. 53-84, in part. p. 72, “Ireneo è figlio di quell’Asia Minore dove aveva conosciuto e assimilato le tendenze apocalittiche”.

¹² The work of Irenaeus has been widely studied under different points of view. For a bibliographical overview see E. OSBORN 2001, pp. 275-289. The main bibliographical coordinates about the arguments and the sections of the text analyzed here will be progressively introduced. At this stage of the research, it may be useful to consider that the whole *Adversus Haereses* can be ascribed to the period going from 180 to 185 (see BRONX N. [ed.], FC 8/5, p. 9). Concerning its textual transmission, the original Greek exists only in fragmentary form, while a complete Latin translation is available – substantially faithful to the original, of uncertain chronology but ascribable within the 3rd and the 5th century and probably deriving from North African context (see A. COSENTINO A. [cur.], *Ireneo di Lione. Contro le eresie*, I-II, Roma 2009 [Testi Patristici 207-208], p. 8; according to E. OSBORN 2001, p. 1, such translation was prepared “about the year 380”); books IV and V “si conservano anche in traduzione armena, e altri frammenti in traduzione siriana” (A. COSENTINO 2009, p. 8; the Armenian translation has been published by E.T. MINASSIANTZ, *Gegen die Häretiker. Buch IV und V*, Leipzig 1910 [Texte und Untersuchungen 35/2]). Addressed to a friend asking for information about Valentinian doctrine, the work was originally supposed to include two books, the first one dedicated to the exposition of the Gnostic theology, the second one to its confutation. Three books were

Gnosticism¹³ and signally in the core of the fifth book¹⁴, dedicated to a reflection about *eschata*, the author twice recalls the episode of the fiery furnace included in chapter 3 of *Dn*. The first allusion, placed in *Adversus Haereses* V 5:2 and assumed as a biblical proof of the resurrection of the flesh¹⁵, does not actually represent an example of “apocalyptic reception” of “tales”, being just thematically

added to the original plan of the work, which was written, according to L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER (edd.), SC 152/1 (1969), p. 166, in order to “démâsquar l’hérésie gnostique – livre 1 –, puis la réfuter, d’abord en la poursuivant sur son propre terrain – livre 2 –, ensuite en démontrant la vérité de l’enseignement traditionnel de l’Eglise au moyen de multiples preuves tirées des Ecritures – livre III et IV comme les Livres III et IV –”; the final book V “veut être une « démonstration » de la vérité chrétienne battue en brèche par l’hérésie”. On the general plan of the book see also A. COSENTINO 2009, p. 32.

¹³ About Gnosticism in its general features see U. BIANCHI (ed.), *Le origini dello gnosticismo*, Leiden 1967; K. KOSCHORKE, *Die Polemik der Gnostiker gegen das kirchliche Christentum*, Leiden 1978 (Nag Hammadi Studies 12); K. RUDOLPH, *Gnosis*, Edinburgh 1983. About the Gnostic conception of eschatology see G. FILORAMO, *Rivelazione ed escatologia nello gnosticismo cristiano del II secolo*, “Augustinianum” 18 (1978), pp. 75-88. About the Valentinian option see C. MARKSCHIES, *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, Tübingen 1992. On the relation between Gnostics and Scriptural interpretation – one of the principal points on which the Irenaeian controversy is based on – see R.M. GRANT, *Gnostics and the Inspiration of the Old Testament*, in A.L. MERRILL-T.W. OVERHOLT (edd.), *Scripture in History and Theology: Essays in Honor of J. Coert Rylaarsdam*, Pittsburgh 1977, pp. 269-277. About the approach of Irenaeus to the Gnostic option see R.A. MARKUS, *Pleroma and Fulfilment. The significance of history in St Irenaeus’ opposition to Gnosticism*, “Vigiliae Christianae” 8 (1954), pp. 193-224; N. BROX, *Offenbarung, Gnosis und gnostischer Mythos bei Irenäus von Lyon*, Salzburg 1966; P. PERKINS, *Ordering the cosmos: Irenaeus and the Gnostics*, in C.W. HEDRICK-R. HODGSON JR. (ed.), *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, Massachusetts 1986, pp. 221-238; A. COSENTINO 2009, pp. 15-21 presents an interesting, general introduction of the theme.

¹⁴ Book V of *Adversus Haereses* has the following structure, as described by L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER (edd.), SC 152/1 (1969), p. 168: “une démonstration de la résurrection de la chair, fondée presque exclusivement sur des textes pauliniens ch. 1-1; une démonstration de l’identité de Dieu Créateur et du Dieu Père par trois faits de la vie du Christ ch. 15-24; une démonstration de l’identité de Dieu Créateur et du Dieu Père par l’enseignement des Ecritures relatifs à la fin des temps ch. 25-36”. About this book see in part. N. BRONX (ed.) 2001; E. OSBORN 2001, p. 15 and the monumental work by A. ORBE, *Teología de San Ireneo, I-III: Comentario al Libro V del Adversus Haereses*, Madrid-Toledo 1985-1988 (Biblioteca de autores cristianos Toledo). About the plan and the content of the book see IBID., pp. 27-28.

¹⁵ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, edd. A. ROUSSEAU-L. DOUTRELEAU, SC 153, pp. 67-73; V 5:2. *Si autem quis impossibile aestimet tantis temporibus permanere homines et Heliam non in carne assumptum, consumptam autem carnem eius in igneo curru, intendat quoniam Jonas quidem in profundum proiectus et in ventrem ceti absorptus salvus iterum exsputus est terrae iussu Dei. Ananias etiam et Azarias et Misael missi in caminum ignis septuplum exardentem neque nociti sunt aliquid neque odor ignis inventus est in eis. Quae igitur illis adfuit manus Dei et inopinata et impossibilia naturae hominum in eis perficiens, quid mirum si in his qui translati sunt effecit aliquid inopinatum, deserviens voluntati Patris? Hic autem est Filius Dei, quemadmodum Scriptura ait dixisse Nabuchodonosor regem: “Nonne tres viros misimus in caminum? Et ecce ego video quattuor deambulantes in medio ignis et quartus similis Filio Dei”. Neque igitur natura alicuius eorum quae facta sunt neque infirmitas carnis fortior erit super voluntatem Dei. Non enim Deus his quae facta sunt, sed ea quae facta sunt subiecta sunt Deo, et omnia serviunt voluntati eius. Quapropter et Dominus ait: “Quae impossibilia sunt apud homines possibilia sunt apud Deum”. Quemadmodum igitur his qui nunc sunt hominibus ignorantibus dispositiones Dei incredibile et impossibile videtur tantos annos aliquem hominem posse vivere, et vixerunt hi qui ante nos fuerunt et vivunt qui translati sunt ad exemplum futurae longitudinis dierum, et de ventre ceti et de camino ignis salvos exisse, et tamen exierunt educti velut manu Dei ad ostensionem virtutis eius: sic et nunc, quamvis quidam ignorantes virtutem et promissionem Dei contradicant suae saluti, impossibile existimantes posse Deum suscitantem corpora in sempiternum perseverationem eis donare, non tamen incredulitas talium evacuabit fidem Dei. For a commentary see A. ORBE 1985 I, pp. 250-263.*

linked with the eschatological idea of salvation¹⁶; much more interesting in this context is the allusion to Ananias, Azarias and Misael recurring in *Adversus Haereses* V 29:2. As it will be progressively underlined, as it happens in the other cases attesting such exegetical tradition, the citation of Irenaeus can be considered as “apocalyptic” under two different points of view:

- 1) concerning its theological contents, since it is included in a section dedicated to the theme of eschatological judgment, in turn integrated in a complex exposition of the millenarian conception of Irenaeus¹⁷. Such speculation is unanimously considered by critics as one of the most interesting expressions of an entrenched paleochristian

¹⁶ The citation will be inspected in chapter 4, see *infra*, pp. 204-208.

¹⁷ It results impossible to offer a complete panorama about Irenaeus’ millenarian conception, that finds its principal expression in book V of *Adversus Haereses* (see O. GIORDANO, *La concezione millenaristica di Ireneo*, “Helikon” 2 [1962], p. 512). Its main specificities can be summarized in the following points: 1) the author establishes a direct reference to *Rev* and First Testament prophecies, uncompleted in the present and destined to be fulfilled in the future (G. NARDI in M. NALDINI 1994, p. 55; M. SIMONETTI 1998, p. 10); 2) he refuses every allegoric interpretation of them, considering creation in a material perspective and affirming that the same substance of this world will participate to the joy of the righteous ones, who suffered in their bodies (such “positive” conception of material body is a trait of opposition in respect to Gnostic theology) (O. GIORDANO 1962, pp. 521; G. NARDI in M. NALDINI 1994, p. 55; M. SIMONETTI 1998, p. 12); 3) his perspective derives from the interpretation of the days of the biblical creation as the prefiguration of the whole history of the world. Starting from *Ps* 89, that establishes an equation between one day of God and a thousand years, he affirms that the seventh genesiatic day in which God rested must correspond with the seventh apocalyptic millennium, that is the Saturday of the eschatological rest, namely the time of God’s kingdom. Moreover, as Adam was created in the sixth day, so the new-Adam, that is Christ, is going to be born, die and resurrect in the sixth millennium (R. CACITTI 1994, p. 133; G. NARDI in M. NALDINI 1994, pp. 55-56; M. SIMONETTI 1998, p. 12). As J. DANIELOU 1958, p. 366 underlines, Irenaeus seems to mix the typical features of Asiatic millenarianism concerning the material conception of a kingdom of God on the earth, with “les calculs des astrologues sur la seamen cosmic constituée de sept millénaires”, which are typical developments of Syriac and Egyptian theologies. For further references about Irenaeus’ conception, apart from the recent studies here cited, see also: E. BUONAIUTI, *Il millenarismo di Ireneo*, in A. DONINI A.-M. NICCOLI (curr.), *Saggi di storia del cristianesimo*, Vicenza 1957, pp. 101-117; O. GIORDANO 1962, pp. 512-530; M. O’ ROURKE BOYLE, *Irenaeus Millennial Hope. A Polemical Weapon*, “Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale” 36 (1969), pp. 5-16 (the scholar particularly insists on the relation between millenarianism and the unity of God in the two economies); A.S. WOOD, *The Eschatology of Irenaeus*, “Evangelical Quarterly” 41 (1969), pp. 30-41 (the author lingers on Irenaeus’ approach to Scriptures); G. JOSSA, *Regno di Dio e Chiesa. Ricerche sulla concezione escatologica nell’Adversus Haereses di Ireneo di Lione*, Napoli 1970 (Historia Salutis 2), in part. about millenarianism see pp. 130-146; C. MAZZUCCO-E. PIETRELLA, *Il rapporto tra la concezione del millennio dei primi autori cristiani e l’Apocalisse di Giovanni*, “Augustinianum” 18 (1978), pp. 29-45, that particularly focuses on the “righteous ones” kingdom; E. NORELLI, *Il duplice rinnovamento del mondo nell’escatologia di S. Ireneo*, “Augustinianum” 18 (1978), pp. 89-106, that includes, a part from a systematic and complete exposition of the argument, an interesting reference to different scientific theories about Irenaeus’ millenarianism (in part. pp. 91-98); A. ORBE, *S. Ireneo y el regime del milenio*, “Studia missionalia” 32 (1983), pp. 345-372; C.R. SMITH, *Chiliasm and recapitulation in the Theology of Irenaeus*, “Vigiliae Christianae” 48 (1994), pp. 313-331, that dedicates a specific section to “non traditional features of Chiliasm in Irenaeus”, pp. 315-317; G. PANI 1998, pp. 53-84, in part. pp. 72-79. Commenting the whole book V, the work of A. ORBE 1985/1988 unavoidably lingers on the theme of millennium in each aspect of Irenaeus’ development.

tradition¹⁸, whose Christian roots can be researched in *Rev* and whose remote matrixes can be ascribed to Jewish context¹⁹. It is necessary to consider since now, that also the other literary examples of such “apocalyptic assumption” of “tales” include the stories derived from *Dn* in similar thematic contexts²⁰;

- 2) concerning the method with which the reference is presented, since the episode of the furnace is evoked through the mention of elements insistently recurring in *Rev*, which perform in early Christianities a symbolic value typically associated with “apocalyptic” sceneries. This peculiarity is shared by both the other literary evidences and – even more so – the iconographic documents which possibly attest an “apocalyptic reception” of *Dn* ³²¹.

¹⁸ About Christian millenarianism see, for a general introduction, C. NARDI (cur.), *Il millenarismo. Testi dei secoli I-II*, Firenze 1995 (Biblioteca Patristica 27), p. 9. Such widespread belief would place, after the second arrival of Christ and before the definitive judgement, a period in which Christ himself would reign on this earth with the righteous men for a thousand year (see also M. SIMONETTI, *Il millenarismo cristiano dal I al V secolo*, “Annali di Storia dell’Egesi” 15/1 [1998], pp. 7-20, in part. p. 7). Such reign, mainly considered as the finally-rebuilt Jerusalem, is characterized by every kind of abundance and fecundity. In a former contribution, the same G. NARDI, *Il regno millenario nelle attese dei primi cristiani*, in M. NALDINI M. (cur.), *La fine dei tempi. Storia ed escatologia*, Firenze 1994, pp. 50-75, in part. p. 50, shortly clarifies that the matrix of such reflection should be prevalently researched in *Rev* 20:1-21:3. If the speculation finds its fundament in the idea that, in spite of Christ’s arrival, creation and human nature are still not reconciled (G. NARDI 1995, p. 25 affirms: “L’ulteriore attesa millenaria cristiana sembra...giustificarsi come un tentativo di risposta a un’obiezione, più o meno implicita, di questo tipo: se il Messia è già venuto nella persona e nell’opera di Gesù, come mai non c’è ancora, visibile e tangibile, manifesta ed evidente, la pace messianica promessa dalle profezie?”), its background should probably be researched in Jewish contexts and in biblical prophecies about a messianic reign of peace (about such link see G. NARDI 1995, pp. 11-12, p. 13, who considers as a Christian specificity the fact that millennium is placed “nel tempo, in opposizione all’eternità”). If traces of millenarianism are diffused in every paleochristian context, Asiatic Christianity represents its privileged *milieu* (G. NARDI 1995, p. 31); if “Giustino” is “il primo autore in cui leggiamo direttamente una descrizione del regno millenario” (M. SIMONETTI 1998, p. 9), Irenaeus of Lyons can be considered among those who expressed this tendency in the most peculiar and original acceptation, see *supra*, chapter 3, n. 17. For a panorama on the theme see also R.L. WILKEN, *Early Christian Chiliasm, Jewish Messianism and the idea of the holy land. Essays in Honor of Krister Stendhal*, “Harvard Theological Review” 79/1-3 (1986), pp. 298-397. The exposition by J. DANÉLOU 1958, pp. 341-365, remains among the most efficacious.

¹⁹ J. DANÉLOU 1958, p. 341, affirms that “cette doctrine se trouve exprimée, dans l’Apocalypse et dans la théologie judéo-chrétienne, au moyen de catégories empruntées à l’apocalyptique juive”. The scholar considers in this sense the millenarianism as a typical trait of Judeo-Christian thought, being “l’expression judéo-chrétienne du dogme de la Parousie”, p. 342.

²⁰ See *infra*, pp. 126-135.

²¹ See *infra*, pp. 136-148.

3.1.1. The “apocalyptic contents”: the theological value of the three Hebrews citation in *Adversus Haereses*

The reference to *Dn* “tales” in *Adversus Haereses* V 29 is included in a learned mosaic of proto and neotestamentary citations, specifically assumed to describe the arrival of the Antichrist and its consequences²², as the reading of the specific passage allows to notice.

***Adversus Haereses* V 29:1.** And for this reason, when suddenly, at the end, this church will be elevated, “there will be” it said “a tribulation, such as was not since the beginning, and never to be equalled again”²³; this is the ever-new battle of the righteous ones, whose winners will be crowned with incorruptibility. **2.** And for this reason, in the beast which is coming, there will be a recapitulation of every iniquity and every fraud, so that the strength of every apostasy, flowing and being closed in it, can be exposed to fiery furnace²⁴. Rightly its name will have the number 666²⁵, which recapitulates in itself every mix of malice that was before the deluge, malice that was originated by angelic apostasy²⁶ – Noah was in fact six hundred years old, and the deluge happened on the earth²⁷, annulling the insurrection that was on the earth because of the perverted generation living in the times of Noah²⁸ –, and recapitulating also every error occurred from the deluge on, that determined the invention of idolatry and the killing of the prophets, and the destruction of the righteous ones by fire –, indeed that statue, that was erected by Nabuchadnezzar, was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide²⁹; for they did not adore it, Ananias, Azarias and Misael were sent to the fiery furnace³⁰: through this happening, they prophesied the destruction of the righteous ones by fire that is going to happen in the end: the whole statue was indeed the prefiguration of the arrival of the one who thought he only had to be adored by every man –. And so the six hundred years of Noah, in whose time happened the deluge because of the apostasy, and the number of cubits of that statue which caused the exposition of the righteous ones to fire mean the

²² The section is called by A. ORBE III 1988, p. 116: “La justicia del verdadero Dio”.

²³ *Mt* 24:21; cf. *Dn* 12:1.

²⁴ Cf. *Rev* 19:20.

²⁵ Cf. *Rev* 13:18.

²⁶ Cf. *Gn* 6:1-7.

²⁷ Cf. *Gn* 7:6.

²⁸ Cf. *Gn* 6:12.

²⁹ Cf. *Dn* 3:1.

³⁰ Cf. *Dn* 3:8-20.

number of the name in which six thousand years of every apostasy, and injustice and perversion and false-prophecy and fraud are recapitulated: for all those things, the deluge will come on the fire³¹.

The paragraph can be considered as the result of an ampler exposition on the eschatological judgement, beginning in chapter V 27:1. Rather than focusing on the entire passage in a systematic way³² it seems appropriate to simply consider here the elements favouring a better comprehension of *Dn* “tales” role in Irenaeus’ reflection concerning end time³³.

First of all, in the light of the whole section, it is possible to identify and isolate two principal “apocalyptic themes” with which the citation of the three Hebrews is connected, and which allow,

³¹ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, edd. L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER, SC 153, pp. 364-371; V 29:1. *Et propterea, cum in fine repente hinc Ecclesia assumetur, “erit”, inquit, “tribulatio qualis non est facta ab initio neque fiet”: novissimus enim agon hic iustorum, in quo vincentes coronantur incorruptelam. 2. Et propter hoc in bestia veniente recapitulatio fit universae iniquitatis et omnis doli, ut in ea confluens et conclusa omnis virtus apostatica in caminum mittatur ignis. Congruenter autem et nomen eius habebit numerum sexcentos sexaginta sex, recapitulans in semetipso omnem quae fuit ante diluivium malitiae commixtionem quae facta est ex angelica apostasia – Noe enim fuit annorum sexcentorum, et diluivium advenit terrae, delens in resurrectionem terrae propter nequissimam generationem quae fuit temporibus Noe –, recapitulans autem et omnem qui fuit a diluvio errorem commentatorem idolorum et prophetarum interfectionem et succensionem iustorum –, illa enim quae fuit a Nabuchodonos instituta imago altitudinem quidem habuit cubitorum sexaginta, latitudinem autem cubitorum sex, propter quam et Ananias et Azarias et Misael non adorantes eam in caminum missi sunt ignis, per id quod eis evenit prophetantes eam quae in finem futura est iustorum succensio: universa enim imago illa praefiguratio fuit huius adventus ab omnibus omnino hominibus ipsum solum decernens adorari –. Sexcenti itaque anni Noe sub quo fuit diluivium propter apostasiam et numerus cubitorum imaginis propter quam iusti in caminum ignis missi sunt numerum nominis significat illius in quem recapitulatur sex millium annorum omnis apostasia et iniustitia et nequitia et pseudopropheta et dolus: propter quae et diluivium superveniet ignis.* As has already been outlined, book V is attested by the original Greek, by the latin translation, by some fragments of the Armenian and Syriac translations and by “quelques débris...de tradition directe. Il s’agit de ce qu’on est convenu d’appeler le Papyrus d’Iéna” (L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER [edd.], SC 152/1 [1969], p. 119). The authors of SC focused on “un travail d’édition critique, visant à procurer un text aussi sûr que possible” (p. 12), providing an edition that “englobe à la fois l’effort fait pour rejoindre les traducteurs et excerpteurs (“une «édition» - au sens courant du mot - des versions latine et arménienne et des fragment grecs) et l’effort ultérieur accompli pour tenter de rejoindre l’oeuvre d’Irenée par delà ces intermédiaires (rétroversion grecque et traduction française accompagnées des justifications)” (pp. 15-16, n.1). Such approach has been disapproved by recent scholars such as A. COSENTINO 2009, p. 8, who warns the reader about the “operazione compiuta dagli editori delle SC che hanno ricostruito artificiosamente il testo greco mancante dalle traduzioni – latina e armena”. Considering A. COSENTINO’s position absolutely appropriate, in this context only the latin version of the text will be presented (see SC edition for the Greek tradition).

³² For a reading of the whole passage and for a comment see A. ORBE III 1988, pp. 117-239.

³³ Single parts of the entire chapter will be progressively mentioned when needed. Moreover, a table has been produced to summarize and offer an over-all view of the entire passage, see *tab. 2*, pp. 151-152. Such table organizes the text with the specific objective to show the antithetic process applied to elaborate the physiognomy of the “righteous” and the “evil” ones and their consequent millenarian destinies; at the same time the following elements will be underlined: 1) references to free will (in red); 2) references to the binomial *fides/apostasia* (in green); 3) “temporary markers” (in pink); 3) references to number 666 (highlighted in green); 4) references to the theme of fire (highlighted in red); 5) references to the theme of water (highlighted in blue).

for this reason, to consider its reception as “apocalyptic” under the point of view of the contents expressed by the author:

- 1) the biblical episode is conceived as type of the *tribulatio*;
- 2) the biblical characters are introduced as types of the *iusti* who will undergo final judgement.

These associations, fully expressed in *Adversus Haereses*, represent the implicit frame and presuppose of the “apocalyptic reception” of “tales” in Methodius of Olympus and in *De Pascha Computus*³⁴. For such reason, the analysis of Irenaeus’ elaboration reveals to be the best occasion to deeply understand the theological context of a wider exegetical tradition.

a) *The episode of the furnace and the tribulatio*

The end of chapter V 29:1 can be considered as the very beginning of the section in which the citation of *Dn* recurs, since here the temporal and geographical coordinates to understand the biblical allusion are introduced:

Adversus Haereses V 29:1. And for this reason, when suddenly, at the end, this church will be elevated, “there will be” it said “a tribulation, such as was not since the beginning, and never to be equalled again”³⁵.

A first consideration can be formulated about the structure of this short passage, elaborated as a sort of progressive focalization, from the general to the particular:

- the temporal dimension to which Irenaeus refers is first of all connoted with the expression *in fine*, a moment more precisely corresponding with the “elevation” of the church to the sky (*cum in fine repente hinc Ecclesia assumetur*);
- such reference immediately casts the argumentation on an eschatological level, that obtains a punctual connotation through a synoptic citation: assuming Gospel’s words³⁶,

³⁴ See *infra*, pp. 132-135.

³⁵ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, ed. L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER, SC 153, pp. 364-365; V 29:1. *Et propterea, cum in fine repente hinc Ecclesia assumetur, “erit”, inquit, “tribulatio qualis non est facta ab initio neque fiet”.*

the author introduces a strongly apocalyptic element, signally marked by the key-word *tribulatio*, that is θλίψις in Greek tradition. Proposing his own interpretation of the neotestamentary passage, the author specifies the character of such *tribulatio*: happening at the moment in which the union of believers will be lifted to the sky, it corresponds with the ever-new battle of the righteous men (*novissimus agon iustorum*), whose winners will obtain the crown of incorruptibility (*in quo vincentes coronantur incorruptelam*)³⁷.

³⁶ It is common opinion of the scholarship (see among the others A. ORBE III 1988, p. 219: “Las líneas comentan *Mt* 24:21”) that Irenaeus is here citing *Mt* 24:21. ἔσται γὰρ τότε θλίψις μεγάλη οἷα οὐ γέγονεν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς κόσμου ἕως τοῦ νῦν οὐδ’ οὐ μὴ γένηται. The fact that the author does not include in its reference the significant adjective μεγάλη, added by *Mt* to *Mk* lesson, suggests not to underestimate the possibility that Irenaeus was actually drawing from the same *Mk* 13:19 (the verse is not shared by *Lk*). ἔσονται γὰρ αἱ ἡμέραι ἐκεῖναι θλίψις οἷα οὐ γέγονεν τοιαύτη ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς κτίσεως ἣν ἔκτισεν ὁ θεὸς ἕως τοῦ νῦν καὶ οὐ μὴ γένηται – or that he was generically referring to an evangelic passage known by heart, without specifically alluding to a version in a punctual way. Comparing the Latin and the Greek Irenaeus (Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο, ἐν τῷ τέλει ἀθρόως ἐντεῦθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀναλαμβάνομένης, «ἔσται», φησὶν, «θλίψις, οἷα οὐκ ἐγένετο ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς οὐδ’ οὐ μὴ γένηται») with the synoptic passage, it is possible to affirm that the real focus of the citation is made of two principal elements 1) the theme of θλίψις; 2) the allusion to its unique and exceptional character, that is going to make of it an experience never happened in past nor destined to happen again. An insight into the neotestamentary contexts of the reference may provide some additional elements. Both in *Mk* and in *Mt* the verse is included within the so-called “apocalyptic discourse”, and signally in the section in which “viene annunciata la grande tribolazione che precede la venuta del Figlio dell’Uomo” (see S. GRASSO, *Vangelo di Marco. Nuova versione, introduzione e commento*, Milano 2003, p. 286 and ID., *Il vangelo di Matteo. Commento esegetico e teologico*, Roma 2014, p. 685; about *Mt* 24 see also G. MACASKILL, *Revealed Wisdom and Inaugurated Eschatology in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, Leiden-Boston 2007 [Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism. Text and Studies 115], pp. 163-180). Such *tribulatio* in Matthean elaboration seems to be at the same time considered as connected with the “abomination of desolation” (a *theologumenon* derived from *Dn* 12:1, where it precedes the resurrection of the dead, see J. GNILKA, *Il vangelo di Matteo*, I, Brescia 1990 [Commentario Teologico del Nuovo Testamento], p. 474), and distinct by it, because “si riferisce alla reazione umana nei confronti dell’avvenimento della devastazione” (S. GRASSO 2014, p. 688). In its commentary to *Mk*, R. PESCH, *Il Vangelo di Marco*, II, Brescia 1982 (Commentario Teologico del Nuovo Testamento), p. 440, interprets θλίψις “nel senso di oppressione da parte del nemico e identificata con la guerra giudaica, intesa come tempo dell’afflizione escatologica”. About the use of the word θλίψις and its eminently apocalyptic value see. H. SCHLIER, s.v. “Θλίβω/Θλίψις”, GLNT 4, coll. 515-542, in part. coll. 531-542. About the reception of *Mt* in *Adversus Haereses* see D.J. BINGHAM, *Matthew’s Gospel in Adversus Haereses*, Leuven 1998, (Traditio Exegetica Graeca), in part. pp. 282, about chapters V 25-30.

³⁷ The reference to *tribulatio* in Matthean tradition is immediately followed by “la notizia che il tempo della crisi è abbreviato a motivo degli eletti, esprimendo così la speranza di salvezza” in *Mt* 24:22 (S. GRASSO 2014, p. 685) but also in *Mk* 13:20 (R. PESCH II 1982, p. 440). Such selected people to which the θλίψις is granted, correspond, in Matthean theology, to those who perseverated in faith, coming from every race and nation (*Mt* 24:30-31; S. GRASSO 2014, p. 688). These figures, whose denomination would be derived from apocalyptic context according to J. GNILKA II 1991, p. 475, are associated to the righteous men in *Mt* 13:43,49; 10:41; the fact that they obtain salvation implies the guarantee for them to sustain and bear persecution and tribulation without being damaged (J. GNILKA II 1991, p. 475). Since the citation of Irenaeus is immediately followed by a reference to the righteous men and their destiny, it is possible to ask whether the author operates an implicit overlapping between the *iusti* and the selected people mentioned by the evangelist. About the passages of *Mk* and *Mt* see also E.P. GOULD, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*, Edinburgh 1948, pp. 247-248, and W.D. DAVIES-D.C. ALLISON, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, III, Edinburgh 1997 (The International Critical Commentary), p. 350.

A first “internal” consideration should be formulated about the quick and interesting change of verbal tenses and “temporary markers” in the paragraph: if the allusion to the “end of time” refers to future (*in fine / assumetur*), the mention of the battle of the righteous ones presupposes a return to the present (*novissimus / hic / vincentes / coronantur*). The tribulation seems to obtain for this reason a “double” chronological placement: on one side, it belongs to “last times” and can be considered as an eschatological event; on the other, it assumes the concreteness of the present, probably for two possible reasons: both because millenarian conception (and signally Irenaean one) tends to stress the material interpretation of eschatological facts³⁸, and because the *agon iustorum* may have unavoidably been conceived in strict reference with the historical condition of communities and with their “martyrial configuration”³⁹.

In addition to such “temporal fluctuation” and as to “recompose” it, the following synoptic allusion seems to connect the extremities of the whole history of salvation: the apocalyptic context of *tribulatio* is in fact conceived as *qualis non est facta ab initio neque fiet*. In this sense, the “beginning” and the “eternity” appears to be both included in the Christian perspective⁴⁰, in a way that may stress

³⁸ O. GIORDANO 1962, p. 521: “La redenzione operata da Cristo non è...come pensavano gli gnostici, solo apparente o di carattere spirituale, ma una realtà concreta che abbraccia lo spirito e la carne. Il verbo si è fatto carne ed è disceso sulla terra per ricondurre l’uomo in cielo...è giusto che i santi ricevano il premio della loro pazienza proprio in quella carne in cui tanto patirono...L’umanità rigenerata, che trova in Cristo il suo esemplare più perfetto, avrà una sua dimora anche su questa terra completamente rinnovellata, in un regno di felicità e prosperità, che è preludio alla gloria nell’immortalità della vita futura...”.

³⁹ About the argument see in general *infra*, chapters 5 and 6.

⁴⁰ This sense of continuity in the parable of salvation history represents a specific trait of Irenaean theological conception, and it is grounded on the presuppose of an identity between the two Testaments’ God: as underlined in L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER (edd.), SC 152/1, p. 183, “toute la deuxième partie du livre 5 visait à démontrer, à partir de trois faits de la vie du Christ, que le seul vrai Dieu, celui qui s’est révélé comme Père dans le Christ, est identiquement le Dieu qui a créé toutes choses” (see also O. GIORDANO 1962, p. 523: “Ireneo...ammette l’unità e la continuità tra l’AT e il NT perché uno solo è l’ispiratore...”; see, for a presentation of the theme, PH. BACQ, *De l’ancienne à la nouvelle alliance selon S. Irénée. Unité du livre IV de l’Adversus Haereses*, Paris 1978 [Le Sycomore]; Y. DE ANDIA, *Modèle de l’unité des Testaments selon Irénée de Lyon*, “Studia Patristica” 21 [1987], pp. 49-59, and E. NORELLI, *Paix, justice, intégrité de la création: Irénée de Lyon et ses adversaires*, “Irenikon” 64 [1991], pp. 5-43). The perception of such unity is not just the element justifying the activation of a typological interpretation of the scriptural events, but – at a previous stage – it is generically connected with the idea of a continuity between different phases of salvation history, conceived as a “processo lineare senza scosse né deviazioni” (G. JOSSA 1970, p. 144). “Gli ultimi tempi” as G. JOSSA 1970, pp. 132-133, affirms, “rinviando... a un passato di cui sono essi stessi realizzazione completa”. For these reasons, the expression can be assumed as an attempt to stress the exceptionality of such tribulation in the light of the entire salvation history, that has to be considered as a *continuum*: in this sense, *tribulatio* can be interpreted as a single step in the uninterrupted progress of men toward God.

one of the critical points on which the polemic against the Gnostics was grounded, namely the idea of the continuity of salvation history⁴¹.

Apart from performing such theological function, the adverbial expression *in fine*, attributed to the moment in which the church will be assumed and tribulation will come, works also as a “temporal marker” that establishes a connection with the same citation from *Dn*, in which it actually recurs another time: Ananias’, Azarias’ and Misael’s exposition to flames is conceived as a prophecy (*prophetantes*) of the destruction of righteous men by fire (*iustorum succensio*), that is precisely going to happen (*futura est*) *in finem*. This temporal association reinforces and confirms the link between the already cited *agon iustorum* and the *iustorum succensio* anticipated by the Hebrews’ experience: in other words, the eschatological *tribulatio* corresponds with the accomplishment of the destiny of those *iusti* who will undergo (and fulfil) the destiny of Daniel’s companions⁴².

In order to better comprehend Irenaeus’ conception of *tribulatio*, it is possible to draw interesting elements from the previous chapter, where the term returns in the description of God’s judgement:

Adversus Haereses V 28:4. And for this reason, in all this time, the man, moulded at the beginning⁴³ by God’s hand, that is by Son and Spirit, was created after the image and similitude of God⁴⁴; the straw was thrown away – which is apostasy –, while in the granary was placed the wheat⁴⁵, which means those who produce fruits to God with faith⁴⁶. And for this reason, tribulation is necessary for those who are saved, so that the ones who have been triturated, diminished and

⁴¹ See among the others G. JOSSA 1978, p. 108: “Contro Marcione Ireneo si è impegnato a sottolineare soprattutto...l’unità di Dio e la continuità dei due testamenti” and M. SIMONETTI, Per typica ad vera. *Note sull’esegesi di Ireneo*, “*Vetera Christianorum*” (1981) 18/2, p. 357, who talks about a “iato” perceived by the Gnostics in the conception of Scriptures and divine economies. About the author’s exegesis see also A. BENOIT, *Écriture et tradition chez saint Irénée*, “*Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse*” 40 (1960), pp. 32-44. For a reference to Irenaeus’ sources see E. CATTANEO-M. LONGOBARDO M. (cur.), *Consonantia salutis: studi su Ireneo di Lione*, Trapani 2005 (Oī christianoi. Antichità 1), in part. E. NORELLI, *Il problema delle fonti ecclesiastiche di Ireneo*; SPACCAPELO N., *Clemente Romano fonte di Ireneo?*; BARBAGLIA S., *Ireneo di Lione e la comunicazione della fede cristiana in una coscienza canonica delle Sacre Scritture*.

⁴² See *infra*, pp. 110-113.

⁴³ Cf. *Gn* 2:7.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Gn* 1:26.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Mt* 3:12; *Lk* 3:17.

⁴⁶ The translation proposed by A. COSENTINO 2009, p. 388, “coloro che danno come frutto la fede in Dio”, is quite imprecise.

strewn with patience by God's Verb and burnt, could be suitable for the king's banquet⁴⁷.

The use of *tribulatio* in this context opens three interpretative windows:

- firstly, the fact that the saved men (*qui salvatur*) are here connoted as “burnt” (*igniti*), unavoidably strengthens the connection between θλίψις and the experience of the three Hebrews in the furnace, through the *tertium comparationis* of fire;
- secondly, the passage offers an explanation for the usefulness and the value of the same tribulation, that is conceived as a sort of instrument (*necessaria est*) granted by God in order to make the saved ones worthy of his banquet. Obtaining a “positive” and “functional” connotation, it becomes an important step in the path of *iusti* toward God's kingdom (*ut...apti sint ad convivium regis*)⁴⁸;
- thirdly, in the immediately preceding passage of *Adversus Haereses* V 28:3⁴⁹, Irenaeus gives a further element with which *tribulatio* has to be connected, that is the “sixth thousand year” (*sextus millesimus annus est*), where the *consummatio* of things will inevitably happen. The presupposes of this chronological and theological clarification have to be

⁴⁷ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, edd. L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER, SC 153, pp. 360-361; V 28:4. *Et propter hoc in omni tempore, plasmatus in initio homo per manus Dei, hoc est Filii et Spiritus, fit secundum imaginem et similitudinem Dei, paleis quidem abiectis, quae sunt apostasia, frumento autem in horreum assumpto, quod est hi qui ad Deum fidem fructificant. Et propterea tribulatio necessaria est his qui salvantur, ut, quodammodo contriti et attenuati et conspersi per patientiam Verbo Dei et igniti, apti sint ad convivium regis.*

⁴⁸ This interpretation can be considered as an original outcome of Irenaeus' conception of the seamless continuity in the progress of salvation history: it is actually considered as “una serie di continue ascensioni” (O. GIORDANO 1962, p. 517), through which men have to be gradually prepared to God's contemplation (IDEM, p. 519). Such conception influences also the same role attributed by the author to the whole creation: as E. NORELLI 1978, p. 105, explains, according to Irenaeus “Dio creò un universo la cui struttura corrispondeva al progresso che l'uomo avrebbe compiuto, dalla plàsis alla divinizzazione”; this progress, according to G. JOSSA 1978, p. 110, “iniziatosi con la creazione e compiutosi nel Cristo con l'incarnazione...prosegue...anche dopo questa venuta (di Cristo) sino alla risurrezione dei morti e alla visione di Dio”. During its course, men have to reach a condition of perfection, whose achievement is made possible also by tribulation: “tutto si compie a beneficio dell'uomo per fare maturare il suo libero arbitrio in vista dell'immortalità e renderlo più atto a essere per sempre sottomesso a Dio” (P. SINISCALCO, *Il senso della storia. Studi sulla storiografia cristiana antica*, Soveria Mannelli 2003, p. 221). About the “human growth from creation to resurrection” see E. OSBORN 2001, pp. 216-229.

⁴⁹ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, edd. L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER, SC 153, pp. 358-359; V 28:3. *Quotquot enim diebus hic factus est mundus, tot et millenis annis consummatur. Et propter hoc ait Scriptura Geneseos: “Et consummata sunt caelum et terra et omnis ornatus eorum. Et consummavit Deus die sexto omnia opera sua quae fecit, et requievit in die septimo ab omnibus operibus suis quae fecit”. Hoc autem est et ante factorum narratio quemadmodum facta sunt et futurorum prophetia. Si enim “dies Domini quasi mille anni”, in sex autem diebus consummata sunt quae facta sunt, manifestum est quoniam consummatio ipsorum sextus millesimus annus est.*

researched in the explicit equivalence established between the days of the biblical creation and the millenniums which will have to pass in order to fulfil the “future events”. The hermeneutical process allowing such connection – already mentioned as an authentic specificity of Irenaeus’ millenarian conception⁵⁰ – presupposes the reading of *Gn* 2:1-2⁵¹ in the light of *Ps* 89:4⁵²: affirming that a single day of God corresponds to a thousand years, the author can place the “consummation” of things in the sixth millennium⁵³. In this way, the events anticipated by the Hebrews do not just assume an apocalyptic value, but are even more precisely set in a specific “millenarian” speculation.

Summarizing what has been so far exposed, it is possible to affirm that the furnace anticipates that *iustorum succensio* corresponding with *tribulatio* and more specifically with the eschatological *agon iustorum* placed in the sixth millennium of consummation of things. The experience of Daniel’s companions has to be first of all considered as a type of that scenery generated by God as a divine instrument to make *iusti* capable to accede to his eschatological banquet. In other words, it is possible to affirm that *Dn* “tale”, in a generic sense, anticipates apocalyptic θλίψις, here re-read in the light of the millenarian conception of the author.

b) *The Hebrews and the iusti*

Since the episode of the furnace represents the type of the apocalyptic tribulation – that is the *agon iustorum* – the figure of the Hebrews perform the role of types of the *iusti* involved in such scenery.

⁵⁰ About this specificity of Irenaeus’ millenarianism see *supra*, n. 17.

⁵¹ *Gn* 2:1-2. “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. 2. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work”.

⁵² *Ps* 89:4. “A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night”.

⁵³ P. SINISCALCO 2003, pp. 217-222, shortly inspects the themes of the seventh millennium and the eighth day in the Epistle of the Pseudo-Barnabas, whose ideas – he affirms – can be found also in Irenaeus (p. 220). Talking about book V of *Adversus Haereses*, he adds: “Ireneo sembra unire nelle sue pagine due tradizioni, quella asiatica, che insiste sul regno terrestre del Messia, sul rinnovato intervento di Dio creatore, sulla fecondità della terra, sulla longevità degli uomini e, in certo modo, sul ritorno allo stato paradisiaco iniziale, e quella siriana, che pone in luce i sei millenni nei quali si esaurisce la storia del mondo, cui segue il settimo millennio e il cessare dell’azione creatrice di Dio” (p. 221). As A. COSENTINO 2009, p. 388, affirms, such tradition is principally attested in Asiatic contexts, having a Syriac ascendance. For an overview concerning Judeo-Christian millenarianism, in a perspective that stresses Irenaeus’ peculiarities, see J. DANIELOU 1958, p. 342-366.

The characteristics of the “righteous men” are moulded by Irenaeus starting from chapter V 27:1, dedicated to eschatological judgment, in tight antithesis to those of *mali*⁵⁴. The definition of these opposite categories is apparently grounded on the neotestamentary presuppose that *Logos* has come “for the ruin and the resurrection of many” (*Lk* 2:34), so that the action of Christ in the moment of judgement is associated with the idea of distinguishing “the son from the father, the daughter from the mother, the daughter-in-law from the mother-in-law” (*Mt* 10:35). In other words, according to Irenaeus, Christ’s arrival would have been superfluous and in contradiction with the fact that he has not judged (*supervacuum ergo erit adventus Christi et contrarius in eo quod non iudicet*⁵⁵).

This peculiar prerogative, described through the mention of synoptic passages such as *Mt* 13:30; 3:12; 25:33-34, may be connected with the final function attributed Jesus, namely not to leave *omnes in aequo...statu*. If it is certainly possible and appropriate to associate such expression with a typical feature of the “apocalyptic manifestations”, that are conceived and described as chaotic events which radically subvert the context in which they happen, at the same time the action attributed to Christ may deal with the necessity to “reveal” and “distinguish” those who believe in God from the others.

In this way, humanity appears to be divided into two opposite groups, whose distinctive traits can be summarized as follows:

- the heart of their opposition is represented by the linguistic couple formed by the terms *fides/apostasia*: if the *iusti* are those who “believed”, the *mali*, on the contrary, did not turn their faith to God. *Fides* and *apostasia* are conceived as the propeller elements of the actions and the consequences envisaged for those groups (*per fidem* [27:2]; *per apostasiam* [27:2]).
- The value attributed to the categories of *fides* and *apostasia* apparently deals with the problem of will, and mainly with the idea of “following” or “not following” God’s *sententia*. Such issue should be inspected in the light of a more precise and specific study of Irenaeus’ lexicon and theology, so that in this context it seems more cautious to simply expose some generic considerations. First of all, *fides* appears to be connected with the

⁵⁴ The characteristics and the references to the *iusti* in constant comparison with *mali* are summarized in *tab.* 2.

⁵⁵ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, edd. L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER, SC 153/2, pp. 338-339; V 27:1.

concept of adhering to God's *sententia*, which means *facere veritatem*; *apostasia* would describe, on the contrary, the condition of those who do not accede to God's "doctrine" and act *secundum suam sententiam*. On one side, it is possible to wonder whether such allusion to "doctrine" evokes, in some measure, the contrast with Gnostics about scriptural interpretation; on the other, it can be noticed that *iusti* are presented as those who maintain a specific proximity with God's will, while *mali* are described as those who do not commit themselves to God, and incur, for this reason, in fatal consequences they are actually responsible for⁵⁶. The two categories are metaphorically associated to the concepts of *lumen/tenebra*: the believers show themselves and come to light *ut manifestentur opera eius quoniam in Deo est operatus*; on the contrary, those who stand on the side of apostasy crave to remain in the darkness, *ne traducantur opera eius* (V 27:2)⁵⁷.

- The destiny of *iusti* and *mali* is expressed through the antithetic couple *communio/separatio*: *iusti* are in fact *aduniti...Deo* (27:2) and thanks to such *communio* they manage to reach *vita*, *lumen* and mainly the *fruitio...bonorum* deriving from God. On the contrary, *mali*, who acted according to their own *sententia*, run into *mors*, *tenebra*, and *amissio...bonorum* (V 27:2), because of their distance from God. Such lack of eternal goods unavoidably determines eternal desolation and sufferance⁵⁸.

Summarizing these elements, it is possible to affirm that the Hebrews are conceived as types of those who believe in God and benefit from a special proximity with him due to their *fides*⁵⁹. Such *fides* can be considered as the principal theological core of the typology, since it both grounds the definition of the righteous ones in *Adversus Haereses* and represents the cause of the three Hebrews' exposition to

⁵⁶ This concept explicitly emerges when Irenaeus specifies that evil men *privati sunt iucunditate luminis, non quod lumen eis poenam inferat caecitatis, sed quod ipsa caecitas superinducat eis calamitatem* (V 27:2), or again when he affirms that they will be eternally exposed to sufferance *Deo quidem...non a semetipso eos puniente, prosequente autem eos poena quoniam sint desolati ab omnibus bonis* (V 27:2).

⁵⁷ It would be certainly important to define in a more conscious way the relation that links God to the actions of *iusti* and *mali*, trying to understand whether Irenaeus is alluding to a "simple coherence" between divine will and the righteous men's actions, or is more specifically implying that God himself "acts through" the *iusti*. The matter is clearly too complex to be inspected in this occasion, since it would lead the reader too far from the core of the argumentation, that is not actually represented by Irenaeus' theology, but rather by a paradigmatic assumption of "tales".

⁵⁸ The nature of those goods is further specified in the section dedicated to the reign of *iusti*, chapter V 32. For a possible interpretation of their theological significance see *infra*, n. 60.

⁵⁹ The proximity between the Hebrews and God is alluded in iconography by those representations of the furnace, in which a "fourth figure" is included between Ananias, Azarias and Misael.

fire, which depends indeed on their refusal of idolatry. The condition of the *iusti* finally results in the access to God's eternal, eschatological reward⁶⁰. Such typological connection between Daniel's companions and the *iusti*, far from representing a distinctive trait of Irenaeus' conception, is another element characterizing the "apocalyptic use" of "tales" in early Christianities.

3.1.2. The method of the citation: the "apocalyptic symbols" in the three Hebrews' reference

The "apocalyptic" reception of *Dn* "tales" in preconstantinian sources does not just involve the theological contents with which the Hebrews' story is associated, but also deals with the same method adopted to recall the biblical episode. The "apocalyptic" trait of such method should not be that much researched in the "typological perspective" explicitly declared by Irenaeus⁶¹ and emerging also from other literary or iconographic sources⁶², but it rather concerns the particular attention devoted to the selection and use of "symbolic elements" in the use of the biblical reference.

⁶⁰ The definition of such reward is the content of the following chapters of book V of *Adversus Haereses*, where the author focuses on the *iusti*'s condition *in regni temporibus* (V 32-34). An interesting interpretation of these chapters, at least under a theological point of view, is offered by R. CACITTI 1991, pp. 151-169 and R. CACITTI 1994, pp. 124-141. The author does not just manage to underline the trait of Irenaeus' millenarian conception in the definition of the price predisposed for *iusti* who accede to "sabbatic rest", but he also underlines the martyrial context of this theological elaboration. The scholar mainly points out that "l'ingresso nel Regno sembra...condizionato precipuamente dallo *status* martirologico" (R. CACITTI 1994, p. 129). The object of R. CACITTI's study is represented by a specific lesson of *Lk* 12:37, assumed by the Latin and Armenian Irenaeus; here a difference among three vigils is traced; only those who will be found *vigilantes in vespertina vigilia* will accede to eschatological banquet (R. CACITTI 1994, p. 131-132). The introduction of such *vespertina vigilia* before the other two would represent, according to the scholar, "una riformulazione dei moduli escatologici delle *mansiones multae*: ne deve allora conseguire l'equivalenza fra *caelorum conversatio, centopium* e *vespertina vigilia*, sigle che concorrono a definire la ricompensa riservata al martire" (p. 132). Such interpretation represents an interesting *datum* to consider, since – as it will be further pointed out – it supports the martyrial background of Irenaeus' conception of *iusti*, see *infra*, in part. p. 120. About the reward see also P. SINISCALCO 2003, p. 221: "Alla fine la tribolazione raggiungerà il massimo grado, avrà luogo l'ultimo combattimento dei giusti, e al suo termine i vincitori saranno coronati dell'incorruttibilità. Nel proseguo del discorso lo scrittore precisa quali siano i premi che attendono i giusti, secondo le economie di Dio: la loro risurrezione e il regno, preludio all'incorruttibilità. Il regno, *quod est principium incorruptelae*, altro non è che il mondo rinnovato, destinato a durare per mille anni (prima della risurrezione finale e generale), nel quale i giusti raccoglieranno il frutto della sofferenza e delle prove superate durante la loro vita e con Cristo regneranno, secondo le promesse fatte da Dio ai padri".

⁶¹ The features of Irenaeus' exegetical conception has been studied by M. SIMONETTI 1981. According to the scholar the perception of a continuity between the two Testaments would underlie the adoption of a "typological approach" (pp. 358-360). It is also connected with the concept of "recapitulation", that would define "the correspondence between first things and last things" and "the idea... of «summing up» everything previous" (C.R. SMITH 1994 as p. 325).

⁶² See *infra*, pp. 126-148.

The technique adopted by the authors who introduce the “tales” in a discourse concerning the establishment of end times, is actually comparable with the “symbolic vocation” of “apocalypse”⁶³, which has to be shortly described.

Mainly in the case of narrations of visions, the cornerstone of this production has been exactly identified by critics with the assumption of a symbolic and allusive code, so that RUSSEL could state that “symbolism corresponds with the language of apocalyptic”⁶⁴. The process of elaboration and use of such “symbols” includes different steps that go from the attribution of a new semantic value to single elements⁶⁵ – corresponding with the creation of a symbolic code –, to the further integration of these elements in complex figures, which are nothing more than a composite sum of independent parts, paradoxically conceived and created with the function to be dismantled⁶⁶.

Concerning the creation of a “code”, it is necessary to underline how, in the pristine process of assumption of symbols, documents seem to draw from the same sources, so that they apparently share a common patrimony of images returning with substantial uniformity in every “apocalyptic scenery”; at the same time, in the individual use and manipulation of such images, sources manifest a substantial independence and achieve original outcomes, so that the “apocalyptic symbolic imagery” is characterized by the union of repetitiveness and originality⁶⁷.

The systematic juxtaposition of isolated elements to create articulated an “incomprehensible” images allows to affirm that in “apocalyptic production” “symbols prevail on figure”⁶⁸, which means that “apocalyptic figures” should be principally considered in their function of “gatherer of symbols”, lacking of a “unitary meaning” and just created to “keep together” different isolated parts, each of them endowed with a specific, analogical and evocative value.

⁶³ See *supra*, pp. 95-96.

⁶⁴ D.S. RUSSEL 1991, p. 159; see also U. VANNI, *L'apocalisse. Ermeneutica, esegesi, teologia*, Bologna 1988 (Supplementi alla Rivista Biblica 17), p. 31: “Il simbolismo occupa, nell'interpretazione dell'Apocalisse un posto centrale”. The author delineates a *status quaestionis* of the early studies about the symbols of *Rev* (pp. 31-33).

⁶⁵ Describing the process of creation of symbols, U. VANNI distinguishes between the “realistic discourse” and the symbolic one. The former “si ha quando i vari elementi che lo compongono mantengono intatta, nel giro del discorso stesso, l'unità precisa di significato che hanno nell'ambito del sistema linguistico in cui un autore opera”. On the contrary, the latter would be generated when “quest'identità non viene più rispettata, ma si compie, sempre nell'ambito del medesimo sistema linguistico, uno spostamento, un cambiamento rilevante”, U. VANNI 1988, pp. 32-33.

⁶⁶ G. PELIZZARI 2006-2007, p. 95.

⁶⁷ G. PELIZZARI 2010, p. 92.

⁶⁸ G. PELIZZARI 2006-2007.

This short exposition of the principal attitude of “apocalyptic method” will allow to better understand the features of paleochristian “apocalyptic use” of *Dn* citation in a wide perspective, from literature to iconography. Also in this circumstance, the case of *Adversus Haereses* represents a good starting point and a concrete example. Three main elements have to be considered:

- 1) in the activation of the “hermeneutical link” with the scriptural episode of the Hebrews, the author resorts to symbols. In other words, the elements allowing him to ascertain and declare a “typological connection” between *iusti* and Daniel’s companions is represented by a “symbolic system” which characterizes both the biblical story and the eschatological scenery described by Irenaeus.
- 2) Such system is composed of three symbols: the number 666; the fire; the water. These elements recur in apocalyptic imageries and inherently own, for this reason, an “apocalyptic character” that should have been easily caught by the audience.
- 3) As it happens in the building of “apocalyptic sceneries”, at least two of these symbols - fire and water - are combined as to create a final, evocative image, resulting from their *crisis*.

In the following paragraphs, each symbol used by Irenaeus to attribute an “apocalyptic guise” to *Dn* “tale” will be individually inspected.

a) *The “number of the beast”*

Adversus Haereses V 29:2. Rightly its name will have the number 666...recapitulating also...the destruction of righteous ones by fire –, indeed that statue that was erected by Nabuchadnezzar was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide...⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, edd. L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER, SC 153, pp. 366-367; V 29:2. *Congruenter autem et nomen eius habebit numerum sexcentos sexaginta sex...recapitulans autem...et succensionem iustorum –, illa enim quae fuit a Nabuchodonosor instituta imago altitudinem quidem habuit cubitorum sexaginta, latitudinem autem cubitorum sex...*

The number 666, which allows the integration of the narrated events in the frame of the sixth millennium⁷⁰, is the first symbolic element propelling and justifying the allusion to Daniel's companions' experience: it actually corresponds with the high and the length of Nabuchadnezzar's statue, which can be in this way overlapped with the image of the beast cited in *Rev* and recalled by Irenaeus. In other words, the relationship between Ananias, Azarias, Misael and the righteous men does not appear to be narratively grounded on a direct connection between the figures of *Dn* and the protagonists of *Adversus Haereses*, but rather passes through the typological couple formed by Nabuchadnezzar and the Antichrist, justified by the textual link represented by the number 666.

This typological connection is in some measure introduced by the previous section (V 28:2), where Irenaeus commits himself to *Rev* words in order to offer a concrete, physical description of the Antichrist, identified with the apocalyptic beast⁷¹. An essential element of its characterization is represented by a "magic" connotation: commenting the passages from *Rev*, the author specifies that everything happened *ne quis eum divina virtute putet signa facere, sed magica operatione*. Among the *signa* performed by the Antichrist, thanks to the cooperation with *daemoniis et apostaticis spiritibus*, Irenaeus precisely cites the erection of the statue of the beast⁷², whose name corresponds with *numerus sexcentos sexaginta sex (Rev 13:14-18); quod est sexies centeni et deni sexies et singulares sex, in ricapitulationem universae apostasiae eius quae facta est in sex millibus annorum*. In other words, the enemy of Christ and the emperor of Daniel act in the same way, that is erecting a statue.

⁷⁰ See also *supra*, pp. 109-110.

⁷¹ *Rev* 13:2-10.

⁷² The same connection between the Antichrist and Nabuchadnezzar is articulated by Victorinus of Pettau, who starts from the motive of the statue but does not mention the numerical symbolism; see Victorinus Petavionensis, *Commentarii in Apocalypsim Johannis*, ed. M. DULAEY, SC 423, pp. 108-111; 13:4. "*Aliam bestiam magnam de terra*": *falsum prophetam, "qui facturus <est> signa" et portenta et mendacia ante illum "in conspectu hominum"; quem dicit "habentem cornua quasi agnum" – id est speciem quasi iusti hominis – "loquentem quasi draconem": diaboli malitia plenus. Hic enim "facturus est in conspectu hominum", ut mortui surgere videantur, <sed "in conspectu hominum". "Et ignis de caelo descendet", sed "in conspectu hominum"> - namque "in conspectu hominum" haec etiam magi faciunt per angelos refugas –, et hoc etiam faciet ut imago aurea Antichristi in templo Hierosolymis ponatur et intret ibi angelus refuga; et deinde voces et sortes reddet. "Faciet etiam ipse, ut servi et liberi accipiant notam in frontibus aut in manu dextera" – numerum nominis eius –, "ne quis emat vel vendat, nisi qui notam habuerit". De hac autem eversione hominum, aspersione Dei et execratione, Danihel ante dixerat: "Et statuet", inquit, "templum suum inter montem maris et duo maria" id est Hierosolymis; et imaginem auream, sicut fecerat rex Nabuchodonosor, tunc hic statuet. Hoc Dominus recolens ad omnes ecclesias de novissimis temporibus ait: "Cum videritis aspersionem eversionis, quod dictum est per Danihel prophetam, stantem in loco sancto, ubi non licet, qui legit intellegat". «Asperatio» dicitur, quando exasperatur Deus, quod idola colantur; «eversio» autem, quod instabiles homines <signis> falsis et portentis evertantur seducti de salute. Two elements of continuity with the passage of Irenaeus must be underlined: the mention of the statue and the allusion to the fire. Also in this case it seems possible to talk about an "apocalyptic reception" of *Dn* 3. About this passage see in part. G. PANI, *L'Anticristo nel commento all'Apocalisse di Vittorino di Petovio*, in E. BOSETTI-A. COLACRAI (edd.), *Apokalypsis. Percorsi nell'Apocalisse di Giovanni*, Assisi 2005, pp. 677-701. About this author's exegesis see M. DULAEY, *Victorin de Poetovio, premier exégète latin*, Paris 1993 (Études Augustiniennes. Antiquité 139-140).*

The author of *Adversus Haereses* goes on dedicating an entire chapter (V 30) to the symbolic pregnancy of the number 666⁷³, whose essential role in *Rev* is clearly stressed by E. CORSINI⁷⁴. In this context it is enough to simply highlight that Irenaeus resorts to an eminently apocalyptic element to activate the exegetical reference to *Dn* 3, so that the citation assumes in turn an apocalyptic tone.

In the figure of the Antichrist – and implicitly in Nabuchadnezzar – all the features characterizing the physiognomy of the *mali* merge, starting from chapter V 28:2⁷⁵, according to that “theology of the recapitulation” which distinguishes Irenaeus’ thought⁷⁶. The attribution of an antithetic structure to the passage, already pointed out in the description of the *iusti*’s portrait⁷⁷, may be as much functional to mould and expose the Antichrist’s role: on one side, the “beast” itself is connoted as the “negative” of Christ, on the other, its arrival is needed to reveal the irreducible gap between two opposite categories: men who stand on Christ’s side, and others who adore the Antichrist (*ut sicut Christum adorent illum qui seducentur ab illo*). The perfect correspondence between the *mali* and the one who is going to arrive (*veniente*⁷⁸) clearly emerges from the following passage:

⁷³ For a comment about the chapter see A. ORBE III 1988, pp. 242-286.

⁷⁴ See E. CORSINI, *I numeri nell’apocalisse*, in E. BOSETTI-A. COLACRAI (edd.) 2005, pp. 391-416, in part. pp. 391-392, and A.Y. COLLINS, *Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature*, in ANRW 1984, pp. 1221-1282. See also U. VANNI 1988, pp. 52-55, and ID., *Apocalisse. Libro della rivelazione. Egesi biblico-teologica e implicazioni pastorali*, Bologna 2009, p. 18, about “il simbolismo aritmetico”. The issue is mentioned also in U. VANNI, *Apocalisse. Una assemblea liturgica interpreta la storia*, Brescia 1979, pp. 21-25.

⁷⁵ See *tab.* 2, pp. 151-152.

⁷⁶ As the Antichrist “recapitulates in his own person all mixed wickedness due to the antediluvian apostasy of angels” (E. OSBORN 2001, p. 138), Christ assumes in Irenaeus’ interpretation all the qualities of good ones, since he is a “new Adam” (J. FANTINO, *Le passage du premier Adam au second Adam comme expression du salut chez Irénée de Lyon*, “Vigiliae Christianae” 52 [1998], pp. 418-429). In order to stress this “double-recapitulation”, A. COSENTINO 2009, p. 51, talks about “ricapitolazione” and “contro-ricapitolazione”. C.R SMITH 1994, pp. 321-328, explains that such trait of Irenaeus’ theology can be defined in two directions: on one side, “recapitulation” is a form of “correspondence” conceived as a “profound harmony” in creation; on the other, “recapitulation” expresses the prerogative of “summing up”. As has already been mentioned, this conception mainly depends on the interpretation of salvation history as an uninterrupted *continuum*, and it underlies the same “typological attitude” of the author. About this issue see E. OSBORN, *The Logic of Recapitulation*, in E. ROMERO-POSE (ed.), *Pléroma: Salus carnis. Homenaje a Antonio Orbe S.J.*, Santiago de Compostela 1990, pp. 321-335, and E. OSBORN 2001, pp. 97-99. About Irenaeus’ conception of the Antichrist see O. GIORDANO 1962, p. 523; L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER, SC 152/1, pp. 25-30; C.N. TSIRPANLIS, *The Antichrist and the end of the world in Irenaeus, Justin, Hippolytus and Tertullian*, “Patristic and Byzantine Review” 9/1 (1990), pp. 5-17; C.R SMITH 1994, p. 316; E. OSBORN 2001, pp. 138-140 and A. COSENTINO 2009, p. 51. The importance of “recapitulation” in the elaboration of the figure of Christ’s enemy is stressed by G.L. POTESTÀ-M. RIZZI, *L’Anticristo, I: Il nemico dei tempi finali: testi dal II al IV secolo*, Milano 2005, p. 476, n. 102.

⁷⁷ See *supra*, pp. 110-113.

⁷⁸ His action evokes the arrival of God’s *Verbum* in V 28:1: *venit Verbum Dei*.

Adversus Haereses V 28:2. He will actually come, and recapitulate in himself with his own sentence the apostasy, and he will do whatever he will do according to his own will and liberty⁷⁹.

The portrait of the Antichrist perfectly matches that one of his followers: on one side, the mention of *sententia* plays once again a central role, becoming one of the principal traits of his characterization (*sua sententia/in semetipsum/sua voluntate/arbitrio*); on the other, *apostasia* represents the content and the core of its actions.

The passage goes on specifying the function of the Antichrist, who has to come *ut credant falso, ut iudicentur omnes qui non crediderunt veritati, sed consenserunt iniquitati*. In other words, as *tribulatio* is necessary to train the *iusti* for God's kingdom, the Antichrist's arrival, as well integrated in salvation history, has the role to reveal and, in a certain sense, "unmask" those who did not believe in God. Resorting to Irenaeus' lexicon, it does not seem too hazardous to say that the Antichrist somehow "brings to light", "makes evident", "discloses"⁸⁰ those who would have otherwise remained in the darkness not to be seen (V 27:2).

In conclusion, it is possible to say that through the mention of the number 666, Nabuchadnezzar becomes the first character of the biblical story assuming a typological function: he anticipates the Antichrist who arrives in the time of tribulation to be adored by men who did not refuse *apostasia*. Following on from this link, the author can develop a wider and richer "typological system" involving the entire "tale" and its protagonists.

b) *The fire*

The element of fire is one of the most cited symbols in the passages of *Adversus Haereses* here considered, and it will reveal to perform a central role in every source assuming *Dn* "tale" in an "apocalyptic perspective".

This element represents a strong suture point between the Hebrews and the righteous men, since the latter undergo *succensio* during the *tribulatio*, as the former were destined to flames for they did not submitted to Nebuchadnezzar (*non adorantes in caminum missi sunt ignis*).

⁷⁹ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, edd. L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER, SC 153, pp. 350-351; V 28:2. *Illo enim veniente et sua sententia apostasiam recapitulante in semetipsum et sua voluntate et arbitrio operabitur.*

⁸⁰ See *supra*, pp. 111-112.

The conspicuous number of allusions may be oriented to cast the typological relation between *iusti* and Daniel's companions on an apocalyptic scenery, since fire and its manifestations (such as the same furnace, together with the generic actions of burning and bursting) are among the "cosmological symbols" representing "la costante simbolica più nota dell'Apocalisse", through which "la terra è ripensata nello schema delle alterazioni violente, è colpita da ogni sorta di flagelli"⁸¹.

The passages of *Rev* in which fire is mainly recalled are two: the context of the "trumpets"⁸² and the section dedicated to the judgment and the apocalyptic "plagues"⁸³. Without going into details, it can be simply noticed that the allusions mount up in *Rev* sections developing a discourse

⁸¹ U. VANNI 1988, pp. 35-36. The other categories would include: cromatical, teriomorphical, anthropological and arithmetical symbolisms (pp. 37-54; see also U. VANNI 2009, pp. 16-19).

⁸² See for instance the significant example of *Rev* 8:7. "The first (*scil.* angel) blew his trumpet, and there was hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was thrown down to the earth, so that a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. 8. Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown down to the sea, so that a third of the sea became blood, 9. and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. 10. Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star, burning like a torch, fell from heaven, and to fell on a third of the rivers and the springs of water". For a mention of the furnace see for instance *Rev* 9:2. "He (*scil.* the fifth angel) opened the shaft of the abyss, and smoke went up from the shaft like smog from a huge furnace, so that the sun and air were darkened by the smoke from the shaft". See also *Rev* 9:17-18. For a commentary about this section see C.R. KOESTER, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, New Haven-London 2014 (The Anchor Yale Bible 38a), pp. 436-474. About the trumpets see U. VANNI 2009, pp. 93-99.

⁸³ As C.R. KOESTER 2014, p. 642, notices, the plagues "disclose different perspectives on divine justice". The fire returns in part. in *Rev* 16:8. "The fourth angel poured out his offering bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to burn people with fire. 9. The people were burned by intense heat, so that they cursed the name of God, who has power over these plagues". In this passage "the bowl plagues bring a still more hostile reaction, for people now curse God" (C.R. KOESTER 2014, p. 642). The element of fire returns also in *Rev* 18:8. "This is why her (*scil.* Babylon) plagues will come just one day: deadly disease and grief and hunger. She will be consumed by fire, for the Lord God who judges her is powerful". In chapters 18-19 "God's justice means turning on destructive agent against another in order to overthrow these tyrannical powers and liberate those who have suffered under their dominion" (C.R. KOESTER 2014, p. 642; for other reference to fire see also 19:12:20). It seems very interesting that the mentions of this symbol mount up in chapter 20, dedicated to the description of "millennial kingdom, defeat of Satan and last judgment" (C.R. KOESTER 2014, p. 768). As U. VANNI 1988, p. 300, notices, the section concerning "il regno millenario...riguarda...i martiri che «vissero e regnarono con Cristo mille anni»...Si tratta dell'instaurazione del regno di Dio che Cristo attua longitudinalmente con i suoi nell'ambito del divenire della storia...tramite una mediazione sacerdotale nella quale sono coinvolti anche i martiri". The context is here particularly close to that one of Irenaeus citation. See in part *Rev* 20:9. "And they (*scil.* the nations at the four corners of the earth, God and Magog) came up across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints, the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10. And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the fals prophet also were, and painful suffering will be inflicted on them day and night forever and ever....14. The Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15. And if any were not found written in the scroll of life, they were thrown into the lake of fire". For a comment about "plagues" see C.R. KOESTER 2014, pp. 696-793.

about martyrs, their condition and the role of God towards them⁸⁴, or in passages mentioning fire as the instrument allowing “God’s victory over the evil”, in speculations that assume in some cases a millenarian perspective⁸⁵.

The continuity between the theological contexts in which fire is evoked in *Rev* and the passages of *Adversus Hereses* here analysed clearly emerges, so that it becomes possible to wonder whether, stressing and reiterating the mention of this symbol, Irenaeus does not just manage to attribute an “apocalyptic value” to his exegesis, but also a “martyrial connotation” to his reflection about the eschatological judgement and the destiny of the *iusti*. In other words, it seems appropriate to hypothesize that the righteous men who accomplish the experience of the Hebrews are conceived by the author as the martyrs of *Rev*⁸⁶. As it will emerge⁸⁷, the Hebrews are expressively defined as types of “martyrs” in other documents ascribable to this hermeneutical tradition.

Irenaeus apparently preserves in his elaboration another prerogative attributed to fire by *Rev*, that one to punish the evil ones: the destiny of the same beast is actually to be thrown *iuste in stagnum...ignis*, so that every cruelty can be extinguished together with its “recapitulator” (*ut in ea confluens et conclusa omnis virtus apostatica in caminum mittatur ignis*). In addition, this element assumes in *Adversus Hareses* a second function of opposite sign, since the proof of fire is contextually conceived as an instrument of salvation for those who have to be *contriti...attenuati et conspersi... et igniti* by God’s *Verbum* in order to accede to *convivium regis* (V 28:4) and its *bona*.

The dual role of fire emerges also where the author, defining the association between *iusti* and *mali*, describes the evil ones as *tantum utiles et aptabiles iustis, quantum utilitatis praestis...palea eius ustionem ad operationem auri* (V 29:1). Resorting to the metaphor of fire, the author compares the *mali* to straw and the *iusti* to gold, both exposed to combustion but oriented to opposite destinies: placed together in the furnace, the former are reinforced and “made perfect” as gold in fire, while the latter are just destroyed as straw, being nothing more than “useful” for the strengthening of the opposite group.

⁸⁴ It mainly happens in the section of trumpets septenary of *Rev* 8:2; 9:21, which is strongly connected, according to G. BIGUZZI 2005, p. 208, with the revenge asked by the martyrs of *Rev* 6:9-10. As C.R. KOESTER 2014, p. 436, affirms, those martyrs who were told to wait “until others had finished bearing witness and then were given white robes as an assurance of salvation”, were not at the same time told “why any more delay was necessary”. Exactly the answer to such question would be offered by trumpets, that show “what it would mean for God to reduce justice to retribution”. About the connection between apocalypse and martyrdom see in part. D. HELLHOLM 1983, p. 729 and D.E. AUNE 2006, p. 3.

⁸⁵ C.R. KOESTER 2014, p. 781. It principally happens in the case of *Rev* 20:9-15. See *supra*, n. 83.

⁸⁶ The martyrial configuration of the righteous ones seems to be confirmed by the analysis of their reward provided by R. CACITTI, see *supra*, chapter 3, n. 60.

⁸⁷ See *infra*, pp. 126-131.

Endowed with such a twofold function, fire seems to inherit the prerogatives attributed in *Rev* to *tribulatio* in a more generic sense. As K.F.A. HANNA underlines, “la realtà storica della passione di Cristo...viene presentata nel suo valore teologico...specialmente dall’Apocalisse, dove la passione...viene prolungata nella sua chiesa”⁸⁸, whose martyrdom and whose salvation depend at the same time on tribulation⁸⁹. Fire plays a similar role also in synoptic passages concerning the themes of eschatological judgement, where it mainly alludes to the specific action of Christ in this context: it is, for instance, the case of *Mt* 13:42, where the fiery furnace is recalled during the explanation of the parable of the dandelion, in a passage where, according to J. GNILKA⁹⁰, it would be possible to find “la descrizione di un giudizio, che tratta della punizione degli iniqui e della ricompensa dei giusti”. The same mention returns in the following parable of the net, where the furnace alludes to the discernment between righteous and evil ones (*Mt* 13:49-50).

In conclusion, it is possible to underline that such elaboration about fire may have played a certain role also in the process of selection of *Dn* “tales”. The episode of the furnace actually describes a similar panorama: in the biblical story, the furnace is not just presented as the instrument of Ananias’, Azarias’ and Misael’s torture⁹¹ and salvation, since flames, retorting against Nabuchadnezzar’s slaves who were meant to heat the fire seven times hotter, cause also the death of the persecutors⁹². In this way, as efficaciously described by the metaphor of *Adversus Haereses*, fire both saves the *iusti* as if they were gold and kills the *mali* as it does with straw.

⁸⁸ K.F.A. HANNA, *La passione di Cristo e dei cristiani nell’Apocalisse*, in E. BOSETTI-A. COLACRAI (edd.) 2005, pp. 501-511. See also U. VANNI, *La passione nell’Apocalisse*, in A.A. V.V., *La sapienza della croce. Atti del Congresso Internazionale, Roma 13-18 Ottobre 1975*, I, Roma 1976, p. 172. It can be noticed that those who are going to reign together with Christ are exactly those “who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (*Rev* 7:14). See also *Rev* 6:9-11; 7:13-17

⁸⁹ The tribulation is already cited in *Rev* 1:9, where the same author introduces himself as one of the members of a community exposed to a difficult situation, see K.F.A. HANNA, in E. BOSETTI-A. COLACRAI (edd.) 2005, p. 507. The continuity in respect to *Rev* concerns also the millenarian acceptance of such idea of salvation. If in *Rev* the “eschatological rest” to which martyrs accede “assomiglia a quello di Dio nel settimo giorno dopo la sua immensa attività creativa” (p. 508), in *Adversus Haereses* the Hebrews’ experience anticipates both the *succensio* placed in the sixth millennium and the consequent access to God’s banquet.

⁹⁰ About this complex passage see J. JEREMIAS, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, Göttingen 1998, pp. 79, 84. Vd. anche G. BAUMBACH, *Das Verständnis des Bösen in den synoptischen Evangelien*, Berlin 1963, p. 59; J. GNILKA, *Il vangelo di Matteo*, I, Brescia 1990 (Commentario teologico del Nuovo Testamento), pp. 724-726.

⁹¹ *Dn* 3:46-48.

⁹² *Dn* 3:19.

c) *The water*

Apart from activating a direct allusion to Nebuchadnezzar and consequently to the episode of the furnace, the number of the beast propels an exegetical connection with the figure of Noah. As it will emerge⁹³, also this development does not represent a peculiarity of Irenaeus' approach, but it is attested, on the contrary, in another important district of this "apocalyptic assumption" of the "tales", namely that one of iconography. Especially in this case, the paradigmatic example of Irenaeus offers a fundamental occasion to gather all the essential elements which will allow a full comprehension of the figurative outcomes.

The mention of Noah in *Adversus Haereses* seems to flow from the years of the patriarch at the moment of the deluge: the 6 hundred years of the prophet evoke the number of the beast (*Noe enim fuit annorum sexcentorum, et diluuium advenit terrae* [V 29:2]⁹⁴). The theological *tertium comparationis* between the biblical episode and the numeric symbol is represented by the function attributed to the deluge, which happened, according to Irenaeus, because of the apostasy (*propter apostasiam* [V 29:2]).

If the theme of apostasy is once again the heart of the typological association, the number 666 is here connected with the *iustus* Noah, while in the case of *Dn* narration it alluded to the statue anticipating the same Antichrist, "recapitulator" of every evil. The contextual attribution of the numeric symbol to a positive figure (Noah) and to a negative one (Nabuchadnezzar) can probably be considered as another trace of the already described twofold function performed by *mali*: that one to both cause martyrial tribulation and favour the *iusti*'s strengthening.

The inclusion of Noah's story in an "apocalyptic horizon" knows a certain fortune in early Christianities⁹⁵. If the episode of the deluge was principally connected with the generic coordinate of salvation and with a specific reference to baptism⁹⁶, the pericope of *Mt* 24:37-41 (see also *Lk* 17:26-

⁹³ See *infra*, pp. 136-148.

⁹⁴ The difference between the six hundred years and the 666 does not seem to be actually perceived by the author, who connects anyway the two numbers through the adverb *enim*.

⁹⁵ The use of the flood as an "apocalyptic motive" is described by J.P. LEWIS, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature*, Leiden 1968, p. 8: it would represent an ancient element whose fortune is attested since First Testament: "Certain poetic and apocalyptic sections of the Bible may borrow from the flood motif and combine it with pictures of an earthquake to give a picture of judgment". The author identifies the phases of a process in the theme's reception that goes from Isaiah to Irenaeus, p. 115: "The flood as a type of the times of the end, we have already seen arising from *Is* 24:1, 4 - 5. This motif furnishes two separate pictures for eschatology. The first is that of the end as a time of wickedness which is developed in the gospels (*Mt* 24:37, *Lk* 17:26). The second is that of the destruction which develops into the idea of the flood of fire (*2Pt* 3:6). The first of these ideas is expounded by Irenaeus".

⁹⁶ See *infra*, pp. 138-142.

27) compares indeed the arrival of the Son of Man with the “days of Noah” immediately preceding the deluge. As J. GNILKA notices⁹⁷, such comparison would have been meant to teach disciples how to behave in the context of a world marching toward the end, in order not be found unprepared in front of the Son of Man’s manifestation. On the background of Noah’s reference there is once again the theme of judgment, that “irromperà direttamente sugli uomini che non se l’aspetteranno affatto”⁹⁸.

Apart from this specific tradition concerning the scenery of the deluge, another “apocalyptic value” can be ascribed to the same symbol of the water, whose relevance for the present research mainly depends on the fact that its citation recurs in some cases together with the mention of the fire. It happens in particular in *Rev* 15:2, where it is possible to read:

***Rev* 15:2.** Then I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire. Those who conquer the beast and its image and the number of its name were standing by sea of glass, holding harps of God⁹⁹.

Under a “technical” point of view, the symbols recreate “una combinazione violenta e impossibile di elementi e aspetti diversi”¹⁰⁰, whose goal would be that one to produce a composite and “impossible” landscape, characterized by the coexistence of opposite elements, as it typically happens in *Rev*¹⁰¹. The link of fire and water recurs in the context of the “trumpets”, in a discourse concerning idolatry, imperial cult¹⁰² and “the trials that test faith”¹⁰³. As G. BIGUZZI points out¹⁰⁴, the mix of these symbols structures “il clima per la presentazione encomiastica dei vincitori sulla bestia e sul numero del suo nome”.

In the light of such considerations, it becomes even more interesting to analyse the final section of *Adversus Haereses* paragraph, where fire and water are connected to recreate a visual frame that mediates the same theological context expressed in *Rev* and concerning the destiny of those who

⁹⁷ J. GNILKA II 1991, 493-494.

⁹⁸ J. GNILKA II 1991, p. 494.

⁹⁹ The section is inserted in a chapter dedicated to “judgement and grace”, introducing the sevenfold cycle of the bowls. About the passage see also P. PRIGENT 2004, pp. 454-461.

¹⁰⁰ U. VANNI 1988, p. 37.

¹⁰¹ The combination of fire and water also returns in *Rev* 4:5.

¹⁰² G. BIGUZZI, *Apocalisse*, Milano 2005, pp. 285-286.

¹⁰³ C.R. KOESTER 2014, p. 631. In particular, “fire can indicate judgement, much as hurling fire onto the earthly sea brings destruction and the beast’s allies are subjected to fire... The faithful stand beyond the fiery sea of judgement”.

¹⁰⁴ G. BIGUZZI 2005, pp. 285-286.

prevailed over the beast. In Irenaean interpretation, fire and water are recalled through the mention of the stories of the Hebrews and Noah, in which these symbolic elements play a central role; the biblical narrations end up being substantially “melted” and “harmonized” in a sort of *crisis*, rather than just seamlessly mentioned:

Adversus Haereses V 29:2. And so the six hundred years of Noah, by whose time happened the deluge because of the apostasy, and the number of the cubits of that statue which caused the exposition of righteous ones to fire mean the number of the name in which six thousand years of every apostasy, and injustice and perversion and false-prophecy and fraud are recapitulated: for all those things, the deluge will come on the fire¹⁰⁵.

The real focus of this rich description is represented by the powerful, final image of the *diluvium* which *superveniet ignis*, so that the mention of Noah seems to be exploited in order to rebuilt and reinterpret the same conclusion of Daniel’s companions’ story: after being exposed to flames, they are saved by a refrigerant “wind of dew” granted by God’s angel¹⁰⁶; such “dew” may be somehow evoked here by the image of the “deluge”.

Considering the parallelism with both *Rev* and the events occurred “inside the biblical furnace”, it is possible to suggest that in this passage of *Adversus Haereses* the allusion to *tribulatio*, conceived as the sum of two scriptural antecedents (Noah and Daniel’s companions), presupposes a further implicit allusion to its outcome, that envisages, together with the recapitulation of *apostasia et iniustitia et nequitia et pseudopropheta et dolus*, also the salvation of *iusti*, refrigerated by the water of the deluge as the Hebrews were saved by the dew.

Concerning the fact that Irenaeus is here resorting to Noah’s episode to describe the conclusion of a “martyrial” path, it must be added that in paleochristian literature the figure of the patriarch is often associated with the theme of the ἀνάπαυσις, starting from Lamech’s prediction at the moment of the patriarch’s birth (*Gn* 5:29). As J.B. LEWIS¹⁰⁷ notices, for Irenaeus “the rest”

¹⁰⁵ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, edd. L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER, SC 153, pp. 368-371, 29:2. *Sexcenti itaque anni Noe sub quo fuit diluvium propter apostasiam et numerus cubitorum imaginis propter quam iusti in caminum ignis missi sunt numerum nominis significat illius in quem recapitulatur sex millium annorum omnis apostasia et iniustitia et nequitia et pseudopropheta et dolus: propter quae et diluvium superveniet ignis.*

¹⁰⁶ *Dn* 3:50.

¹⁰⁷ J.B. LEWIS 1968, p. 160.

corresponds to “that of the millennium”¹⁰⁸, so that it appears to be plausible that the image of Noah is adopted to evoke the eschatological reward exclusively predisposed for saved ones.

In conclusion, the analysis of Irenaeus’ “apocalyptic reception” of *Dn* offered an occasion to reflect about the contents and the methodologies characterizing a protochristian tradition and allowed to point out the essential features of this typological assumption of the Hebrews’ story. Mainly, the author from Lyons includes it in a speculation concerning judgement, making of Daniel’s companions the types of the martyrs exposed to *tribulatio*. Such tribulation is granted by God as a necessary passage both in the progress of the righteous men toward salvation, and in the destruction of those *mali* who do not know the faith. Both salvation and destruction, conceived in a millennial perspective, are accomplished by God through the instrument of fire, which trains the *iusti* “exploiting” the *mali*. The “apocalyptic character” of the exposition is fully expressed by Irenaeus through the adoption of a symbolic technique of interpretation and description of all the typological relation activated in the passage. The final section of chapter 29, describing a “deluge of fire”, can be assumed as a “collector image” which gathers all the elements progressively introduced by the author, and it can be considered as the exemplary expression of the skilled use of typology and “apocalyptic symbols” to sustain his theological conceptions and elaborate a stratified interpretation.

¹⁰⁸ See Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, edd. L. DOUTRELEAU-C. MERCIER, SC 153, pp. 386-387; 30:4. *Hoc est requietionem, septimam diem sanctificatam.*

3.2. LITERARY PARALLELS FOR IRENAEUS' EXEGESIS

After having exposed the hermeneutics of *Adversus Haereses*, it is possible to address, in a more agile way, other significant witnesses of the “apocalyptic assumption” of “tales”, starting from two literary parallels.

3.2.1. The case of Methodius of Olympus' *De Resurrectione*

An important witness of this interpretative tendency is represented by a passage of *De Resurrectione*¹⁰⁹ of Methodius of Olympus, a writer of the last years of the 3rd and early years of the 4th century¹¹⁰, whose life seems to be substantially unknown¹¹¹ and whose exegetical peculiarities did not apparently attract the attention of critics before the 80's years of the 20th century, starting from when the scholars have focused on his complex and interesting relation with Origen¹¹².

This subject becomes particularly critical for the specific case of *De Resurrectione*, a work which was actually elaborated in polemic with the Alexandrian author and which represents a good source to partially rebuilt the Origen's thought, though in an indirect way¹¹³. In this circumstance it is

¹⁰⁹ The text was probably written around 310 (M. MEJZNER-M.B. ZORZI 2010, p. 33, n. 119) in the form of a dialogue taking place at Aglaophon's house, in three books, composed to defend flesh resurrection against Gnostic and Platonic theories; as it will be exposed, the work represents also a confutation of Origenian theories: “Metodio gli rimprovera l'affermazione che sarà il principio formale del corpo...a risorgere, non la carne che sempre si rinnova e perciò non è mai la stessa” (E. PRINZIVALLI 1985, p. 105). On the whole, the dialogue can be understood in the light of the theological polemic about resurrection, which played a central role in 3rd century; in this dispute, Methodius has the goal to defend the idea of flesh resurrection interpreted as the recomposition of the whole body both in its material substrate and in its exterior form (see As M. MEJZNER-M.B. ZORZI 2010, p. 33 and 44; see also L.G. PATTERSON, *Who Are the Opponents in Methodius' De Resurrectione?* “Studia Patristica” 19 [1989], pp. 221-229). For a panorama on the contents of the work see L.G. PATTERSON, *Methodius of Olympus: Divine Sovereignty, Human Freedom and Life in Christ*, Washington DC 1997, pp. 141-199. See also M. MEJZNER-M.B. ZORZI, *Metodio d'Olimpo. La Risurrezione*, Roma 2010 (Testi Patristici 216), pp. 33-44 and in part. p. 34.

¹¹⁰ About the chronological problem concerning Methodius' life see M. MEJZNER-M.B. ZORZI 2010, p. 9.

¹¹¹ L.G. PATTERSON 1997, p. 1 (the study is recommended also for the *status questionis*, pp. 1-3) and M. MEJZNER-M.B. ZORZI 2010, pp. 6-8.

¹¹² The bibliographical “void” is underlined by E. PRINZIVALLI, *L'esegesi biblica di Metodio d'Olimpo*, Roma 1985 (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 21), p. 9. About the scarce attention paid to the figure of Methodius see in part. B. ZORZI, *Metodio d'Olimpo, un autore «minore»?*, “Rivista di Studi Augustiniani e Patristici” 52 (2006), pp. 31-56.

¹¹³ E. PRINZIVALLI 1985, p. 9. The scholar underlines the most debated elements connected with the possible dependence or independence of Methodius from Origen. The scholar concludes that “bisogna parlare di una mai rinnegata forma mentis origeniana che spinse Metodio ad affrontare con gli strumenti dell'allegoria origeniana anche contenuti dottrinari divergenti da quelli dell'alessandrino”, p. 13. After having traced a panorama about paleochristian allegory, E. PRINZIVALLI mentions two principal *trajectories* between

simply necessary to remember that Methodius is mainly seen as the creator of a synthesis of themes drawn from Irenaeus and from the same Origen¹¹⁴. According to some scholars such as E. PRINZIVALLI, the exegetical proximity with the Alexandrian represents in some cases the element leading Methodius' thought far from the Asiatic tradition¹¹⁵, concerning both some exegetical outcomes, and his millenarian theology¹¹⁶, often interpreted in the light of an extreme "Alexandrian spiritualism" (it happens, for example, in the reflection about the kingdom of the righteous ones who will reign together with Christ¹¹⁷).

Methodius' and Origen's allegory: "l'organizzazione della terminologia esegetica" (p. 21) and the use of allegory to show the real meaning of Scripture (p. 24), with the objective to "attuare la santificazione dell'uomo mediante l'illuminazione dello Spirito Santo" (p. 25). For an overview about the relation between Origen and Methodius, with particular reference to *De Resurrectione* see H. CROUZEL, *Les critiques adressées par Méthode et ses contemporaines à la doctrine origénienne du corps ressuscité*, "Gregorianum" 53 (1972), pp. 679-715; A. VITORES, *Identidad entre el cuerpo muerto y resuscitado en Orígenes según el De Resurrectione de Metodio de Olimpo*, Jerusalem 1981; J.F. DECHOW, *Origen and Corporeality: the Case of Methodius' On the Resurrection*, in R.J. DALY (ed.), *Origeniana Quinta: Historica, Text and Method, Biblica, Philosophica, Theologica, Origenism and later developments. Papers of the fifth International Origen Congress, Boston College, 14-18 August 1989*, Leuven 1992 (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovanensium 105), pp. 509-518.

¹¹⁴ See L.G. PATTERSON 1997, p. 7. As M. MEJZNER-M.B. ZORZI 2010, p. 5 underlines, the author can be considered as an heir of Justin, Athenagoras, Irenaeus and Clement, and the first critic of Origen. For other references about the link between the two authors see C. MAZZUCCO, *Il millenarismo di Metodio di Olimpo di fronte a Origene*, "Augustinianum" 26 (1986), pp. 73-87; E. PRINZIVALLI, *Aspetti esegetico-dottrinali del dibattito nel IV secolo sulle tesi origeniane in materia escatologica*, "Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi" 12 (1995), pp. 279-325, ID. *Per una storia dei conflitti intorno all'eredità di Origene fra III e IV secolo*, in A.A. V.V., *Ad contemplandam sapientiam. Studi di filologia, letteratura, storia, in memoria di Sandro Leanza*, Soveria Mannelli 2004, pp. 572-592, in part. pp. 585-587.

¹¹⁵ According to the scholar (E. PRINZIVALLI 1985, p. 97), it would mainly happen in the interpretation of the apocalyptic beast: aware of Irenaeus' and Hippolytus' exegesis of *Dn* 7:7-8, the author chooses to stay "agli antipodi della tradizione asiatica. Ancora una volta, fra questa e Metodio si frappone l'esperienza dell'esegesi origeniana".

¹¹⁶ E. PRINZIVALLI 1985, p. 98.

¹¹⁷ See also M. SIMONETTI, *Il millenarismo in Oriente da Origene a Metodio*, in A.A. V.V., *Corona Gratiarum. Miscellanea E. Dekkers*, Gravenhage 1975, pp. 37-58: "Il testo di Metodio ... presenta con chiarezza ... il quadro completo dei tempi escatologici, fissando bene il carattere intermezzo del regno millenario, destinato ad essere trasceso dall'ascesa dei santi dalla terra al cielo ove essi avranno dimora definitiva. Si tratta perciò di tema tipicamente asiatico eppure esso è presentato con i tratti di tipico sapore origeniano, sia nel motivo della progressiva ascesa e perfezione sia nel collegamento del motivo della marcia verso la meta finale col motivo della marcia degli israeliti verso la terra promessa". See also ID. 1998, p. 16, where the scholar interprets Methodius' millennium as an attempt to achieve a "contaminatio tra la concezione tradizionale del millennio e le nuove esigenze di matrice origeniana", through the paradoxical tendency to ground the millennium itself on an allegoric process. A specific trait of his elaboration consists in the connection established between the tabernacle feast of *Lv* 23:39 and the theme of the progress of men toward perfection (about the issue see in part. L.G. PATTERSON 1997, pp. 166-167 and R. CACITTI 1994, p. 57 n. 71, who introduces a rich bibliography about millenarianism in Methodius with reference to the Tabernacles feast; more generically about the Tabernacle see J. DANIELOU, *La Fête des Tabernacles dans l'exégèse patristique*, "Studia Patristica" 1 [1951], pp. 262-279). For a general introduction about Methodius' eschatology it seems enough to suggest the recent study by M. MEJZNER, *L'escatologia di Metodio d'Olimpo*, Roma 2011 (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 124).

Moreover, it must be underlined that, though according to M. SIMONETTI, “al tempo di Eusebio le credenze millenariste furono impersonate in Oriente, a livello letterario, soprattutto da Metodio d’Olimpo”¹¹⁸, in *De Resurrectione* the same adoption of such perspective is often called into question, since here “il millenarismo, inteso come dimora temporanea dei giusti sulla terra in attesa del trasferimento nei cieli, scompare”¹¹⁹.

Such overall view about the complex definition of Methodius’ influences should be assumed as a generic background allowing to better grasp the peculiarities of his reference to *Dn* “tales”.

***De Resurrectione* I 56:3.** There are two choirs of victorious martyrs, one of New Testament, and the other of the Ancient, sending in unison a tuned hymn to God, allied and Lord of everyone: “For you, God, tested us, you burnt us like silver is burnt, you brought us into prison, and placed tribulations on our backs”¹²⁰, that is the courthouse of people or the tortures with which, oppressed and burnt, they were harshly proved¹²¹. <And also David says:> “Test me, Lord, and try me. Burn my loins and my heart”¹²². And also Abraham, burning in his innards for the only-begotten, but mainly caring to obey to God’s orders, after he had heard: “Abraham, spare your son”¹²³, throwing away the knife, he could say “You tested us God, you burnt us like silver is burnt”¹²⁴. And also Job, after [...] his flesh stopped rotting and he was blamed by the loved ones, and his body suffered, listening to God out of the storm: “Would you dare condemning me to justify yourself?”¹²⁵ he could tell him: “You placed tribulations in front of us”¹²⁶, Lord, in order to taste us “as gold in the furnace”¹²⁷. And also the three young men in the furnace, scattered with dew, not to be burnt by fire¹²⁸: “You tested us, God, you burnt us like silver is burnt. We went through fire and water and you brought us to coolness”¹²⁹. Allow also me, Methodius, to say – oh God who created everything, the great one, the eternal one, father of Christ – in your day, after walking through fire without pain and escaping

¹¹⁸ M. SIMONETTI 1998, p. 15.

¹¹⁹ E. PRINZIVALLI 1985, p. 100.

¹²⁰ *Ps* 65:10-11.

¹²¹ *Hebr* 11:36-37. See also *Martyrium Polycarpi* 15.

¹²² *Ps* 25:2.

¹²³ *Gn* 22:11-12.

¹²⁴ *Ps* 65:10-11.

¹²⁵ *Job* 40:8.

¹²⁶ *Ps* 65:11.

¹²⁷ *Wis* 3:5-7.

¹²⁸ *Dn* 3:49-50.

¹²⁹ *Ps* 65:10-12.

from the strength of the waves that flow toward deflagrated nature¹³⁰ – that I went “through fire and water, and you brought me to coolness”¹³¹. In fact your own announce to those who love you is this one: “If you will have to walk through water, I will be with you, and rivers will not submerge you; and if you will have to walk through fire, you will not be burnt. The flame will not burn you”¹³²¹³³.

The section is included in the context of an interpretation of *Ps* 65:10-12, literally cited by the author.

Ps 65:10. For you God tested us. You burnt us like silver is burnt; **11.** you brought us into prison, and placed tribulations on our backs. **12.** You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water and you brought us to coolness¹³⁴.

Methodius contrasts his rivals' exegesis (exposed in *De Resurrectione* I 6), which interprets the body as a “prison” predisposed by God for men (εἰσήγαγες ἡμᾶς εἰς τὴν παγίδα) and which conceives the path through fire and water (Διήλθομεν διὰ πυρὸς καὶ ὕδατος) as a reference to the harsh passage

¹³⁰ Cf. *Ps* 123:2-7.

¹³¹ *Ps* 65:12.

¹³² *Is* 43:2.

¹³³ Methodius Olympius, *De Resurrectione*, ed. G.N. BONWETSCH, GCS 27, pp. 316-317; I 56:3. Δύο δὲ τῶν καλλινίκων οἱ χοροὶ μαρτύρων, εἷς μὲν τῆς διαθήκης τῆς καινῆς, θάτερος δὲ τῆς παλαιᾶς, ἀντίφθογον ὕμνον συμφώνως τῷ ὑπερμάχῳ θεῷ καὶ βασιλεῖ τῶν ὄλων ἀναπέμποντες »ἐδοκίμασας ἡμᾶς ὁ θεός, ἐπύρωσας ἡμᾶς ὡς πυροῦται τὸ ἀργύριον, εἰσήγαγες ἡμᾶς εἰς τὴν παγίδα, ἔθου θλίψεις ἐπὶ τὸν νῶτον ἡμῶν«, τὸ δικαστήριον τῶν ἐθνῶν ἢ τοὺς πειρασμούς, καθ' οὓς ἐκθλιβέντες καὶ πυρωθέντες ἰσχυρῶς ἐδοκιμάσθησαν. <καὶ πάλιν Δαυὶδ' > »δοκίμασόν με« φησί »κύριε, καὶ πείρασόν με. πύρωσον τοὺς νεφρούς μου καὶ τὴν καρδίαν μου«. λεγέτω δὴ καὶ ὁ Ἀβραάμ ἐπὶ τῷ μονογενεῖ πυρωθεὶς τὰ σπλάγχνα, προτιμήσας τε τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μᾶλλον πρόσταγμα, μετὰ τὸ ἀκοῦσαι »Ἀβραάμ«, φείσαι τοῦ παιδὸς σου, ἀπορρίψας τὸ ζῆφος, »ἐδοκίμασας ἡμᾶς ὁ θεός, ἐπύρωσας ἡμᾶς, ὡς πυροῦται τὸ ἀργύριον«. λεγέτω καὶ ὁ Ἰωβ. μετὰ τὸ ἀπορρεῦσαι τὴν σαπρίαν . . . καὶ ὄνειδισθῆναι τε ὑπὸ τῶν φίλων καὶ ἀλγήσαι τὸ σῶμα, »διὰ λαίλαπος« ἀκούσας λαλοῦντος αὐτῷ τοῦ θεοῦ »οἶμαι με ἄλλως σοὶ κεχρηματικέναι ἢ ἵνα ἀναφανῆς δίκαιος;« »ἔθου θλίψεις ἐναντίον ἡμῶν«, κύριε, ἵνα ἡμᾶς »ὡς χρυσίον ἐν χωνευτηρίῳ« δοκιμάσῃς. λεγέτωσαν καὶ οἱ τρεῖς ἐν τῇ καμίνῳ παῖδες δροσιζόμενοι, ἵνα μὴ καταφλεχθῶσιν ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς, »ἐδοκίμασας ἡμᾶς ὁ θεός, ἐπύρωσας ἡμᾶς, ὡς πυροῦται τὸ ἀργύριον. διήλθομεν διὰ πυρὸς καὶ ὕδατος. καὶ ἐξήγαγες ἡμᾶς εἰς ἀναψυχὴν«. δὸς εἰπεῖν κάμοι τῷ Μεθοδίῳ, ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ μέγας, ὁ αἰώνιος, ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ σου διαβάντι τὸ πῦρ ἀναληγί, καὶ τῶν ῥευμάτων εἰς τὴν καυστικὴν μεταβληθέντων φύσιν ὑπεξαλύζαντι τὰς ὁρμὰς, διήλθον »διὰ πυρὸς καὶ ὕδατος, καὶ ἐξήγαγες με εἰς ἀνάψυξιν«. σὴ γὰρ αὕτη τοῖς ἀγαπῶσί σε ἢ ἐπαγγελία »ἐὰν διαβαίνῃς διὰ ὕδατος, μετὰ σοῦ εἰμι, καὶ ποταμοὶ οὐ συγκλύσουσί σε. κἂν διαβαίνῃς διὰ πυρὸς, οὐ μὴ κατακαυθῆς· φλόξ οὐ κατακαύσει σε«.

¹³⁴ *Ps* 65:10. ὅτι ἐδοκίμασας ἡμᾶς, ὁ θεός, / ἐπύρωσας ἡμᾶς, ὡς πυροῦται τὸ ἀργύριον · / 11. εἰσήγαγες ἡμᾶς εἰς τὴν παγίδα, / ἔθου θλίψεις ἐπὶ τὸν νῶτον ἡμῶν. / 12. ἐπεβίβασας ἀνθρώπους ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς ἡμῶν, διήλθομεν διὰ πυρὸς καὶ ὕδατος, / καὶ ἐξήγαγες ἡμᾶς εἰς ἀναψυχὴν. The comment to the *Ps* is developed in *De Resurrectione* I 54:56.

from the mother's womb to the world¹³⁵. The author tries to underline a central contradiction in such exegesis: if body consists is a punishment predisposed for sinners, how could it be possible that protoplasts had a body also *before* they committed sin, especially considering that without a body it would not have been possible for them to sin at all?¹³⁶ In the subsequent section, he can expose his own interpretation, which conceives the trials mentioned by Scriptures as the sufferances of the martyrs and the righteous men. In order to argument its exegesis, he recalls parallel passages and produces a sort of series of *testimonia* that can be related to *Ps* 65:10-12. Among them, also the episode of the Hebrews in the fiery furnace is evoked.

Some elements of this elaboration allow to identify a radical similarity between this citation and the interpretation of Irenaeus, and mainly the final image of *Adversus Haereses* V 29:2¹³⁷. Also in *De Resurrectione* the theological argumentation deals with the modality in which θλίψις will manifest, so that the literary frame can be certainly considered as “apocalyptic” under the point of view of the contents it develops. As emerging from Irenaeus' conception, also in Methodius trials and afflictions have the objective to make the righteous men worthy of salvation, and Daniel's companions are presented as the types of the “proved” Christians. The author of *De Resurrectione* is anyway more explicit about such point: if in Irenaeus the “martyrial” connotation of the *iusti* has to be inferred from indirect elements¹³⁸, Methodius immediately attributes the definition of “victorious martyrs” to the biblical characters¹³⁹.

A second trait of continuity is represented by the mention of the elements of fire and water, whose function of powerful “apocalyptic symbols” has already been analysed for the case of *Adversus Haereses*. On one side, fire is cited also by Methodius as the principal form in which θλίψις manifests; on the other – starting from the allusion to silver refined recurring in *Ps* 65 – it seems to represent one of the elements that have most consistently influenced the selection of *testimonia*: each biblical example actually includes a specific reference to fire; when absent from the scriptural passage (as it happens in the case of Abraham), it is added by the same author.

De Resurrectione and *Adversus Haereses* adopt the same metaphor linked with fire: the image of the gold in the furnace returns in Methodius' work, where it does not anyway undergo an exegetical elaboration comparable to that one proposed by the writer of Lyons.

¹³⁵ See Methodius Olympius, *De Resurrectione*, ed. G.N. BONWETSCH, GCS 27, pp. 310-313; I 54.

¹³⁶ See Methodius Olympius, *De Resurrectione*, ed. G.N. BONWETSCH, GCS 27, pp. 310-315; I 54-55.

¹³⁷ See *supra*, pp. 103-104.

¹³⁸ See *supra*, p. 107 and n. 60.

¹³⁹ See *supra*, pp. 126-127.

Together with fire, also water performs a significant a role in both texts, but with a substantial difference: if Irenaeus resorts to the biblical story of Noah’s deluge to introduce such symbol, the writer of Olympus does not assume a specific scriptural episode connected with it. In *De Resurrectione* the reference to water is rather set in the same citation of the Hebrews in the fiery furnace, who are indeed restored by a “wind of dew”; this detail may function as a grapple that leads *from* verses 10-11 of *Ps* 65 – where the single element of fire is mentioned (ἐπύρωσας ἡμᾶς ὡς πυροῦται τὸ ἀργύριον) – *to* verse 12 – where another allusion to fire returns in combination with water –. Certainly the idea of “walking through fire and water” is easy to associate with the image of the prophet’s companions seen by Nebuchadnezzar “walking around in the fire” and then saved by the refreshing wind of God’s angel; in spite of this, starting from that input, the text of Methodius assumes the idea of water as another form of tribulation, and not as a symbol of salvation.

In conclusion, though the possibility that Methodius adopted Irenaeus’ reading of *Dn* “tales” represents a realistic option, the author of *De Resurrectione* can be also considered as another witness of a tradition which interprets the story of the three Hebrews in an “apocalyptic perspective” and whose most mature exponent is the writer of Lyons. If Irenaeus sets the reference in a thick theological elaboration about judgment and the destiny of the *iusti* in a millenarian scenery, Methodius assumes the biblical narration among a number of passages allowing a correct interpretation of *Ps* 65:10-12, conceived by the writer as a reference to the afflictions predisposed by God to test his people.

On one side, resorting to the Scriptures to explain a passage of *Ps*, the author may reveal a certain proximity to Origen’s method¹⁴⁰, on the other, explicitly mentioning the martyrs, Methodius sheds light on the “martyrial frame” of this “apocalyptic tradition”, which could be just implicitly grasped in *Adversus Haereses* and which does not know any further outcome in Alexandrian context.

¹⁴⁰ About Origen interpretation see *infra*, chapter 7, in part. 348-354. About Methodius’ exegetical peculiarities see E. PRINZIVALLI 1985.

3.2.2. The case of *De Pascha Computus*

The apocalyptic reception of *Dn* “tales” knows another witness coming from North African context, so that at least three different districts of paleochristianity testify an important geographic diffusion of such interpretation. Also in this case it is possible to establish a significant point of contact with the paradigmatic reflection of Irenaeus of Lyons.

The text at issue is *De Pascha Computus*, “the earliest preserved prose work on Easter computation”¹⁴¹, “a document combining traditional chronology and symbolic number configurations in such a way as to produce a system for Christians to determine the date and the day of the week of 14 Nisan according to the Julian calendar”¹⁴². The chronology of the document is associated by critics to 243¹⁴³, while the identity of the author remains an unsolved problem¹⁴⁴. In this context the analysis will remain rigorously linked to the reception of *Dn* “tales”, once again using the elaboration of Irenaeus as outline.

***De Pascha Computus* 17.** In the end we would see what the same forty nine years mean. Not without a reason God wanted such a great work – which means prophetic – to be consumed in seven hebdomades. Now, it can be understood that it was prophetic since from the forty nine years in the name of Jesus Christ eighteen are segregated and thirty one remain: fulfilled them, Jesus Christ for the faithful ones’ salvation died and resurrected, and he showed through his own experience that everything was accomplished: and he shaped a temple which was not made by human hands but by his own sacred ones, because of his father’s power; he did not

¹⁴¹ C.P.E. NOTHAFT, *Dating the Passion: the Life of Jesus and the Emergence of Scientific Chronology (200-1600)*, Leiden 2011, p. 52.

¹⁴² S.K. ROLL, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, Kampen 1995, p. 81. About the text see also A.A. MOSSHAMMER, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era*, Oxford 2008 (Oxford Early Christian Studies), pp. 125-127. The bibliography concerning *De Pascha Computus* remains definitely scarce.

¹⁴³ See S.K. ROLL 1995, p. 81 and G. OGG (ed.), *The Pseudo Cyprian, De Pascha Computus*, London 1955, pp. vii-viii. The date is almost explicitly given in chapter 22, as S. STERN, *Calendars in Antiquity. Empire, States and Society*, Oxford 2012, p. 327, n. 91 underlines.

¹⁴⁴ The attribution to Cyprian is excluded by chronological considerations and some scholars considers the text as an expansion of Hippolytus paschal tables (see S.K. ROLL 1995, pp. 81; L. FENDT, *Der heutige Stand der Forschung über das Geburtsfest Jesu am 25.XII und über Epiphánias*, “Theologische Literaturzeitung” 78/1 [1953], p. 4; A.J. CHUPUNGO, *Cosmic Elements of Christian Passover*, Rome 1977 [Studia Anselmiana 72; Analecta Liturgica 3]); for other argumentations about the link between this text and Hippolytus’ work see also G. OGG 1955, p. ix and C.P.E. NOTHAFT 2011, p. 52-53.

anoint with oil but with God's Spirit and he built a city, that is the church, with sanctified rocks, and posed a street in it. Indeed the street is a straight and easy path, and those who walk through it reach eternal life. For this city he established a strong and impregnable wall, that is his saint name: through such name he submitted every adversary under his feet. And here is how, for God's grace, such eminent and admirable things are shown to us through thirty nine years, years that, on the contrary, reveal to the unfaithful ones and to those who persecuted God's servants, a great calamity that is going to happen, whose reason we can see: this world in which the righteous and the unrighteous ones live together since the beginning of the century was indeed fulfilled in six days, and, once they were completed, the seventh day of the eternal Saturday which is going to arrive was blessed. In these days, since the beginning, not just for the devil and his angels, but for every sinner, the fire was predisposed by God. In its flame it was shown the rich Finaeus burning. This is the fire of gehenna, and in a similar way a burning furnace, for the emperor's command, grew the septuple in forty and nine cubits, and consumed the enemies of Ananias, Azarias and Misael, and the same three young men, protected by the Son of God (in the mystery of us, who are the third generation of men) did not burden¹⁴⁵.

In the case of *De Pascha Computus* the "apocalyptic reception" of *Dn* recurs in the context of a speculation concerning the number forty nine¹⁴⁶, corresponding with the end time in which *Deus*

¹⁴⁵ Ps. Cyprianus, *De Pascha Computus*, ed. G. HARTEL, CSEL 3/3, pp. 264-265; 17. *Denique videamus quid ipsi XLVIII anni significant. Non sine causa enim Deus voluit in septem hebdomadibus tam magnum id est propheticum opus consummari. Hoc autem modo propheticum fuisse intellegitur, cum de XLVIII annis in nomine Iesu Christi decem et octo segregantur et remanent XXXI: quibus suppletis Christus Iesus propter credentium salutem passus est et resurrexit, et per semet ipsum omnia perfecta ostendit: et templum quod non humanis sed suis sacris manibus ob imperium patris suis plasmavit non oleo sed Spiritu Dei unxit et civitatem id est ecclesiam lapidibus sanctificatis aedificavit et in ipsa plateam constituit. Platea autem est via recta et plana, in qua ambulantes perveniunt ad vitam aeternam. Huic civitati fortem et inexpugnabilem murum id est sanctum nomen suum constituit: per quod nomen omnes adversarios pedibus eius subicit. Et ecce Dei gratia quam praeclara et admirabilia nobis ostensa sunt per annos XXXVIII, qui anni e contrario infidelibus et persecutionem servis Dei facientibus magnam demonstrant superventuram calamitatem. Qua autem ratione videamus: hic enim mundus in quo iusti et iniusti ab initio saeculi conversantur sex diebus est consummatus, quibus suppletis benedictus est dies septimus ille superventurus sabbati aeterni. In his itaque diebus ab initio non tantum diabolo et angelis eius sed et omnibus peccatoribus a Deo ignis est praeparatus. In cuius flamma uri ille Finaeus dives ab ipso Dei filio est demonstratus. Hic est gehennae ignis, in cuius similitudine caminus imperio regis septies tantum incensus per XL et VIII cubita excrevit et adversarios Ananiae, Azariae et Misahel consumpsit, et ipsos tres pueros a Dei filio protectos (in mysterio nostro qui sumus tertium genus hominum) non vexavit.*

¹⁴⁶ In the case of *De Pascha* the "numeric symbolism" is particularly stressed, probably because of the same nature of the text. About the numeric conception of the *De Pascha* see S.K. ROLL 1995, pp. 81-82, who explains the ideological context which underlies the elaboration of the symbolic-numeric world expressed in the work, p. 83: "the theologians of the early church would undoubtedly be unable to perceive this (scil. the symbolic number system) as a projection; instead they rejoiced, as did the author of *De Pascha Computus*, that

voluit...tam magnum id est propheticum opus consummari. After associating the “prophetic” connotation of such time with the story of Christ and mainly with the moment in which his *Pascha* took place (*Christus Iesus propter credentium salutem passus est et resurrexit*), the author establishes a chronological connection between death and resurrection and the fulfilment of everything (*omnia perfecta ostendit*), corresponding with the building of a divine temple (*et templum quod non humanis sed suis sacris manibus ob imperium patris suis plasmavit*), with the anointment with God’s Spirit (*non oleo sed Spiritu Dei unxit*) and with the edification of the church, compared to a city (*civitatem id est ecclesiam lapidibus sanctificatis aedificavit*) whose street, *recta et plana*, leads to eternal salvation.

This net of allusions to the modalities in which end time will manifest – which actually is the fundamental core of every apocalyptic exposition – is further enriched by a reference to those who will not accede to eternal life, considered as Christ’s enemies destined to be submitted by him and connoted as the *infideles* who persecute God’s servants. Also in this document, the righteous men who will obtain salvation are identified with the persecuted ones, so that the “martyrial context” of the text immediately emerges.

A detail concerning the identity of those who will be defeated by Christ stimulates a short comparison with Irenaeus. In the passage of *Adversus Haereses*, the *mali* are defined through the mention of their guilt, which is *apostasia*, while in *De Pascha Computus* they are more vaguely called *infideles*. If, on one side, the terms seem to be equivalent (especially considering that the author of Lyons chooses the word *fides* as contrary of *apostasia*), it is necessary to stress that through the specific mention of “apostasy” Irenaeus appears to establish a more precise connection with historical persecutions and those who deny their God in order to preserve their life. On the other side, the comparison between the texts allows to better clarify the acceptance in which the generic adjective *infideles*, used by Methodius, should probably be understood, that is as a reference to those who did not face martyrdom.

If in Irenaeus’ millenarian perspective the destiny of *iusti* and *mali* will accomplish during that “sixth millennium” of consummation of things, the author of *De Pascha* places it in the seventh day which comes from the eternal Saturday. In spite of this remarkable theological difference, both authors share the conviction that the “apocalyptic scenery” will be characterized by the element of fire, predisposed for both the devil and its angels, and the sinners. Such “destiny of fire” is

God had certainly acted in such an appropriate and perfect manner which in effect proved God’s credibility as the omniscient supreme being, as well as the perfection of God’s salvific plan”.

typologically¹⁴⁷ anticipated by the episode of Finaeus, burnt *ab ipso Dei Filio*, and by the story of the Hebrews, who were on the contrary protected *a Dei Filio*¹⁴⁸ from that furnace which destroyed their persecutors.

The function of fire here expressed can be certainly considered as another expression of the interpretative tradition so far described: it is once again associated with the context of the judgement and with the intervention of God's son; moreover, it is conceived as a symbolic instrument performing the twofold role of destroying the persecutors and saving the righteous men. In this perspective, if the example of Fineus seems to introduce a simple allusion to the *infideles*' destiny, the case of the Hebrews becomes a testimony of such double function of fire, that both saves Ananias, Azarias and Misael and kills Nabuchadnezzar's men.

In other words, *Dn* "tale" expresses here, in the fullest way, the sense of the apocalyptic judgement, through an exegesis that intersects three levels of salvation history: the "prophetic" event anticipates both the historical condition of Christian martyrs, and its eschatological projection.

¹⁴⁷ About the typological vocation of the text, C. LEONHARD C., *The Jewish Pesach and the Origins of the Christian Easter*, Berlin 2006, p. 416, n. 297, speaks about "typological issues", while S.K. ROLL 1995, p. 82 (see also G. HARTEL (ed.), CSEL 3/3, pp. 256-257) underlines how "the Isaac typology is also here applied to Christ".

¹⁴⁸ For further specification about the use of this term see *infra*, chapter 4, in part. 217-231.

3.3. THE “APOCALYPTIC ICONOGRAPHY” OF THE THREE HEBREWS AND NOAH

The analysis of literature revealed the traces of a unitary tradition that interprets the story of *Dn* 3 in an “apocalyptic perspective”, whose polarities are represented by the theme of the judgement of fire and by the speculation about the destiny of *iusti* and *mali*, set in the frame of a “martyrial context”.

Irenaeus of Lyons proved to express the most mature development of such approach, summarizing all the elements emerging from the other witnesses. In addition to them, the author of Lyons includes a reference to the biblical story of Noah, which is not reprised by the other literary documents. Casting a glance to the whole panorama of paleochristian sources, a tradition connecting Daniel’s companions to the patriarch of the deluge reveals to exist in figurative documentation, where the type of the ark and that one of the Hebrews are steady combined in a fixed and early “figurative couple”¹⁴⁹.

Before inspecting the modalities of such link and its possible interpretations, it becomes necessary to both introduce some material *data* and clarify the exegetical meaning of Noah iconographic type.

a) *Noah and the Hebrews: realia*

The figurative couple formed by Daniel’s companions and the patriarch¹⁵⁰ is mainly attested in sarcophagi production and signally on documents ascribable to roman laboratories; it does not seem to circulate in the context of catacomb paintings, where the figure of Noah is prevalently associated with the representation of the prophet in lions’ den¹⁵¹.

¹⁴⁹ In iconography the type of Noah and that one of the Hebrews are among the most ancient and widespread (see L. AVELLIS 2008, pp. 193-219, p. 193).

¹⁵⁰ For generic indications concerning the composition of the scene, see J. WILPERT 1903, pp. 38, 316-322; about the structure and the diffusion of the theme on documents see in part. H. LECLERQ, s.v. “Noè” in DACL 12, coll. 2709-2732 (see also ID., s.v. “Arche” in DACL 1, coll. 1397-1400) and P. PRIGENT 1995, pp. 178-187. The scene represents one of the earliest images of paleochristian art, as B. MAZZEI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, p. 231 underlines. About the patristic interpretation of the figure of Noah see A. PARROT, *The Flood and Noah’s Ark*, New York 1955; J.B. LEWIS 1968, in part. pp. 154-180, where single elements of the type are examined, such as the the same Noah, the ark, the dove.

¹⁵¹ The link will be investigated in the chapter dedicated to the eschatological reception of *Dn* themes, see *infra*, chapter 4, pp. 153-200. It seems enough to remember here that the option returns also in the already interpreted Velletri tombstone (see *supra*, chapter 2, in part. pp. 55-57; for another eloquent case see REP 1:364).

The following *table* describes the principal coordinates of the combination, with reference to sarcophagi from the origins to the first third of 4th century:

Name of document	Type associated with Noah	Technique of the association	Place on documents
<p>REP 1:834 Fragment from “Museo Capitolino”</p>	<p><u>Three Hebrews in the fiery furnace</u></p>	<p><u>contiguity</u></p>	<p><u>Cover</u></p>
<p>REP 1:143 Antefixes from “Museo Lateranense” nr. 182</p>	<p><u>Three Hebrews in the fiery furnace</u></p>	<p><u>contiguity</u></p>	<p><u>Cover</u></p>
<p>REP 1:797 Fragments from “Museo Nazionale Romano” and “Berlin Museum”</p>	<p>Refusal to adore the statue of Nabuchadnezzar</p>	<p><u>contiguity</u></p>	<p><u>Cover</u></p>
<p>REP 1:637 Fragment from SS. Marco e Marcelliano cemetery</p>	<p><u>Three Hebrews in the fiery furnace</u></p>	<p><u>contiguity</u></p>	<p><u>Cover</u></p>
<p>REP 1:959 Fragment from “Villa Doria Pamphili”</p>	<p><u>Three Hebrews in the fiery furnace</u></p>	<p><u>contiguity</u></p>	<p><u>Cover</u></p>
<p>REP 1:121 Fragment from “Museo Lateranense” nr. 134</p>	<p><u>Three Hebrews in the fiery furnace</u></p>	<p><u>contiguity</u></p>	<p><u>Cover</u></p>

(Tab. 1)

Considering the documents in which the type of Noah is associated with the subjects extracted from *Dn 3* some quantitative evaluations can be formulated:

- in 5 documents the scene of the ark is linked with that one of the fiery furnace, and in a single case with the refusal to adore the statue of Nabuchadnezzar;
- the figures are always connected through the iconographic expedient of contiguity;
- the couple is always placed on sarcophagi antefixes.

Notwithstanding the difficulty to anchor the materials to a precise chronology, it is substantially possible to affirm that the “figurative couple” prevalently circulates on sarcophagi from the origin to the first quarter of the 4th century (the only case ascribable to the first third is represented by REP 1:121).

b) The type of Noah between baptism and salvation

As it happens in literary production, also the figurative interpretation of Noah type is characterized by the variety of the exegetical options. If in literature the assumption of a specific interpretation of the biblical story is revealed from both the context in which the mention of the patriarch recurs and the wider study of the author’s thought, the definition of the meanings assumed by the type in iconography represents a complex issue, that has to be faced in a twofold perspective: on one side, it becomes necessary to consider the whole paleochristian iconographic panorama in order to define how the scene is prevalently used; on the other, it must be constantly remembered that only the study of single documents and programs allows to get the specific value assumed by the theme of the patriarch in each occasion.

Notwithstanding the fact that critics have considered the iconographic type of Noah as an allusion to salvation and baptism, an insight into the internal structure of the scene allows to notice that, though the presence of the “aquatic” element must have seemingly roused in the audience the memory of the first Christian rite, the attribution of a baptismal value does not demonstrate to be

primarily grounded on figurative evidences, but rather may depend on the tendency to “transfer” literary exegetical outcomes to iconographic representations¹⁵².

The “baptismal acceptance” seems to prevail in those isolated cases in which the type of the patriarch is linked with others referring to such coordinate (such as, for instance, the scene of Peter striking the rock); on the contrary, the “salvific pregnancy” of the subject appears to be constantly present, as a sort of internal and fixed meaning of the scene, suggested by permanent attributes that directly allude to salvation. These intrinsic details, which allow to consider the subject as equipped with a distinctive and connoted “eschatological vocation” rather than as a generic “paradigma di salvezza”¹⁵³, are the following ones:

- 1) the presence of the dove, a salvific marker that progressively knows an individual fortune and an independent use as symbol of the saved soul¹⁵⁴;
- 2) the overlapping between the image of the ark and that one of the casket: the structural similarity between these elements indirectly establishes a continuity between the figure of the saved patriarch in the ark and that one of the dead emerging from the casket to accede to eternal life. The perception of such continuity in early Christianities is strongly

¹⁵² The baptismal character of Noah type is cited by P. PRIGENT 1995, p. 183, who refers to literary interpretations and underlines how “l’application de cette typologie aux peintures et aux reliefs achoppe sur le caractère très irrégulier de la représentation de l’eau sur laquelle l’arche devrait flotter. Un élément capital pour l’interprétation ne peut avoir été retenu de manière aussi aléatoire. D’autre part, on ne peut tenir pour établi que Noé soit régulièrement associé à des thèmes incontestablement baptismaux”. The author correctly points out that “il ne faut pas perdre de vue ces deux remarque en ce laissant indûment impressionner par les développements patristiques: ceux-ci ne doivent être invoqués pour expliquer les images qu’auprès un examen qui prouve la validité de la démarche”. See also B. MAZZEI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, p. 232.

¹⁵³ As it will be further highlighted in the chapter dedicated to eschatological salvation, see *infra*, chapter 4, pp 155-157, and as it has already been mentioned in the introduction, see *supra*, introduction, pp. 13-14, a generic “salvific value” is attributed by scholars to the entire panorama of paleochristian representations. In this “vague” acceptance, the salvific value is associated also with the image of Noah by B. MAZZEI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, p. 231, who affirms: “Sin dalla metà del III secolo, il tema è diffusamente attestato nella pittura cimiteriale romana e nella plastica funeraria, categorie nelle quali interviene con uno schema pressoché costante...l’essenzialità dello schema iconografico...corrisponde alle intenzioni semantiche espresse dalla primitiva arte cristiana, che...offre un’ampia gamma di immagini paradigmatiche della salvezza”. In this context it seems necessary to underline the specificity of Noah’s salvific meaning, which is explicitly mediated by the internal features of the type.

¹⁵⁴ The dove is introduced as an independent allusion to dead souls on Velletri tombstone (see *supra*, chapter 2, n. 91, also for further bibliographic references; see also P. PRIGENT 1995, pp. 180-181, who presents a synthetic inspection on the diffusion of this symbol in other representations, among which also those derived from *Dn* are cited).

confirmed by the cases in which the portrait of the dead is substituted to the representation of Noah¹⁵⁵.

Passing from the analysis of the single type to the exam of its privileged iconographic contexts, it becomes interesting to point out the subsistence of cases in which the scene of the deluge reveals to express something more than a generic reference to salvation, that is a punctual allusion to the theme of the eschatological rest. Such *theologumenon* may be evoked by those documents in which the figure of Noah is associated with that one of Jonah resting under the pergola, a symbol connected with the idea of the ἀνάπαυσις and God's kingdom¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵⁵ The most significant example of this exegetical outcome is represented by the famous “Juliana sarcophagus” (REP 1:46), where the figure of the patriarch is substituted by that one of the dead woman emerging from the ark-casket, as to accede to resurrection (the example is cited also by B. MAZZEI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, p. 231). Another interpretative coordinate of the scene can be added, and it concerns the motif of the church saved by the water (see in part. H. RAHNER 1994, pp. 865-938, in part. pp. 870-886, for a panorama about Judeo-Christian adoption of the ark-church symbol. See also pp. 886-923); this element knows an rooted literary fortune, and can be conceived as a sort of *tertium comparationis* between the baptismal value and the salvific dimension of the representation. The iconographic consistence of this development is anyway hard to define. Conclusively, it is interesting to mention a significant case in which the “salvific elements” of Noah's scene (the dove and the ark-casket) have been extrapolated from the type of the patriarch to elaborate a program alluding to the condition of the dead ones in eschatology. The reference is to laternan fragment nr. 206 (REP 1:124): here a dove stands on an ark-casket placed next to the figure of the Hebrews in the furnace. The state of the fragment does not allow to formulate an articulated interpretation of the scene, but it clearly alludes to the condition of salvation that follows on from martyrdom:



(Fig. 1)

¹⁵⁶ See *supra*, chapter 2, pp. 27-29 for a reference to the entire cycle and its phases.



(Fig. 2)

In the paradigmatic example of the so-called Jonah sarcophagus the patriarch is placed at the “entrance” of the pergola from which the same dove seems to come. Significantly, from the left side, the figure of Peter arrested, alluding to the martyrdom of the community¹⁵⁷, is approaching the symbol of the reign. In other words, this portion of the famous document can be interpreted as an allusion to the reward predisposed for those who sacrifice themselves and consisting indeed in the salvation of the rest, evoked by the couple formed by Noah and the pergola¹⁵⁸.

If, in general, the internal analysis of the patriarch’s scene reveals the prevalence of the coordinate of salvation, the study of iconographic programs represents a precious occasion both to define the acceptance of this meaning, and to point out the eventual subsistence of other occasions of use, depending on single cases¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁷ For an introductory analysis of the figure of Peter and its meanings see F. BISCONTI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 258-259; S. SOTOMAYOR, *S. Pedro en la iconografía paleocristiana. Testimonios de la tradición cristiana sobre San Pedro en los monumentos iconográficos anteriores al siglo sexto*, Granada 1962 (Biblioteca teológica granadina 5); P. TESTINI, *Gli apostoli Pietro e Paolo nella più antica iconografia cristiana*, in S. GAROFALO-M. MACARRONE-J. RUYSCART-P. TESTINI (edd.), *Studi petriani*, Roma 1968, pp. 103-130. For an analysis that focuses on the complex link between the iconographic type and *Acta Petri* see and D.R. CARLIDGE-J.K. ELLIOT, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha*, New York 2001, pp. 134-171, and G. PELIZZARI, *Dal battesimo al regno: il sarcofago di Giona, un’Apocalisse scolpita*, in ROSSANA G. (ed.) 2011, pp. 37-80, pp. 37-80.

¹⁵⁸ L. AVELLIS 2008, pp. 207-208 notices that “il nome ebraico Noach è chiaramente interpretato in *Gn* 5:29 come colui che consola...Secondo una tradizione iniziata con Filone di Alessandria e seguita dai padri della chiesa...veniva, invece, interpretato in greco come ἀνάπαυσις, in latino *requies*...Entrambi I verbi ἀνάπαυω e *requiesco* erano comuni all’epigrafia dei cristiani per indicare il riposo del defunto nell’attesa del giudizio universale. Noè è dunque anche colui che riposa. Se si considera inoltre che il termine latino arca ha un equivalente palmare nel greco λάρναξ, utilizzato per indicare l’arca del diluvio...l’immagine di Noè e quella dell’arca acquisiscono in entrambe le culture una marcata valenza salvifico funeraria”. The consideration of the scholar confirms the possible subsistence of a connection between the salvation evoked by the patriarch and the eschatological rest.

¹⁵⁹ The case of the already cited Velletri tombstone (see *supra*, chapter 2, pp. 49-58) allows to notice how the figure of Noah changes its meanings and its significance in each iconographic program, according to the position it assumes. Here the subject is in fact placed next to the figure of the protoplasts, creating a sort of “narrative sequence” from *Gn*: the passage from the condition of Adam and Eve to that one of the patriarch

3.3.1. “Apocalypse” in iconography? The figurative couple formed by the Hebrews and Noah

In order to define the exegetical value of the couple formed by the three Hebrews and Noah, two different approaches can be assumed. The first one consists in the traditional interpretative method that settles the final meaning of a figurative combination starting from the “exegetical sum” of the individual meanings of the two types: in such perspective, it becomes effortlessly natural to affirm that this iconographic link must have been primarily conceived as an allusion to salvation (Noah) predisposed for the martyrs¹⁶⁰ (Hebrews), and, secondly, as a possible expression of the unity between “blood-baptism” (Hebrews) and “water-baptism”¹⁶¹ (Noah). Without denying nor calling

saved from the water conveys the idea of the emancipation from sin and determines the assumption of a more specific conception of both coordinates characterizing the ark’s value (baptism and salvation).

¹⁶⁰ The special relation that seems to connect the figure of Noah and “martyrial” themes can be better fixed reflecting on a specific scientific debate. J. FINK, *Noe der Gerechte in der frühchristlichen Kunst*, Münster/Köln 1955 (Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte 4), presenting a richest inspection especially under a documentary point of view, suggests the hypothesis of a connection between the scene of Noah and those of Daniel and Job, which would be included in a sort of “penitential cycle”. The scholar suggests that the figure of the patriarch saved from the deluge had to be signally connected with the problem of the *lapsi*; the argumentation seems anyway to remain quite arbitrary and too weak to be immediately accepted. The opposition expressed by R.P.J. HOOYMAN R.P.J., *Die Noe-Darstellung in der frühchristlichen Kunst. Eine christlich-archäologische Abhandlung zu J. Fink: Noe der Gerechte in der frühchristlichen Kunst*, “Vigiliae Christianae” 10 (1958), pp. 113-135, is actually reasonable, as well as the middle-position assumed by P. FRANKE, *Bemerkungen zur frühchristlichen Noe-Ikonographie*, “Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana” 49 (1978), pp. 171-182. Notwithstanding this, J. FINK’s risky proposal has at least the merit to point out the frequent association between the figure of the patriarch and martyrial scenes; in this sense, its proposal ends up representing a much more interesting interpretative option than his detractors’ ones, which limit to repeat the vague baptismal-salvific interpretation of Noah’s type. L. ALVELLIS 2008, n. 4 pp. 193-194, underlines that the figures of Noah, Daniel and Job are frequently associated in literature, but denies the subsistence of any parallel iconographic tradition. It remains objectively true that “le sole due volte in cui i tre soggetti sono rappresentati effettivamente prossimi è (*sic!*) nel cubicolo 7 del *Coemeterium Maius* e nel cubicolo 78 del cimitero dei SS. Pietro e Marcellino. A questa andrebbe aggiunta una terza attestazione nel cubicolo 6 della catacomba dei Giordani”; moreover, in other cases the scene of Noah is accompanied by only one of the other representations (“ricorre otto volte con Daniele e due volte con Giobbe”). Curiously, the scholar never cites the combination between Noah and the figure of the Hebrews in the fiery furnace (the same L. ALVELLIS 2008, mentioning the linking between Noah and other biblical figures, simply alludes to Jonah and Peter). Considering all these elements, in spite of the fact that both the subsistence of a specific reference to *lapsi* and the possible diffusion of a “cycle” composed of Noah, Job and Daniel remain unlikely, it seems realistic to affirm that the figure of Noah was often attributed of a “martyrial” acceptance, becoming a symbol of salvation predisposed for those exposed to *tribulatio*.

¹⁶¹ Such connection is well-attested also in literature, and it seems to have a particular fortune in *Acta Martyrum*. As paradigmatic example it is possible to cite the case of *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 7:4; here, during the description of the third vision in which the martyr “baptize” her brother Dinocrates, the iteration of the hydric element (cited in reference to a *phiala* and a *piscina*) may allude to the existence of two baptisms: the first one, of water, obtained by the martyr in the prison, and the second one, of blood, that waits for her in

into question the effective subsistence of those semantic coordinates in the reception of the scenes, the exegesis elaborated by Irenaeus suggests to exceptionally exploit another interpretative method, whose legitimacy and fundament have to be shortly explained.

a) *Apocalypse and iconography: a methodological reflection*

The bedrock of this interpretative approach has to be researched in the cogent similarity between the already described “apocalyptic method” of expression¹⁶² and the process of elaborations of iconographic documents. As G. PELIZZARI states¹⁶³, as well as “apocalypses”, also figurative source exploits a fixed number of common, well-established and crystalized themes, combining and mixing them in original and independent solutions; moreover, as the “apocalyptic language”, also visual has an eminently symbolic nature, resulting from the selection of elements and their association in the building of new meanings¹⁶⁴.

A difference between these symbolic expressions can certainly be spotted: if “apocalyptic images” are built to be “decomposed”¹⁶⁵ and often appear as incomprehensible and paradoxical to the reader, iconographic representations can be easily associated with the biblical material they are extracted from, with which they maintain a “formal” connection. Exactly in the light of such character of figurative language and since in paleochristian iconography it results impossibile to find

the arena. About the episode see in part. E. CORSINI, *Proposte per una lettura della “Passio Perpetuae”*, in A.A. V.V., *Forma Futuri. Studi in onore del cardinale Michele Pellegrino*, Torino 1975, pp. 480-541 and C. BERETTA C., *La visione di Dinocrate nella Passio Perpetuae come ermeneutica di 1Cor 15,29*, “Annali di Scienze Religiose” 7 (2002), pp. 195-223. For other literary developments of the theme see also *Passio Montani et Lucii* 8:4-6 and *Passio Marianii et Jacobi* 6:14. A monumental archeological evidence testifying the connection between baptism and martyrdom is represented by the case of *Thaenae* painted *ara*, studied and interpreted by R. CACITTI-G. LEGROTTAGLIE-G. PELIZZARI-M.P. ROSSIGNANI 2011; for other artifacts that can be interpreted in this sense, such as *phialae* see Y. DUVAL, ID., *Loca sanctorum Africae. Le culte des martyrs en Afrique du IVe au VIIe siècle*, I, Roma 1982 (Collection de l'École Française de Rome 58).

¹⁶² See *supra*, pp. 95-96.

¹⁶³ G. PELIZZARI 2006-2007, pp. 150-151.

¹⁶⁴ The symbolic character of “apocalyptic language” is underlined by E. SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, in D. HELLHOLM (ed.) 1983, p. 305, who notices how such expression “is often misunderstood as descriptive instead of imaginative language”. On the contrary, “apocalyptic language” is described by the scholar as “strange and fantastic”, “mytho-poetic” and for this reason impossible to be “reduced to descriptive factual information”. It “resists any attempt at logical reduction and closed one-dimensional interpretation. Its aim is not explanation and information but the expression of visionary wholeness”, so that “it elicits understandings, emotions and reactions that cannot fully be conceptualized and expressed in propositional language. Since «apocalyptic language» appeals to the imagination it has to be analysed from a literary perspective” (p. 305). This considerations allow to catch the “visual character” of apocalyptic expression, and consequently its immediate proximity to iconographic experiences.

¹⁶⁵ See *supra*, in part. p. 114.

any type derived from *Rev* or reproducing apocalyptic sceneries, critics have come to the statement that ancient visual does not perform any “apocalyptic vocation”¹⁶⁶.

Notwithstanding this, the importance of symbolism and the exegetical (and certainly not illustrative) nature of iconography suggest to sensibly modify the approach to documents: instead of hunting for “reproductions” of specific sections of *Rev*, it becomes interesting to wonder whether in some cases also this source demonstrates to assume an “apocalyptic perspective” in which “symbols prevail on figure”¹⁶⁷. In other words, the evaluation of the “apocalyptic value” of visual should not depend on the global identification of each type, but should proceed from the study of the symbolic potential of every scene, which means from both the inspection into the single elements involved in the representations, and the study of their relation with other themes.

This attempt will be conducted in the analysis of the “iconographic couple” composed of Noah in the ark and the Hebrews in the fiery furnace, characterized by the presence of two elements such as fire and water, whose “apocalyptic value” clearly emerged from the passage of *Adversus Haereses*. It seems actually necessary to wonder whether their symbolic potential, clearly exploited in literary elaborations to indirectly recreate an “apocalyptic scenery”, could be perceived and used in the same direction also in iconographic documents, in which symbolism assumes an even stronger relevance. In other words, the question is whether in the creation of the “iconographic couple” formed by the patriarch and Daniel’s companions, apart from the purpose to evoke martyrdom and salvation, also the intent to recreate and “apocalyptic scenery” has played a certain role.

¹⁶⁶ Even the studies which have focused on “apocalyptic” scenes do not offer concrete outcomes for the paleochristian period. It happens for instance in F. VAN DER MEER, *L’Apocalypse dans l’art*, Antwerpen 1978 and L.A. HUBBES, *Apocalyptic Motifs in the Early Apocalyptic Art*, in M. LABAHN-O. LEHTIPUU (edd.), *Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, Leuven-Paris-Walpole 2011, pp. 55-78.

¹⁶⁷ See *supra*, p. 114.

3.3.2. The *crasis* of fire and water

The direct analysis of iconographic documents allows to test the effective rationality of the question. A first, general consideration can be formulated about the usual disposition of subjects: in the whole panorama of sarcophagi, the couple is always connected through the expedient of the visual proximity¹⁶⁸: in all cases, subjects are placed in the same antefix, and are contiguous to each other.



(Fig. 3)

In the document of Museo Capitolino¹⁶⁹, the continuity between the types is remarked by the image of the waves of Noah, which seem to seamlessly merge *in* the fire of the furnace. Considering the intrinsic nature of the source, it does not seem sufficient to explain such structural choice as a spatial arrangement; on the contrary, it may probably be better understood as an attempt to combine two different scenes as to form a single one.

This iconographic choice closely evokes the elaboration of Irenaeus, at least under the point of view of the interpretative method adopted: first of all, the figurative link seems to reproduce the visual effect of an “apocalyptic oxymoronic landscape” similar to that one described in *Rev* 15:2¹⁷⁰, as to integrate the themes of martyrdom and salvation in an “apocalyptic frame”. Secondly, as it has

¹⁶⁸ See *supra*, tab. 1.

¹⁶⁹ REP 1:834 (fig. 3). Some bibliographical references: G.B. DE ROSSI, *La Roma Sotterranea Cristiana descritta ed illustrata*, III, Roma 1867, p. 9, nr. 7; R. GARRUCCI 1879, p. 124, tab. 383:3; O. MITIUS 1897, p. 110, nr. (105); G. STUHLFAUTH G., *Un frammento di sarcofago cristiano*, “Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana” 3 (1897), pp. 178-182, tab. 5; O. MARUCCHI, *I monumenti egizi ed i monumenti cristiani recentemente sistemati nel Museo Capitolino*, II: *Collezione cristiana*, “Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma” 40 (1912), p. 200; H. STUART JONES, *A Catalogue of the Ancient Sculpture preserved in the Municipal Collections of Rome. The Sculpture of the Museo Capitolino*, Oxford 1912, p. 362, nr. 4, tab. 93; F. SÜHLIG, *Die Taube als religiöses Symbol im christlichen Altertum*, Breslau 1930 (Römische Quartalschrift, Ergänzungsbände 24), p. 232; J. WILPERT 1932, pp. 223, n. 2; 260; 262, tab. 181:3; F. GERKE 1940, p. 374 X 22; G. BOVINI 1952, p. 38, nr. 9; J. FINK 1955, pp. 13, n. 47; 41, n. 184; 43, n. 199; 95, n. 437; tab. 34; REP 1, 350, tab. 134; G. PELIZZARI 2006-2007, pp. 202-203.

¹⁷⁰ See *supra*, p. 123.

already been noticed for *Adversus Haereses*, the “figurative couple” can be interpreted as an exegetical elaboration about the same biblical destiny of the Hebrews, saved from the flames by a wind of dew produced by the angel, which would be evoked, in this case, by the water of Noah.

The elaboration of Lateran sarcophagus nr. 134¹⁷¹ seems to lead even closer to Irenaeus’ hermeneutics, signally under the point of view of the theological contents expressed.



(Fig. 4)

First of all, also in this case it is possible to notice the continuity between the scenes, conveyed by the attitude of Noah, who turns to the furnace and opens his arms toward it. Apart from the already mentioned arguments concerning the “apocalyptic connotation” of martyrdom and salvation, a further, fundamental element requires here to be underlined: it consists in the presence of a fourth subject next to the furnace, excluded by the most common structure of the scene and reproducing Nabuchadnezzar’s slave, portrayed while stoking the fire.

Its insertion cannot be considered as an irrelevant, narrative detail, especially because of the presence of Noah’s dove above his head. Certainly the attribution of such salvific marker¹⁷² to the image of the persecutor seems at first sight an odd, unexplainable choice, but once again, Irenaeus’ theology reveals helpful and enlightening: if persecution – signally when fire is involved – can be conceived as the proof which “trains” the righteous men for the reign¹⁷³, the persecutors eminently

¹⁷¹ REP 1:121, fig. 4. Here follows a short bibliography about the document: A. BOSIO A., *Roma sotterranea*, Roma 1632, fig. 291; P. ARINGHI, *Roma Subterranea Novissima: In qua Antiqua Christianorum Et Praecipue Martyrum Coemeteria, Tituli, Monumenta, Epitaphia, Inscriptiones, Ac Nobiliora Sanctorum Sepulchra, Tribus Libris Distincta, I-II*, Roma 1651, p. 618, fig. 619; G.G. BOTTARI, *Roma Sotterranea, II: Sculture e pitture sacre estratte dai cimiteri di Roma*, Roma 1746, p. 97-9, tab. 87; R. GARRUCCI 1879, p. 142, tab. 397:6; J. FICKER J., *Die altchristlichen Bildwerke im christlichen Museum des Laterans*, Leipzig 1890, p. 76, nr. 134; O. MARUCCHI, *I monumenti del Museo Cristiano Pio Lateranense*, Milano 1910, p. 17, tav. 20:6; F. SÜHLIG 1930, p. 232, tab. 32:1; J. WILPERT 1932, tab. 175:6; F. GERKE 1940, pp. 34 X 24; J. FINK 1955, pp. 40, n. 183; 42, n. 198, tab. 33; REP 1, pp. 84-5; G. PELIZZARI 2013, pp. 141-142.

¹⁷² About the role of the dove as a “salvific marker” see *supra*, p. 139.

¹⁷³ See *supra*, in part. pp. 120-121.

represent the “instruments” that lead *iusti* to their eternal reward by harassing them. This may be the possible reason why the dove is placed above the head of Nabuchadnezzar’s man, as to connote his function in salvation history.

The same scheme returns on Lateran fragment nr. 182¹⁷⁴.



(Fig. 5)

Also in this case the figure of Noah is deeply integrated in the scene of the Hebrews: turning to the furnace, he overlooks a kneeling figure stoking the fire. The composition reproduces a sort of visual effect of circularity, in which the patriarch seems to propell and animate the action of Nabuchadnezzar’s slave, who is flanked by another salvific marker, the “fourth figure” of the angel exceptionally placed outside of the furnace¹⁷⁵.

Once again the iconographic connection between persecution and salvation reproduces the paleochristian paradoxical conception of martyrdom¹⁷⁶ that sets in the moment of the victim’s death his real *dies natalis*.

The analogy between *Adversus Haereses* elaboration and the visual outcomes should not be necessary considered as a trace of a possible dependence of a source from the other, but can be more cautiously assumed as another sign of the circulation of an “apocalyptic interpretation” of *Dn* “tales” at the beginning of Christianities. In any case, considering the massive iconographic diffusion of this option, that remains in literature a peculiarity of Irenaeus exegesis, it does not seem

¹⁷⁴ REP 1:143, fig. 5. Some bibliographical references: R. GARRUCCI 1879, pp. 5, 125, tab. 384 I; J. FICKER 1890, p. 137, nr. 182; O. MARUCCHI 1910, p. 24, tab. 31:4; J. WILPERT J., *Wahre und falsche Auslegung der altchristlichen Sarkophagskulpturen*, “Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie” 46 (1922), p. 179; J. WILPERT 1932, tab. 174:10; F. GERKE 1940, pp. 317 VIII 22; 374 X 16; J. FINK 1955, p. 42, n. 198, tab. 36; REP 1, p. 93, tab. 33;

¹⁷⁵ About the “fourth figure” see *infra*, chapter 4, pp. 217-231.

¹⁷⁶ Such conception is also present in *Rev*, and signally in the elaboration concerning the figure of the Lamb. See A.D. AUNE 2006, pp. 73-74 (“The paradoxical meaning of victory”), in part. p. 73, who speaks about “irony of kingship through crucifixion”, talking about the death of Jesus understood as a victory – this is the paradigmatic experience grounding Christians’ death conception.

too hazardous at least to wonder whether the author had in mind the widespread “figurative couple” during the composition of the chapter V 29:2¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷⁷ This possibility may be supported by the other citation of *Dn* “tale” recurring in chapter V 5:2 of *Adversus Haereses* (for the text see *infra*, chapter 4, pp. 204-208). The author associates here an allusion to the Hebrews with a reference to Jonah, *quidem in profundum projectus et in ventrem ceti absorptus salvus iterum exsputus est terrae jussu Dei*. It seems interesting to notice that the biblical episode of the prophet is evoked through the mention of the three phases included in the iconographic cycle. Thanks to this further trace, it seems possible to hypothesize that Irenaeus was not just passively “exposed” to iconographic documents, but had a deep familiarity with such production, which could offer him elements of reflections. The *datum* seems very interesting also because the author lived in the second half of the 2nd century, a period to which only scarce iconographic evidences can be ascribed. The hypothesis that by that time figurative production already presented its principal, stable contents would be supported.

3.4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the light of the *data* emerged from the analysis, it becomes possible to notice that, beside the consistent Christian assumption of the “apocalyptic core” of *Dn*, that is “visions” section, a scanty but geographically extended tradition elaborates an “apocalyptic reading” of the story of the three Hebrews exposed to fire.

The most consistent testimony can be found in *Adversus Haereses* V 29:1-2, a passage which gathers and summarizes all the typical features of this interpretative option. The in-depth analysis of this paradigmatic case first of all reveals a fundamental character of the “apocalyptic reception” of “tales”: if, on one side, it forecasts the inclusion of the biblical passage in reflections concerning the manifestation of end times – from the Antichrist’s arrival to Christ’s final judgement, from *tribulatio* to the speculation about *iusti*’s and *mali*’s destinies –, it presupposes the application of an “apocalyptic method” of assumption and interpretation of the “tale”, which undergoes a typological exegesis grounded on the use of symbols, the principal instrument of the same “apocalyptic genre”.

Under the point of view of the theological contents, this tradition conceives the experience of the Hebrews exposed to the flames as an anticipation of the final θλῖψις, which will manifest through fire and will contextually bring salvation for the righteous men and destruction for the impious ones. In Irenaeus’ reflection, such *agon iustorum* is equipped with a twofold role: “testing” the faithful men in order to make them worthy of God’s kingdom, and “destroying” the evil ones, who stand on the Antichrist’s side. As it happens in *Dn* “tale”, where the flames spare the brethren and kill the king’s men, also in apocalyptic time the enemies of God have the function to propel *iusti*’s eschatological triumph.

Within this scenery, the three companions of Daniel represent the type of those *iusti* who obtain final salvation passing through tribulation in reason of their *fide*, while the Hebrews’ persecutors are the antecedent of *mali*, whose principal prerogative is represented by *apostasia*.

Apart from a millenarian perspective, which remains a peculiarity of the author from Lyons, the other traits of such interpretation are clearly shared by the exponents of this interpretative tradition: in Methodius of Olympus’ *De Resurrectione* the “martyrial background” of the typology linking the Hebrews and the *iusti* is explicitly revealed, while *De Pascha Computus* mainly insists on the salvation of the righteous men exposed to fire against the *infideles*.

Under the point of view of the “apocalyptic method” of the citation, both Irenaeus and the other witnesses of this tendency pay a special attention to symbolic elements shared the biblical story and the typical sceneries of *Rev*, so that the latter seems to determine the reading and the modality of assumption of the former. Irenaeus particularly insists on the number 666, associated with the

proportions of Nabuchadnezzar's statue, while the entire literary tradition focuses on fire, recurring in "martyrial" contexts of *Rev* and evoking the judgement anticipated by the Hebrews. A third recurring "symbol" is represented by water, connected with fire since *Rev* in order to create one of the typical "apocalyptic landscape" and in some measure evoked by the "wind of dew" of *Dn* 3 . If in Methodius water is mentioned among the afflictions which train the martyr, in Irenaeus the symbol is mediated by the story of Noah in the ark. The final passage of *Adversus Haereses* introduces a strong, exegetically stratified image of a deluge coming on the fire, which results from both the interpretation of *Dn* "tale" in the light of *Rev*, and the *crisis* between the story of the Hebrews and that one of Noah.

This powerful association between the episode of the patriarch and that one of the furnace does not find a parallel in literature, but still represents an essential trait of this paleochristian tradition, since it is widely attested in figurative documentation. Signally on Roman sarcophagi antefixes, the type of the Hebrews in the fiery furnace is often associated with that one of Noah in the ark, in visual compositions which stress the structural continuity between the themes and efficaciously seem to recreate a visual-*crisis* comparable with the panorama described in the chapter V 29:2. Also in iconographic context the seamless connection between fire and water may evoke an "apocalyptic paradoxical landscape", so that both the martyrial value of the furnace scene and the baptismal-salvific meaning of Noah obtain a more specific "apocalyptic interpretation".

Irenaeus and iconography share another trait. As it happens in the exegesis of *Adversus Haereses*, also the figurative tradition reveals to conceive the "persecutors" as the instrument of the salvation of the *iusti*: the former actually provoke the *tribulatio* which prepares the latter for their reward. In sarcophagi production this motif is marked by the link between the salvific figure of the dove – or the portrait of the patriarch – and the image of Nabuchadnezzar's slave stoking the flames.

If the continuity between literary and iconographic outcomes represents, in a generic sense, an interesting *datum* that confirms the subsistence of an "apocalyptic interpretation" of "tales", the peculiar proximity between Irenaeus' reflection and the visual elaboration allows at least to wonder whether the author had in mind such well-diffused iconographic models in the composition of the chapter V 29. More seemingly, the answer should be researched in the fundamental role of liturgic and catechetic contexts, where the whole paleochristian reflection found its original production and from which it flew both in figurative and in literary expressions.