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Introduction

Hierophagic eating is a prevalent but overlooked literary trope.¹ The basic event of hierophagy² involves the eating of something otherworldly which associates the eater with another world. The trope of hierophagy occurs in texts composed across many time periods and represents a long-standing cultural understanding of the ritual ramifications of consuming other-worldly food: eaters gain access to divine knowledge, abilities, and locations. *4 Ezra* includes a hierophagic scene wherein the protagonist, Ezra, is offered a cup in the course of his final revelatory episode. This cup, containing a fiery liquid, comes from heaven and is given to Ezra by God, who, for the first time in the text, speaks directly to Ezra. The cup scene takes place during the seventh and final episode of *4 Ezra*, an episode which has consistently been under-emphasized in scholarship. Ezra's transformation in this episode is facilitated by his heavenly meal, which represents the most intimate interaction between Ezra and the divine realm: Ezra's revelations escalate throughout the text, from hearing, to seeing, and finally to tasting. As such, the seventh episode of *4 Ezra* represents the climax of Ezra's revelatory experiences.

4 Ezra is a text which describes one way that the boundary between this world and the divine world can be transgressed. In *4 Ezra*, the eschatological expectation does not reside in a rebuilt Jerusalem temple, nor in the earthly realm at all;³ rather, in this text, the hope is always in another, heavenly world (Najman 2010: 152–153). At the same time, however, all of the revelations imparted to Ezra take place on earth (Collins 1998: 6). At the outset this narrative establishes itself as navigating between two separate worlds, where Ezra receives divine instruction and wisdom, eventually communicating God's will to both ordinary and extraordinary mortals. This divine instruction is mediated by the angel Uriel, who answers for God when Ezra addresses questions to the divine. Uriel acts as the interpreter of Ezra's

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episodes—Ezra is not able to comprehend the meaning of the things God tells and shows him on his own until the seventh episode, and thus requires an *angelus interpretis* in episodes 1–6.

I maintain that the only *clear* instance of God speaking directly to Ezra without a mediator is in the final episode; in each other instance, Uriel dictates the words of the Most High (Reynolds 2013: 180). In some instances, it is difficult to discern whether God or Uriel responds to Ezra's questions, since Ezra frequently addresses himself to God directly, although Uriel is present in the narrative. Reynolds concludes, however, that the use of third-person terminology to describe God in the divine responses suggests that Uriel (and not God) is the speaker, despite certain uses of the first person. Significant for the present study is Reynolds' acknowledgement that the only time God directly speaks to Ezra is in *4Ezra* 14. In other words, the only time that Uriel does not mediate the divine response is in the seventh episode—when Ezra ingests the heavenly cup. The significance of this shift should not be overlooked: the fourth episode marks a turning point in both the narrative and in the character of Ezra, but the seventh episode equally indicates a fundamental alteration of the relationship between Ezra and the divine, and, I argue, of the relationship between Ezra and the earthly realm.

While many current and previous scholars have attempted to reconstruct the socio-historical situation out of which *4 Ezra* arose, or to identify the psychological or theological mindframe of the author through the characters of Ezra and/or Uriel (e.g. Hogan 2008; Stone 1990; etc.), the present project rather limits its examination of *4 Ezra* to the narrative level, insofar as its literary tropes function within a given plot and genre. This narrative-level analysis necessarily engages with *4 Ezra* primarily as a story, which uses plot devices, generically defined patterns, allusions, and symbols to communicate meaning. In order for them to communicate their meaning, these tools must be comprehensible within the culture

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that produced them; in other words, *4 Ezra*'s use of literary devices participates in the culturally accepted norms of the ancient literary realm at the same time as it deviates from them, as all texts within a genre necessarily do (Beebee 2004: 19). It is necessary to reiterate that I am not making claims about historical or otherwise 'real world' rituals which may or may not have been understood to involve food from other worlds. As Carla Sulzbach underscores, we do not and cannot know about the 'actual preparatory practices of early mystics' and therefore we are limited in our discussion of meals in texts to the narrative function or literary pattern of such meals; 'the significance lies in the fact that an important ritual is described prior to the activation of the visionary experience' (Sulzbach 2010: 177). By engaging directly with one narrative-level trope, hierophagy, I illustrate how *4 Ezra*'s use of this particular element both emerges out of an ancient expectation concerning the (narrative) consumption of other-worldly food and also develops the trope to its own ends.

Two recent studies engage with *4 Ezra*'s food imagery and its significance to the text's structure (Moo 2011: 146–148; 153n.165; Smit 2011), but both studies, surprisingly, neglect to comment on the role of the fiery cup in 14:39–40. Jonathan Moo recognizes the importance of Ezra's floral meals, especially after fasting, but suggests the possibility that the text reflects the practices of actual seers consuming opium-poppies, while admitting that the evidence for such practices in antiquity is scant.⁴ He further proposes that Ezra's consumption of the flowers in the field in the fourth episode represents his participation in the heavenly world to come, since flowers 'can often be associated with Eden and paradise (cf. *1 En* 24:4; *2 En.* [J] 8:2; *3 Bar.* 4:10; *Apoc. Adam* 7:21; *Jos. Asen.* 16:14–16)' (Moo, 2011: 147). Moo's analysis, and his connection of the flowers with the heavenly realm, is not incorrect, but he misses the fact that Ezra's connection to that other realm is still incomplete. Ezra still requires explanation of his revelations from Uriel. It is not until the final episode that Ezra's

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association with the heavenly realm is made complete, through the fiery cup. In fact, according to his index, Moo does not mention the final, and I argue climactic, cup episode.

Smit, for his part, is primarily interested in the metaphorical use of food imagery. He rightly recognizes that the progression of *4 Ezra* literarily is related to the progression of Ezra's relationship to food, and I agree with his conclusions, which I also argue here, that Ezra's ability to speak wisdom is related to his consumption of foodstuffs (Smit 2014: 8, 12). However, while he recognizes these structural-consumptive elements, Smit neglects to recognize the role of Ezra's senses in this progression, as I outline in the present study, and further, neglects to discuss the function of the cup except to trace the metaphor of ‘drinking wisdom’ in other Jewish texts (Smit 2014: 2–21). Smit's otherwise excellent and thorough study, then, likewise misses the significance of Ezra's experiences as sensory revelations that culminate in the ingestion of heavenly food. As I argue here, examining the final cup episode along side other examples of this kind of consumptive behaviour in narrative elucidates the importance of this episode to the narrative structure of *4 Ezra*.

Structure of Episodes

4 Ezra is structured around seven revelatory episodes. Four of these episodes involve visions which communicate divine meaning to Ezra concerning God's role in the world. The episodes vary in terms of location, content, and what activity on Ezra's part facilitates the revelation. **Table 1** outlines the locations and contexts of the seven revelatory episodes:

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Episode	Revelatory Trigger	Sense	Interlocutor
First Episode: 3:1–5:20	Meditation/lying in bed	Auditory	Uriel
Second Episode: 5:21–6:34	7 days of fasting	Auditory	Uriel
Third Episode: 6:35–9:25	7 days of fasting	Auditory	Uriel
Fourth Episode: 9:26–10:59	Eating flowers from a field	Visual	Uriel
Fifth Episode: 11:1–12:51	Sleeping in the field	Visual	Uriel
Sixth Episode: 13:1–13:58	Eating flowers; sleep	Visual	Uriel
Seventh Episode: 14:1–14:48	Call narrative; fiery cup	Gustatory	God

Ezra fasts before receiving the second and third revelation and consumes flowers before the fourth and sixth.⁵ Although Frances Flannery-Dailey maintains that all of the first six episodes are dreams, and that only episode seven occurs while Ezra is awake, and Smit states that Ezra receives visions (rather than auditory revelation) after fasting and dreams after consuming flowers (Flannery-Dailey 2010: 212–220; Smit 2014: 12), most scholars agree that the fifth and sixth visions come to him like dreams, while the others take place while Ezra is awake (Stone 1990: 160; Hogan 2008). The seventh episode takes place in the same location as the fourth, fifth, and sixth visions, but instead of consuming flowers, Ezra consumes a heavenly liquid. Since five of Ezra’s seven revelatory experiences hinge on his relationship to consumption—he either eats peculiar things or eats nothing at all—it is clear that consumption plays a role in how we should understand the progression of Ezra’s interaction with the divine.

As Michael Stone, among others, has pointed out, ‘the apocalypse is a highly traditional genre [...] Most apocalypses [...] describe ecstatic states in very similar terms [...] drawn from biblical prophecy, particularly from Ezekiel and Zechariah’ (Stone 2003: 170). In

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other words, certain conventions utilized in *4 Ezra* to describe the revelatory episodes experienced by Ezra—the use of an other-worldly mediator, the prominence of revelatory episodes, etc. (Collins 1998: 4–5)—are shared by other works of the same genre; I would further argue that the literary trope of hierophagy, found also in Ezekiel, in the Revelation of John, and *Perpetua and Felicitas*, among other texts, is a convention not unique to either biblical prophecy or the apocalyptic genre, but rather one that represents a shared cultural understanding or expectation of the ramifications of consuming other-worldly food. In this way, *4 Ezra* indeed utilizes the traditional language of ecstatic experience as also preserved in biblical prophetic sources, as Stone suggests is typical of apocalypses, but it further engages the trope of hierophagy which appears throughout a wider range of genres and religious traditions. Ezra's hierophagic experience in episode 7 (*4 Ezra* 14) conveys its significance both because of the similarities it shares with a similar scenario in Ezekiel, but also because of its intersection with ancient Mediterranean expectations about what interaction with divine beings and their food might entail. Contextualizing Ezra's final meal behaviour in this way permits us to recognize the significance of this meal as the culmination of all of Ezra's food behaviour and thus as the culmination of his revelation. Relatedly, my emphasis here on the importance of sensory imagery as a whole highlights how crucial the seventh episode is to *4 Ezra's* structure.

Without going into an analysis of each episode in turn, a clear pattern in Ezra's experiences is visible. Ezra's revelations escalate throughout the text. This escalation is visible in their progression through three major senses. The first three episodes are only auditory. In the pivotal fourth episode, Ezra at last *sees* a vision of a woman, with whom he also converses; Uriel describes how Ezra experiences this revelation 'as far as it is possible for [his] eyes to see, and [...] as much as [his] ears can hear' (10:55–56). Episodes five and

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six extend these visual qualities using language that emphasizes the visuality of these experiences: ‘and I looked, and behold...’ (11:2, 3, 5, 7, 10; 13: 3, 5, 8, etc.). In each of episodes one through six, however, Ezra is incapable of making sense of what has been revealed to him. It is only when Ezra tastes heavenly food in the final episode, the cup filled with the fiery liquid, that he is able to transcend mortal understanding. This tasting of the fiery cup participates in what I describe as hierophagic consumption and marks the pinnacle of Ezra’s interaction with the divine.

The Fourth Episode

It is in the fourth episode where Ezra’s mode of revelation shifts from just auditory to both auditory and visual. At the end of the third episode, Uriel gives Ezra a series of instructions:

Go into a field of flowers where no house has been built, and eat only the flowers of the field, and taste no meat and drink no wine, but eat only flowers, and pray to the Most High continually—then I will come and talk with you (*4 Ezra* 9:25).⁶

As instructed, Ezra consumes the flowers of the field, and again contemplates how it is possible for the law of God to be eternal while those who observe it perish. Having addressed God ‘in his heart,’ Ezra looks up and sees a vision of a woman mourning for her dead son (9.38–10.4). Unsympathetically, Ezra admonishes the woman for publicly displaying her private sorrows at a time when such a great public calamity has the very earth in mourning. In 10.25–28 the woman suddenly transforms into the heavenly city of Jerusalem, flashing with light. Ezra is astounded and confused, and calls for Uriel to come explain his vision (10.28). Uriel urges Ezra not to fear his vision of Jerusalem, but rather to take in as much as he can with his limited human senses (10:55–56); Ezra is still unable to comprehend the meaning of the vision on his own, and can only see the glory of Jerusalem in part, and not as it truly is (Stone 2014: 129).

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This fourth revelatory episode marks a turning point in both the plot and in Ezra's experience (Stone 1990: 17; Stone 2003: 171, 177; Hogan 2008: 4; Stuckenbruck 2013: 139; Smit 2014: 8). Michael Stone's important analysis of the structure of *4 Ezra* has recently come under scholarly criticism. Stone notes that the pattern of the first three episodes is maintained in the fourth, and that 'highly significant differences' point to the fourth episode as a pivotal event in the book. However, scholars such as Najman (2010: 164–165) and Hogan (2008: 160) de-emphasize the fourth episode as central to Ezra's transformation, seeing this transformation instead as a gradual shift throughout the narrative. This trend is heartening, since my research demonstrates that the seventh episode represents the climax of Ezra's alteration from uncomprehending mortal to a being of divine understanding. Nevertheless, certain differences signal the importance of the fourth episode in Ezra's development. First, while the preceding three episodes took place in Ezra's bedroom, in this one he is in a field. Second, while episodes two and three required fasting, for the fourth Ezra is to eat flowers (9:24). Stone notes that the structural elements of the fourth episode also share aspects in common with the subsequent visions, five and six, in that Ezra consumes flowers (12:51) and stays in the same field (10:58; 12:51) (Stone 1990: 29). In this way, many scholars view the fourth episode as the hinge on which the surrounding episodes rest.

I agree that the fourth episode represents a change in how Ezra receives divine knowledge. The sensory imagery employed in *4 Ezra* points to the fourth episode as demarcating a shift in how Ezra experiences revelation: Ezra's revelations escalate throughout the text. The first three episodes are only auditory—Ezra and Uriel converse with words alone. In the fourth episode, Ezra at last *sees* a vision of a woman, with whom he also converses; Uriel also describes how Ezra experiences the revelation of the transformed woman/city through both vision and hearing (10:55–56). The fourth episode thus represents

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the point at which Ezra's ordinary human senses are expanded—hearing is supplemented with seeing, a pattern of growth that continues throughout the narrative. But tasting, as opposed to seeing or hearing, represents a more direct interaction with the sense-subject, that is, with the divine realm (Lieber 2006: 316).

The import of Ezra's augmented sensory abilities is reflected in how he reacts to the vision of the woman. Ezra is finally able to put aside his own problems and focuses instead on the woman (9.39; 10.5)—for Stone, this suggests that ‘what is abandoned is not only the train of thought expressed in the address but the whole set of questions that have preoccupied the seer from the start of the book’ (Stone 1990: 311). Several scholars have suggested that Ezra is changed in this vision from one who needed comforting to one who is able to comfort others, i.e. the personification of Jerusalem (Stone 1990: 318; Brandenburger 1981: 81). However, it is questionable whether one can, as Stone does, call Ezra's behaviour to the woman ‘comforting’—his harsh and unsympathetic tone hardly exudes consolation. Ezra is described as having anger towards the woman, not sympathy (10:5–6). Hogan notes that Ezra seems to be taking out his own frustration on the woman in his vision, and that this scene indicates how Ezra is far from being consoled himself (Hogan 2008: 163, 166). Stone proposes that Ezra takes on traits which were, in previous episodes, characteristic of Uriel—just as Uriel pointed out to Ezra that his mourning for Jerusalem was narrow and short-sighted, so here Ezra suggests to the woman that her grief for her son is misplaced given the larger events (Stone 1990: 319). Ezra, having questioned God's justice in previous episodes, in this episode brings up the reality of God's righteousness; in other words, he appears to have taken on the role of Uriel in relation to this woman. As such, Stone argues that this episode represents Ezra's complete acceptance of Uriel's message to this point (Stone 2003: 172–174). However, as Hogan points out, Ezra at this stage is still grieving for the destruction

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of Jerusalem, and as such, has not fully accepted Uriel's words (Hogan 2008: 166). In my view, the fact that Ezra behaves towards the woman in a similar manner to how Uriel has behaved to him ironically underscores how little Ezra has understood up until this point. As the woman whom he has scolded transforms into Jerusalem, Ezra's words likewise transform in meaning from powerful to foolish, in the sense that the reader can now see the irony in Ezra's behaviour.

The force with which Ezra experiences the transformation of the woman into the city of heavenly Jerusalem indicates that this scene is a turning point in *4 Ezra*. For Stone, this experience represents some kind of conversion—the blinding light, the fainting, and the crying out for guidance resemble ‘the major sort of reorientation of personality usually associated with religious “intensification,” a powerful and sudden integrating internalization of religious beliefs previously assented to intellectually. This may be called, not quite accurately, conversion’ (Stone 2003: 173). In other words, for Stone, Ezra has ‘assented [...] intellectually’ to Uriel's statements about God's role in Jerusalem's past, present, and future, but it is with his physical experience that this acceptance becomes realized and internalized (Stone 2003: 173–174). However, throughout the subsequent episodes, Ezra is still unable to internalize the message that God sends him through Uriel. This suggests that Ezra has made a move in the right direction, but is not fully transformed at this point. Hogan views this episode as the event that transforms Ezra into a ‘willing recipient’ of revelation (Hogan 2008: 4). She disagrees with Stone that this episode marks Ezra's complete acceptance of Uriel's point of view, but admits that ‘Ezra's resistance to Uriel's revelations has finally broken down, which is the first step in his gradual transformation’ (Hogan 2008: 167). This is a perspective which I support: after this experience, Ezra's behaviour changes: he blames himself rather than God or Uriel for his weakness, for his inability to comprehend (12:4–5)

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and prays to God for strength (12:6) (Hogan 2008: 169). Since Ezra is still incapable of true understanding in the subsequent visions, I argue that although this fourth episode is an important step in Ezra's eventual transformation, that transformation is not yet complete. I instead propose that this shift is one step in the continuous escalation of Ezra's experiences, with the seventh episode actually representing the climax of received divine knowledge. The fourth episode still requires explication by Uriel; in this sense, Ezra has not internalized the divine message. In other words, Ezra does not have the heavenly wisdom he requires to make sense of his experience and needs an explanation:

I lay there like a corpse and I was deprived of my understanding. Then he [the angel] grasped my right hand and strengthened me and set me on my feet, and said to me, 'What is the matter with you? And why are you troubled? And why are your understanding and the thoughts of your mind troubled?' I said, 'Because you have forsaken me! I did as you directed, and went out into the field, and behold, I saw, and still see, what I am unable to explain.' He said to me, 'Stand up like a man, and I will instruct you.' I said, 'Speak, my lord; only do not forsake me, lest I die before my time. For I have seen what I did not know, and I have heard what I do not understand. Or is my mind deceived, and my soul dreaming? Now therefore I entreat you to give your servant an explanation of this bewildering vision' (*4 Ezra* 10.30–37).

Loren Stuckenbruck agrees that 'the shift [the fourth episode] represents in the narrative *does not translate into any real or new understanding or insight on his part*' (Stuckenbruck 2013: 145). In other words, the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem alters Ezra's attitude so that he is a more willing recipient of revelation, but it does not transform his ability to understand.

Ezra's lack of comprehension makes sense in light of the hierophagic pattern—heavenly food given by a heavenly being yields heavenly understanding. But the flowers that Ezra eats in 9:26, though unusual for a person to eat, did not grow in heaven but rather in a field on earth, albeit one set apart by its lack of previous human interference (*4 Ezra* 9:25). The food that Ezra consumes prior to the fourth episode, while it triggers revelation, is not heavenly in origin; it is therefore insufficient to grant the eater true understanding. As I will demonstrate, only in the seventh (hierophagic) episode is Ezra at last able to comprehend

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God's meaning, without Uriel as interpreter. As such, far from being an afterthought or a literary epilogue, as it is called by Stone (2003: 171)⁷ and Hogan (2008: 23) among others, it is this final episode which marks the climax of Ezra's revelatory experiences.

Seventh Episode

When Ezra first consumes the flowers of the field prior to the fourth episode, we read that Ezra's 'mouth was opened' (9.28)—this same phrase is used in the seventh episode, in 14.41. In this way, it appears that the fourth episode and the hierophagic seventh episode are parallel, but the significant differences between the two indicate that episode 4 does not represent a hierophagic event. The flowers, like the fasting before, initiate a revelatory episode, but they do not facilitate understanding, something only hierophagic consumption brings about. The use of parallel language in the seventh episode suggests that, just as the fourth episode marked a turning point for Ezra, so too the seventh represents a significant shift in Ezra's relationship to the divine realm.

The seventh episode is structured differently from previous episodes: the call narrative that precedes the actual revelation signals the major difference between this section and the others, which is that, for the first time, God and Ezra interact directly. The call echoes those of Moses (Ex 3:4), Abraham (Gen 22:11), and Samuel (1 Sam 3:10). Given Ezra's responsibility with regard to the Torah and the direct reference to Moses in *4 Ezra* 14:3, this scene most strongly brings to mind Moses' call. If Stone is right that Ezra's preoccupation with Torah is central to *4 Ezra*'s message (2003: 172), then surely Ezra's receiving of the Torah in episode 7, especially when viewed in conjunction with the introductory call narrative at the start of the episode, marks the culmination of the entire revelatory sequence. Further, in contrast with the previous episodes, here Ezra displays neither anxiety nor mourning (Stone 1990: 412). His emotional state signals how different this experience will be

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from the previous ones.

God instructs Ezra to prepare himself to write things that God will tell him, some to be made public and some to be kept secret (14:24–26). God tells Ezra that God will illuminate his heart (14:25); when Ezra returns from reproving his people, Ezra has the hierophagic experience which at last grants him understanding:

And on the next day, behold, a voice called me, saying, ‘Ezra, open your mouth and drink what I give you to drink.’ Then I opened my mouth and behold, a full cup was offered to me; it was full of something like water, but its colour was like fire. And I took it and drank; and when I had drunk it, my heart poured forth understanding, and wisdom increased in my breast, for my spirit retained its memory; and my mouth was opened, and was no longer closed (4 Ezra 14:38–41).

At this point, Ezra is able to dictate to his five scribes the contents of ninety-four books over a period of forty days. The scribes have also been given understanding (14:42), though we are not privy to how their inspiration is delivered, and as a result they are able to write in strange characters. Some of the books, presumably the twenty-four of the Hebrew Bible,⁸ are to be made public, but the seventy remaining are only for the wise of Ezra’s people. The episode culminates in Ezra’s assumption to heaven in 14:50: ‘at that time Ezra was caught up, and taken to the place of those who are like him, after he had written all these things.’⁹

No satisfactory analysis of the cup motif has been carried out to date. Stone’s commentary on *4 Ezra* 14:38–41 describes the cup as filled with the holy spirit, which communicates wisdom. He rightly emphasizes the importance of this scene and even links it to Ezekiel and the book of Revelation, where revelatory experiences are also mediated through consumptive and hierophagic imagery. But Stone primarily associates Ezra drinking from the cup with the ‘Hellenistic theme of ‘divine drunkenness’ as a way of describing inspiration’ (Stone 1990: 121; cf. Philo, *De Ebr.* 146–148). Certain elements of the ‘divine drunkenness’ trope match up with *4 Ezra*, in that Ezra consumes a divine liquid, like water, but fire-coloured, and as a result gains wisdom—but Ezra is not intoxicated by this cup. That

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is, the text itself does not describe his experience in terms of ecstatic possession. Rather, Ezra is, for the first time, able to *retain memory* (14.41) in a way that is incongruous with drunkenness. Smit, most recently, examines the cup language in the context of ‘drinking wisdom’ (cf. *4 Ezra* 8:4), but the function of the cup in the narrative is not Smit’s primary concern—he is more interested in the metaphorical imagery (2014: 13, 21). Najman (2013) likewise only discusses the consumption of the fiery liquid in passing, in the context of textual resonance with previous apocalyptic texts (2013: 2–3; 29; 63). Even Stone’s most recent contribution to the subject only briefly discusses the cup as a ‘symbolic cup of inspiration’ (Stone 2014: 136–137). In light of the progression from auditory to visual sensory revelation already articulated, the gustatory aspect of Ezra’s cup should not be overlooked.¹⁰ In this final revelatory experience, Ezra is able not just to hear, as in the first three episodes, or to see, as in the next three, but also to taste. It is this sense which is the most intimate of the five natural senses; hearing and sight put distance between the sensor and the sense-object, whereas with taste, the sense object is made internal to the sensor (Korsmeyer 1999; Lieber 2006: 316n.8). Thus, Ezra’s ingestion of the contents of the heavenly cup indicates the pinnacle of his sensory revelations that began in the previous episodes. Hogan, like Stone, correctly associates the cup scenario with Ezekiel’s similar experience and concludes that Ezra’s mouth ‘will not be his own, but [...] will only be able to speak God’s words, like Ezekiel’ (Hogan 2008: 215). In linking this pattern of consumption to other similar scenes in ancient literature, the significance of Ezra’s cup is increased, lending strength to the idea that the seventh episode represents the climax rather than the epilogue of Ezra’s revelations. But Hogan does not go far enough: Ezra’s cup scenario is not linked only to Ezekiel’s similar experience, but also with a whole wealth of other literary examples of the consumption of heavenly foods, such as Revelation, *The Martyrdom of*

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Perpetua and Felicitas, Joseph and Aseneth, and others.¹¹ Like other characters who undergo such experiences, Ezra gains new knowledge and new abilities: he is finally able understand and to communicate God's word to his people through the books he transcribes.

In confirmation of Ezra's new divine association, he is even 'caught up' into heaven (verse 50), physically leaving the earthly realm. This translocation is also, I argue, a hallmark of hierophagic experience. This assumption, found in 14:50, was predicted in 14:9, when God tells Ezra that he will be taken up like others before him, 'until the times are ended.'¹² It is clear from the text that through his consumption of the fiery cup, Ezra is now closely associated with the divine realm, an association which represents a marked feature of the literary category of hierophagy.

Thus, I propose that this final revelatory scene in *4 Ezra* participates in the hierophagic pattern, in contrast with episodes 4 and 6; indeed, the presence of these earlier non-hierophagic meals highlights the importance of recognizing this special category. The full cup from heaven that Ezra drinks allows him, for the first time, to understand the heavenly revelations and to transmit this knowledge to others. Further, whereas previously the angel Uriel was the interlocutor between Ezra and the divine, during the episode with the cup it is God who speaks with Ezra directly. The drinking of the cup rests at the centre of this more intimate interaction between the mortal and heavenly realms, and allows Ezra, at last, direct access to the divine realm and the understanding that comes with it.

Conclusion

4 Ezra 14 participates in the hierophagic pattern in each of the trope's three major features: as a result of his heavenly meal, (1) Ezra is finally able to understand the received divine knowledge that he has been transmitted; (2) he gains new abilities, such as the ability to retain memory and to recite and therefore communicate what he has learned from God; and

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(3) Ezra is translocated to another realm. *4 Ezra*'s structure of seven revelatory episodes depicts the gradual escalation of Ezra's revealed knowledge until its pinnacle at the point of hierophagic consumption of the cup. Episode one occurs under ordinary circumstances, episodes two and three are brought about through fasting, and episodes four and six occur after the consumption of flowers. The initial episodes depict auditory revelation while the fourth, fifth, and sixth are marked by the addition of visions. The seventh vision represents a dramatic shift in Ezra's experiences: his consumption there is not ordinary ritual behaviour (such as fasting) or earthly edible material (such as the flowers), which previously allowed revelation using two of the more distant human senses. In *4 Ezra* 14, the sensory intimacy of taste allows Ezra to transcend human understanding and cosmic boundaries. This heavenly consumption in the form of his ingestion of the fiery cup occurs in the context of Ezra communing directly with God for the first time, and allows him, again for the first time, to understand the revelations he is given and communicate them fully to the community. It is only when Ezra undergoes his hierophagic experience through consuming heavenly material, given to him directly from the heavenly realm, that he is able to transcend his mortal understanding. This final example of food discipline participates in the literary trope of hierophagy—food given by an immortal to a mortal which transforms the eater in some way. In this case, Ezra receives the full transmission of heavenly knowledge. Episode 7 participates in the aspect of hierophagy where other-worldly knowledge is conferred upon the eater. The identification of this scene with hierophagy also aligns with some scholars' suggestion that the character of Ezra, in this episode, becomes heavenly and enters a mythical liminal sphere, as in *4 Ezra* 14:50 (Najman 2010: 159). This liminality and shifting of Ezra's identity from mortal to heavenly is only possible because of the assumed narrative ramifications of consuming other-worldly food: in short, Ezra's visions are only fully understandable in light

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of their participation in hierophagy as a literary device.

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Notes

¹ For my complete definition of the category of hierophagy and a discussion of other texts which make use of the trope, see my forthcoming monograph on the subject, *Hierophagy: Transformational Eating in Ancient Literature*. I am grateful to the FRQSC for the support of this research.

² The term is not used in any scholarship of any field of which I am aware and the concept itself has never received scholarly attention apart from Meredith Warren, ‘Like dew from heaven: Honeycomb, religious identity and transformation in *Joseph and Aseneth*’ (Thesis, McGill, 2006), two related conference presentations: ‘You are what you eat: Transformation through solitary ritualized eating in ancient Mediterranean literature’ Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting (2007, Vienna, Austria); ‘Blessed are the cheese-eaters: Relocating Perpetua’s transformational meal’ Women in the Biblical Word Unit, Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting (2012, Chicago, USA), and two conference presentations by Nicolae Roddy: “‘Taste and see. . .’: Hierophagy as religious experience,’ Trends of Ancient Jewish and Christian Mysticism Seminar (TAJCM), University of Dayton, (2008), and ‘Fill your stomach with it: Hierophagy as religious experience,’ AAR/SBL Annual Meeting (2007, San Diego). I am grateful to Roddy for suggesting the term to me. The word is also found in H. Desroches, *Jacob and the Angel* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973) 40 n.18, where credit is given to F. A. Isambert in *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 21 *Bulletin Bibliographique* 184, although the term is not found in this citation Pfister (1948: 262) refers to hierophagy as a ‘sacral meal [which] represents the eating of the god or of the holy entity’ but does not elaborate or give examples. My use of the term here represents a significant development in definition from these brief previous allusions. The relevance of *4 Ezra* to my work was first pointed out to me by Roddy and by Shayna Sheinfeld.

³ In contrast, see, for example Ezekiel 40–48; *1 Enoch* 90:20–37; the Temple Scroll; and the New Jerusalem Text.

⁴ Brent Landau makes a similar suggestion about hallucinogens with reference to what he calls the ‘star food’ in *Revelation of the Magi*, where he also correctly notices the affinity that text has with *4 Ezra*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, Ezekiel, and Revelation (2013: 12–13).

⁵ Ezra’s pattern of fasting, which punctuates his revelatory experiences, highlights the importance of consumptive imagery for understanding *4 Ezra* in general and the seventh episode in particular, since, like the consuming of flowers, fasting participates in the escalating pattern of behaviour through which Ezra receives revelation. For more on the significance of fasting in *4 Ezra*, see Knowles (1989: 257–274, esp. 261–265), although there appears to be a lacuna in scholarship concerning the relationship between fasting and receiving revelation. See only Arbessmann (1949) and (briefly) Hacham (2010: 635). Nonetheless, I consider fasting to be independent from the trope of hierophagy. Although Aseneth fasts prior to her hierophagic experience in *Joseph and Aseneth* (11:17; 16:15–16),

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this behaviour is not characteristic of any other hierophagic event; neither Ezekiel nor John are described as having fasted before they consume their respective scrolls in Ezekiel 2:8–3:3 and Revelation 10:8–11. Nor is Lucius in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* 11 depicted as having fasted. Likewise, Perpetua, prior to her vision in which she consumes the heavenly cheese in *Perpetua and Felicitas* 4:8–10, does not fast, and indeed, must be eating something as she continues to nurse her baby. Persephone can be said to not have eaten prior to the pomegranate snack in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 5.533ff, but this is hardly characterized as fasting in the way Ezra or Aseneth fast. For further discussion of these texts *vis à vis* hierophagy, see Warren, *Hierophagy* (in preparation).

⁶ All English of *4 Ezra* is from Stone (1990).

⁷ Stone describes it as merely a conclusion (2003: 171) even while he admits that the episode provides ‘a climax of revelation before Ezra’s assumption to heaven’ (1990: 428). Nonetheless, most scholars, including Stone, spend a disproportionately small amount of time examining the seventh episode.

⁸ Stone (1990: 439 n.5) notes, ‘the alternative tradition of 22 books, according to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, first occurs in Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.38.’ He also remarks that this is the earliest reference we have to a 24-book canon (1990: 441). Lee M. McDonald reminds us that although it is likely that the 24 books indicated in *4 Ezra* are those of the Bible, the text does not specify which texts were part of this collection (1995: 60).

⁹ Although verses 49–50 do not occur in the Latin version of *4 Ezra*, in the opinion of most scholars today, the verses are original and were lost with the addition of *6 Ezra* to the text (Stone 1990: 442; Zurawski, 2014: 12 and n.40).

¹⁰ Smit also articulates a progression of revelation, but does so in terms of Ezra’s abilities (i.e. to hear, to see, to speak) rather than in terms of his sensory experiences (2014: 8).

¹¹ For a discussion of these texts *vis à vis* hierophagy, see Warren, *Hierophagy* (forthcoming).

¹² Jason Zurawski, in his article proposing that *4 Ezra* is a ‘prequel’ to the biblical Ezra narrative, argues that this assumption into heaven takes place only after Ezra delivers the books to the Jerusalem temple and therefore that *4 Ezra* 14:50 alludes to Ezra’s narrative future rather than his narrative present. While Zurawski’s thesis is compelling, I am inclined to a less complicated chronology for Ezra’s experiences. However, regardless of when Ezra’s assumption to heaven takes place in the literary-historical time frame, narratively, the text is clear that this final experience is concretely associated with Ezra’s being taken up into heaven. In other words, even if Zurawski is right and there is a forty-seven year gap between when Ezra receives the books and when he goes up to heaven, the narrative structure of *4 Ezra* 14 demonstrates that the end result of consuming other-worldly food is that Ezra now belongs in the heavenly realm (Zurawski 2014: 12–15, esp. 15). I thank Jason Zurawski for sharing a copy of this article with me in advance of its publication.

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