

The Placement and Significance of the Tree of Life

A Fresh Look at the Syntax of Revelation 22:2 in Light of
Grammatical Patterns in Biblical and Graeco-Roman Literature

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Abstract

This study offers a fresh look at the syntax of Revelation 22:2a based on a close reading of the text and analysis of grammatical patterns in biblical and wider Graeco-Roman literature. This article examines: 1) the history of interpretation concerning the punctuation of Revelation 22:2a; 2) relevant grammatical patterns in biblical and wider Graeco-Roman literature; and 3) the implications of these findings for the punctuation, syntax, and translation of Revelation 22:2a.

1. Introduction¹

Revelation 22:1-5 concludes the final vision of the new Jerusalem in Revelation that began in 21:9.² After describing the city's street in 21:21, John lays out the orientation of the throne, river, and tree of life (ξύλον ζωῆς) in 22:1-2 as he paints a beautiful picture of the heavenly city that is rich in symbolism and significance.³ However, the syntax of Revelation 22:1-2 continues to puzzle exegetes, who have taken differing positions on its punctuation and translation. Consequently, as Robert Mounce observes, the exact placement of

1. I am grateful to Dr George H. Guthrie, Dr Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions.

2. Francis J. Moloney, 'Tracing a Literary Structure in the Book of Revelation', *CBQ* 84.4 (2022): 642–659, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cbq.2022.0134>.

3. See, for example, David L. Mathewson, 'The Temple and the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:1-22:5: The Transformation of an Old Testament Image', *CTR* 21.2 (2024): 47–59; Martin H. Pohlmann, 'Embracing a Vision of the New Jerusalem (Rv 21:1–22:5) to Impact on Life and Society', *Skriflig* 49.2 (2015): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i2.1854>.

river, street, and trees laid out in the verses ‘is less than clear’.⁴ This study aims to clarify the placement of the river, street, and tree in Revelation 22:1-2 by analysing the syntax of the passage based on grammatical patterns in Graeco-Roman literature.

2. History of interpretation

Attempts to punctuate Revelation 22:1-2 generally follow one of two approaches.⁵ The first approach places a full stop after τοῦ ἁρνίου at the end of verse 1, so that verse 2 begins a single independent sentence and the ἐν μέσῳ prepositional phrase modifies ξύλον ζωῆς:

¹Καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι ποταμὸν ὕδατος ζωῆς λαμπρὸν ὡς κρύσταλλον, ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁρνίου.

²ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ξύλον ζωῆς ...

This approach, adopted by the UBS5 and NA28 critical editions, is also favoured by Robert Thomas, Sigve Tonstad, and David Mathewson, who argue that having ἐν μέσῳ modify ξύλον ζωῆς highlights the direct allusion to Genesis 2:9, τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς ἐν μέσῳ τῷ παραδείσῳ (‘the tree of life was in the midst of the garden’).⁶

The second approach places the full stop at the end of τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς in verse 2, so that ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς belongs to the preceding clause in verse 1 and does not modify ξύλον ζωῆς:

¹Καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι ποταμὸν ὕδατος ζωῆς λαμπρὸν ὡς κρύσταλλον, ἐκπορευόμενον ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁρνίου, ²ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς.

καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ξύλον ζωῆς ...

David Aune’s translation is representative of this approach:

4. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Eerdmans, 1997), 399, <https://doi.org/10.5040/bci-000e>.

5. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Revelation*, BECNT (Baker Academic, 2023), 746–747.

6. Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, 1995), 482; Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Baker Academic, 2019), 323; David L. Mathewson, *Revelation: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Baylor University Press, 2016), 300.

He showed me a river of living water, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, down the center of the main street of the city. On each side of the river there were trees of life ... ⁷

G. K. Beale, Robert Mounce, Buist Fanning, and Thomas Schreiner also adopt this approach, as do the NIV2011, CSB, NET, and ESV.⁸ Those who support it have proposed various explanations for the singular ξύλον ζωῆς being described as on ‘each side of the river’. These explanations include envisioning a river dividing into two branches,⁹ a huge mangrove with roots on each side of the river,¹⁰ and interpreting ξύλον ζωῆς as a collective singular.¹¹

Proponents of both approaches argue that the alternative reading is grammatically problematic. For example, Thomas contends that the second approach is grammatically awkward because it opens a new sentence with καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ, and that limiting ἐν μέσῳ to modify only τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς leaves καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ to depend on ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν, which is syntactically harsh.¹² Conversely, Ian Paul, Craig Koester, and David Aune argue that the second approach is preferable as John rarely begins sentences with a prepositional phrase but often opens them with the conjunction καί.¹³

From a grammatical perspective, the choice between the two approaches hinges on two issues: i) the function and translation of ἐν μέσῳ when followed by multiple genitives; and ii) whether it is common for ἐν μέσῳ to open a clause. These issues will be addressed in the following sections through a review of

7. David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC 52C (Zondervan, 1998), 1136.

8. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1103; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 399; Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan Academic, 2020), 554; Schreiner, *Revelation*, 726–727.

9. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCB (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), 331.

10. Tze-Ming Quek, ‘The New Jerusalem as God’s Palace-Temple: An Exegetical Study of the Eden-Temple and Escalation Motifs in Rev 21.1–22.5’ (ThM diss., Regent College, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.2986/tren.048-0297>.

11. Kulli Toniste, *The Ending of the Canon: A Canonical and Intertextual Reading of Revelation 21–22*, LNTS (T&T Clark, 2016), 180; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 1106; Fanning, *Revelation*, 554; Douglas Estes, ‘The Tree of Life in the Apocalypse of John’, in *The Tree of Life*, Themes in Biblical Narrative 27 (Brill, 2020), 193–195, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004423756_010.

12. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 482.

13. Ian Paul, *Revelation*, TNTC (IVP Academic, 2018), 358; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB (Yale University Press, 2014), 823, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780300262148>; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1136.

grammars and lexicons, and a study of grammatical patterns in biblical and wider Graeco-Roman literature.

3. Review of grammars and lexicons

3.1 The use of ἐν μέσῳ when followed by multiple genitives

A. T. Robertson notes that, in line with developments from Classical Greek,¹⁴ ἐν μέσῳ is one of numerous adverbial phrases formed from μέσον, many of which came to function as prepositions, with several surviving into the Greek New Testament.¹⁵ Grammars and lexicons variously gloss ἐν μέσῳ as ‘that which lies in the middle’,¹⁶ ‘among, between’,¹⁷ and referring to ‘a position within an area determined by other objects and distributed among such objects – “among, with”’.¹⁸

Based on the lexical character of ἐν μέσῳ, the secondary literature describes it as frequently governing genitive substantives that immediately follow,¹⁹ a not uncommon characteristic for prepositional phrases in Koine Greek.²⁰ BDAG glosses ἐν μέσῳ as ‘in the midst of, among’ when followed by a plural genitive,²¹ while Robertson concludes that ‘ἐν μέσῳ has almost the force of a preposition with the genitive’.²² Similarly, Daniel Wallace describes the prepositional phrase ἐν μέσῳ in Revelation 5:6 as one ‘whose lexical nature requires a genitive’,²³ highlighting the genitive substantives τοῦ θρόνου and τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων in Revelation 5:6 as an example of ‘the use of the genitive after certain words’, where two genitives are joined by καί, with the meaning ‘between’.²⁴ David Mathewson and Elodie Emig likewise interpret ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ

14. Evert Van Emde Boas et al., *Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 87, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139027052>.

15. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), 644.

16. MGS, s.v. ‘μέσος’.

17. Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 1961), §215, 3.

18. Louw and Nida, s.v. ‘μέσος’.

19. Corroborating their assertions, in the Greek New Testament ἐν μέσῳ appears twenty-seven times and modifies a genitive substantive in the majority of instances.

20. Murray J. Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis* (Zondervan Academic, 2021), 44.

21. BDAG, s.v. ‘ἐν’; s.v. ‘ἵστημι’; s.v. ‘μέσος’.

22. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 504.

23. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan Academic, 1997), 135.

24. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 135.

θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων as a single syntactical unit, describing it as a spatial prepositional phrase.²⁵

The interpretation advanced by Wallace, and Mathewson and Emig – that ἐν μέσῳ governs both τοῦ θρόνου and τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων in Revelation 5:6 – is significant for this study as Revelation 5:6 constitutes the only instance other than Revelation 22:2 in the Greek New Testament where ἐν μέσῳ is followed by more than one noun in the genitive case.

3.2 The placement of ἐν μέσῳ to open a clause

Regarding the regular placement of a spatial prepositional phrase such as ἐν μέσῳ, Steven Runge notes that the default position is clause-final. However, Runge identifies a rhetorical device he terms the ‘Spatial Frame’, in which ‘placing information about place or location in an initial position has the effect of attracting more attention to it than it otherwise would have received’.²⁶ Mathewson and Emig similarly note that such a departure from the expected word order imparts prominence to a phrase, thereby shaping the reader’s focus.²⁷

4. Grammatical patterns in biblical and wider Graeco-Roman literature

The review of the grammars and lexicons suggests that it is not unusual to have prepositional phrases such as ἐν μέσῳ govern multiple genitives. Furthermore, having ἐν μέσῳ open a clause may be a strategy employed by the author to create prominence. This section further examines these insights in light of patterns in Graeco-Roman literature.

A search of Graeco-Roman literature was conducted on the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG) database, concentrating on syntactical constructions similar to Revelation 22:2a. Specifically, the search targeted instances in which ἐν μέσῳ is immediately followed by multiple genitive substantives linked by the conjunction καί. Given the approximate production of Revelation around the first century AD,²⁸ the TLG’s dating function was used to identify a corpus of texts produced between the first century BC and the second century AD. These texts were then reviewed to confirm that their composition fell within

25. David L. Mathewson and Elodie Ballantine Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar: Syntax for Students of the New Testament* (Baker Academic, 2016), 285.

26. Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*, bilingual edition (Hendrickson, 2010), 220–224.

27. Mathewson and Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar*, 279–281.

28. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 4; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 15.

the specified parameters. A search was also conducted of the LXX texts, given the possibility that they were known to the author of Revelation.

The searches surfaced fifty-nine instances that fit the abovementioned syntactical construction. Fifty-seven instances were from the LXX and wider Graeco-Roman literature, while the remaining two were from the Greek New Testament (Revelation 5:6 and 22:2).

4.1 LXX and wider Graeco-Roman literature

The fifty-seven instances found in the LXX and wider Graeco-Roman literature are laid out in Table 1. In fifty-four of the fifty-seven instances, clear thematic and grammatical markers indicate that the genitive nouns following ἐν μέσῳ are to be read as being directly governed by the ἐν μέσῳ prepositional phrase. These markers unambiguously group the genitives together and mark them apart from the phrases/clauses that follow. The reading of the genitive nouns as being governed by the ἐν μέσῳ prepositional phrase is also consistent with the punctuation and translation (where available) of the critical texts. In the three exceptions, while all the genitive nouns immediately following ἐν μέσῳ are part of the same clause, some function epexegetically and are therefore not directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ.

Table 1: Instances of ἐν μέσῳ + multiple genitives from LXX and wider Graeco-Roman literature of the relevant period²⁹

Author/source (Approx. date)	Reference	Genitives all directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ				Genitives not all directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ
		All nouns are proper and/or thematically linked ³⁰	Grouped by correlative conjunctions	Followed by preposition demarcating new syntactical unit	Followed by conjunction demarcating new syntactical unit	
[LXX] (C3rd/2nd BC)	Judges 3:5					X ³¹
	2 Samuel 24:5	X				
	Proverbs 5:14	X				

29. Unless otherwise indicated, citations of Graeco-Roman literature in this table use the reference system found in the Loeb Classical Library.

30. Thematic linkages include parallels and contrasts. For example, in Plutarch *Is. Os.* 361C, the two anarthrous genitives are clearly intended to be read as parallel points of comparison: ‘between gods and men’.

31. The punctuation of the MT suggests the possibility that the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites were subsets of the Canaanites, hence Webb’s translation as ‘But the Israelites lived among the Canaanites (the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites)’ – Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, NICOT

Author/source (Approx. date)	Reference	Genitives all directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ				Genitives not all directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ
		All nouns are proper and/ or thematically linked ³²	Grouped by correlative conjunctions	Followed by preposition demarcating new syntactical unit	Followed by conjunction demarcating new syntactical unit	
Strabo (C1st BC/C1st AD)	<i>Geogr.</i> 8.6.24	X				
	<i>Geogr.</i> 9.3.1	X	X			
	<i>Geogr.</i> 9.5.8	X				
	<i>Geogr.</i> 16.1.12					X ³²
Plutarch (C1st/2nd AD)	<i>Sull.</i> 17.3	X		X		
	<i>Sert.</i> 18.3			X		
	<i>Alex.</i> 45.2	X			X	
	<i>Caes.</i> 14.1	X				
	<i>Ag. Cleom.</i>	X	X		X	
	<i>Cleom.</i> 14.2					
	<i>Brut.</i> 20.6		X			
	<i>Arat.</i> 9.6	X			X	
	<i>Is. Os.</i> 361C	X				
	<i>E Delph.</i> 392A	X				
	<i>Def. orac.</i> 415A	X				
	<i>Her. mal.</i> 863B	X				
	<i>An. Procr.</i> 1012C	X				
[Themistocles] (C1st/2nd AD) ³³	<i>Epistulae</i> 8.90	X				

(Eerdmans, 2012), 148, <https://doi.org/10.5040/bci-008z>. If this is the case, then τοῦ Χετταίου, τοῦ Αμορραίου, τοῦ Φερεζαίου, τοῦ Ευαίου, and τοῦ Ιεβουσαίου may function epexegetically, not being directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ.

32. While all the genitives are to be read as part of the same clause, it is likely that the genitives in τοῦ τε Λιβάνου καὶ τοῦ Ἀντιλιβάνου καὶ τοῦ Κασίου modify ταῦτα epexegetically and should not be taken as objects of the ἐν μέσῳ phrase. Moving from κειμένων to τοῦ τε Λιβάνου καὶ τοῦ Ἀντιλιβάνου καὶ τοῦ Κασίου, there is a change from plural to singular, anarthrous to articular, and from substantive participle to proper nouns. Furthermore, the presence of the τε particle in τοῦ τε Λιβάνου suggests that κειμένων is to be treated separately from the list of genitives that follow.

33. R. Hercher, *Epistolographi Graeci* (Paris, 1873). A composition date of late first or early second century AD is supported by several considerations, including the pseudonymous author's superficial attempts at Atticism, the lack of usage of Diodorus or Plutarch as sources, and the sophistication of the letters. Norman A. Doenges, *The Letters of Themistokles* (Arno Press, 1981), 59–63.

Author/source (Approx. date)	Reference	Genitives all directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ				Genitives not all directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ
		All nouns are proper and/ or thematically linked ³⁴	Grouped by correlative conjunctions	Followed by preposition demarcating new syntactical unit	Followed by conjunction demarcating new syntactical unit	
Arrian (C1st/2nd AD)	Anab. 3.28.8	X	X			
	Anab. 5.5.5		X			
	Anab. 5.12.1		X			
	Anab. 5.24.1		X			
	Tact. 6.6 ³⁴	X	X			
Appian (C1st/2nd AD)	Hist. Rom. 6.7	X	X			
	Hist. Rom. 7.10	X	X			
	Hist. Rom. 7.14(1)		X			
	Hist. Rom. 7.14(2)		X			
	Hist. Rom. 12.17	X	X			
	Bell. civ. 4.86	X	X			
	Bell. civ. 5.23	X	X			
Galen ³⁵ (C2nd AD)	Temp. 2.579K	X				
	UP 3.347 ³⁶		X			
	UP 3.706 ³⁷					X ³⁸
	Vict. att. 41.2 ³⁹		X		X	
	San. tu. 5.363K	X	X		X	
	Alim. fac. III	X	X		X	
	6.578 ⁴⁰					

34. A. G. Roos and G. Wirth, *Flavii Arriani Quae Exstant Omnia. Vol. 2: Scripta Minora et Fragmenta* (Teubner, 1968).

35. Abbreviations for Galen's works follow the recommendations in P. N. Singer and Ralph M. Rosen, 'List of Galen's Works: Titles, Editions, Translations, and Online Resources', in *The Oxford Handbook of Galen*, ed. P. N. Singer and Ralph M. Rosen, (Oxford University Press, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190913687.005.0001>.

36. G. Helmreich, *Galen de Usu Partium Libri XVII* (Teubner, 1907).

37. Helmreich, *Galen de Usu Partium*.

38. The genitives in τοῦ τ' ὁστοῦ καὶ τῆς παχείας μήνιγγος are likely to be functioning epexegetically, unpacking χώρας.

39. K. Kalbfleisch, *Galen de Victu Attenuante*, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* 5.4.2. (Teubner, 1923).

40. G. Helmreich, *Galen de Alimentorum Facultatibus Libri III*, *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* 5.4.2. (Teubner, 1923).

Author/source (Approx. date)	Reference	Genitives all directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ				Genitives not all directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ
		All nouns are proper and/ or thematically linked ⁴¹	Grouped by correlative conjunctions	Followed by preposition demarcating new syntactical unit	Followed by conjunction demarcating new syntactical unit	
Galen (cont.)	<i>Bon. mal. suc.</i> 6.794 ⁴¹	X	X			
	<i>Inaeq. int.</i> 735K	X	X		X	
	<i>Diff. puls.</i> IV 8.601 ⁴²	X	X		X	
	<i>Di. dec.</i> III 9.903 ⁴³		X			
	MM 10.729K	X			X	
	MM 11.742K	X	X		X	
	MM 11.807K	X				
	<i>Comp. med. loc.</i> X 12.810 ⁴⁴	X			X	
	<i>Hipp. prorrh.</i> 16.640 ⁴⁵	X		X		
	<i>Hipp. epid.</i> I 17a.220 ⁴⁶	X			X	
	<i>Hipp. prog.</i> 18b.59 ⁴⁷	X	X		X	
	<i>Hipp. off. med.</i> 18b.893 ⁴⁸	X				
Lucian (C2nd AD)	<i>Fug.</i> 10				X	

41. G. Helmreich, *Galenī de Rebus Boni Malique Suci Libellus*, Corpus Medicorum Graecorum 5.4.2. (Teubner, 1923).

42. K. G. Kühn, *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia*, Vol. 8 (Leipzig, 1824).

43. K. G. Kühn, *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia*, Vol. 9 (Leipzig, 1825).

44. K. G. Kühn, *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia*, Vols. 12-13 (Leipzig, 1826).

45. H. Diels, *Galenī in Hippocratis Prorrheticum I Commentaria III*, Corpus Medicorum Graecorum 5.9.2. (Teubner, 1915).

46. E. Wenkebach, *Galenī in Hippocratis Epidemiarum Librum i Commentaria III*, Corpus Medicorum Graecorum 5.10.1. (Teubner, 1934).

47. J. Heeg, *Galenī in Hippocratis Prognosticum Commentaria III*, Corpus Medicorum Graecorum 5.9.2. (Teubner, 1915).

48. K. G. Kühn, *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia*, Vol. 18.2 (Leipzig, 1830).

Author/source (Approx. date)	Reference	Genitives all directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ				Genitives not all directly governed by ἐν μέσῳ
		All nouns are proper and/ or thematically linked ⁴⁹	Grouped by correlative conjunctions	Followed by preposition demarcating new syntactical unit	Followed by conjunction demarcating new syntactical unit	
Aelius Aristides (C2nd AD)	<i>Rhet. Ῥώμης ἐγκώμιον</i> 200.17 ⁴⁹			X		
	<i>Rhet. Συμυρναϊκός πολιτικός</i> 229.28 ⁵⁰	X				
	<i>Rhet. Εἰς τὸ Αἰγαῖον πέλαγος</i> 248.10 ⁵¹		X	X		
Pausanias (C2nd AD)	<i>Descr. 6.20</i>	X		X	X	
	<i>Descr. 10.10</i>	X			X	
Julius Pollux (C2nd AD)	<i>Onom. 2.134</i> ⁵²	X	X	X		

4.2 Greek New Testament

In the Greek New Testament, Revelation 5:6 is the only instance other than Revelation 22:2 where ἐν μέσῳ is followed by more than one noun in the genitive case:

Καὶ εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἄρνιον ἑστηκός ... (Rev 5:6)

And **between the throne and the four living creatures** and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing ... (Rev 5:6 ESV)

Although no consensus exists concerning the appropriate gloss for ἐν μέσῳ in Revelation 5:6,⁵³ there is clear consensus that both τοῦ θρόνου and τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων should be read as governed by the first ἐν μέσῳ prepositional phrase.⁵⁴ Both nouns are articular and in the genitive case. Furthermore,

49. W. Dindorf, *Aristides*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1829).
50. Dindorf, *Aristides*.
51. Dindorf, *Aristides*.
52. E. Bethe, *Pollucis onomasticon*, vol. 1 (Teubner, 1900).
53. There is disagreement whether ἄρνιον should be ‘in the midst of’ (CSB), ‘in the middle of’ (NET), or ‘between’ (ESV) the throne and four living creatures.
54. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 352; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 350; Fanning, *Revelation*, 218; Mathewson, *Revelation*, 73.

the καί conjunction and subsequent prepositional phrase ἐν μέσῳ following τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων suggests the commencement of a new syntactical unit. Significantly, as with Revelation 22:2, the ἐν μέσῳ prepositional phrase in Revelation 5:6 is clause-initial.

The thematic and syntactical parallels between Revelation 5:6 and 22:2 are significant as they suggest correspondence in the author's style. Both record what John saw (εἶδον in 5:6, and ἔδειξέν μοι in 22:1), are at critical points in the narrative, and have the ἐν μέσῳ prepositional phrase as clause-initial. Furthermore, as laid out in the table below, both follow the general structure of a verb of perception, followed by one or more prepositional phrases, followed by the object of the verb of perception (which is modified by the prepositional phrase).

Revelation 5:6

Verb of perception	Καὶ εἶδον
Prepositional phrase	ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων
Noun	>ἀρνίον ἑστηκός

Revelation 22:1a-2

Verb of perception	Καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι ...
Prepositional phrase	ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν
Noun	>ξύλον ζωῆς

5. Implications for the syntax of Revelation 22:2a

Based on the grammatical patterns identified in biblical and wider Graeco-Roman literature, the following conclusions regarding the use of ἐν μέσῳ when followed by multiple genitives emerge, with corresponding implications for the interpretation of Revelation 22:2a.

First, consistent with standard grammars and lexicons, it is common for the ἐν μέσῳ phrase to indicate a middle position, whether spatial or figurative. The genitive(s) that follow provide reference points for the item in between (i.e. 'between/in the middle of A and B').

Second, when ἐν μέσῳ is immediately followed by multiple genitive nouns joined by the conjunction καί, it is typical for the genitive nouns to be governed by the ἐν μέσῳ prepositional phrase. Revelation 22:2a follows this pattern, indicating that the genitives τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς and τοῦ ποταμοῦ should both be understood as governed by ἐν μέσῳ. This reading is reinforced by the thematic and grammatical similarities between τῆς πλατείας and τοῦ

ποταμοῦ: both are articular genitives naming city landmarks that frame the location of the ξύλον ζωῆς.⁵⁵

Third, it is not uncommon for the ἐν μέσῳ phrase to function as a predicate of a verb of being (implied or otherwise).⁵⁶ And fourth, it is also not unusual for ἐν μέσῳ to be clause-initial.⁵⁷

Together, these conclusions suggest that the first punctuation approach, adopted in the UBS5 and NA28 critical editions, is the most reasonable reading of the text, whereby ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ is read as two genitives governed by the ἐν μέσῳ prepositional phrase. Based on the punctuation, a proposed translation of Revelation 22:2 is:

Between the city's street and the river, one on each side, is the tree of life,
producing twelve fruits ...

Before turning to exegetical and theological implications of this preferred punctuation, two additional interpretative points warrant comment.

The first point concerns the appropriate gloss for τῆς πλατείας (cf. Rev 11:8 and 21:21). While Fanning translates the term as 'city square',⁵⁸ others, including Smalley, Koester, and Schreiner, translate it as 'street'.⁵⁹ The immediate context offers few clues as to which gloss is preferable. However, BDAG, Louw and Nida, and the NIDNTTE gloss πλατεῖα as 'street',⁶⁰ a reading followed by most commentaries and translations on Revelation 22:2.⁶¹ Ultimately, the choice between the glosses does not significantly affect the conclusion that the tree stands between the street (or square) and the river.

55. The case study of Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.1.12 indicates that this does not hold for adjectives, or if there are modifying participles between the genitive nouns.

56. Prov 5:14 (LXX); Strabo, *Geogr.* 9.3.1; Plutarch, *Caes.* 14.1; *E Delph.* 392A; Appian, *Hist. Rom.* 6.7; *Bell. civ.* 5.23; Galen, *Temp.* 2.579K; *Alim. Fac.* III 6.578; *Bon. mal. suc.* 6.794; *MM* 11.807K; *Comp. med. loc.* X 12.810; *Hipp. epid.* I 17a.220; Pausanias, *Descr.* 6.20; 10.10.

57. Strabo, *Geogr.* 9.3.1; 9.5.8; Plutarch, *Alex.* 45.2; *Her. mal.* 863B; Arrian, *Anab.* 5.12.1; Galen, *Bon. mal. suc.* 6.794; *Di. dec.* III 9.903; Aelius Aristides, *Rhet. Eἰς τὸ Αἰγαῖον πέλαγος* 248.10; Pausanias, *Descr.* 10.10.

58. Fanning, *Revelation*, 550.

59. Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (InterVarsity Press, 2005), 527; Koester, *Revelation*, 810; Schreiner, *Revelation*, 727.

60. MGS renders πλατύς as 'broad' (MGS, s.v. 'πλάτυς'). However, as the NIDNTTE notes, BDAG and other authorities regard πλατεῖα as a separate noun (NIDNTTE, s.v. 'πλατύς'). Also see BDAG, s.v. 'πλατεῖα'; Louw and Nida, s.v. 'πλατεῖα'; NIDNTTE, s.v. 'πλατεῖα'.

61. Including the ESV, NIV11, NET, and CSB.

The second ancillary point concerns the phrase ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν. The terms ἐντεῦθεν and ἐκεῖθεν function as demonstrative correlative adverbs of place, as noted by BDF, Herbert Smyth, MGS, and BDAG.⁶² In Revelation 22:2, ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν likely describes the location of the tree of life by indicating that the street and river are on either side of the tree. This interpretation is consistent with the conclusion that τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς and τοῦ ποταμοῦ are governed by ἐν μέσῳ. Furthermore, it is grammatically awkward for ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν to refer to only one of the two landmarks flanking the tree. Though no earlier or contemporaneous attestations of ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν are known,⁶³ the related idiom ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐντεῦθεν is attested in the biblical corpus. Glossed by BDAG as ‘from here and from there’ or ‘on each side’,⁶⁴ the use of ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐντεῦθεν in the biblical corpus supports this study’s interpretation of ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν in Revelation 22:2.⁶⁵ For example, in John 19:18, which is the only occurrence of ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐντεῦθεν in the Greek New Testament, locates the two criminals crucified *on either side* of Jesus. Similarly, Exodus 17:12 uses ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐντεῦθεν to explicate the positions of Aaron and Hur *on either side* of Moses.

6. Exegetical and theological implications, and conclusion

Schreiner, while acknowledging the ambiguity surrounding the punctuation of Revelation 22:1-2, suggests that ‘we should not be overly worried about which interpretation is correct since John writes apocalyptically and doesn’t envision a literal reality.’⁶⁶ Similarly, Mounce asserts that ‘the specific geographical layout is of no particular importance in understanding the symbolism of the verse.’⁶⁷ Such conclusions carry weight insofar as, regardless of the punctuation

62. BDF, §104.1; Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Harvard University Press, 1920), §346; Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* [MGS], edited by Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder (Brill, 2015), s.v. ‘ἐντεῦθεν’ and ‘ἐκεῖθεν’; BDAG, s.v. ‘ἐντεῦθεν’ and ‘ἐκεῖθεν’.

63. Based on a search of Graeco-Roman literature in the TLG database. The next recorded instance is not found until the second/third century AD in Aelian, *Nat. an.* 9.34.6.

64. BDAG, s.v. ‘ἐντεῦθεν’.

65. See John 19:18; Exod 17:12; Num 11:31; 22:24; Josh 8:22; 2 Sam 2:13. Textual variants of Rev 22:2 also soften ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν to ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐντεῦθεν.

66. Schreiner, *Revelation*, 747.

67. Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 399.

approach employed, the allusions in Revelation 22:1-2 to Genesis 2-3 and Ezekiel 47:12 are clear, with possible further echoes of Zechariah 14 and Isaiah 35:6-9.⁶⁸

However, this study demonstrates that in light of grammatical patterns in Graeco-Roman literature, the punctuation of Revelation 22:2 is far from ambiguous and therefore warrants a definitive interpretation of the corresponding geographical layout.

Furthermore, the punctuation proposed in this study highlights the author's emphasis on a single tree of life in the heavenly city. Commentators endorsing the alternative punctuation have struggled to explain whether the tree is singular or plural, encapsulated by Beale's question: 'how could one tree grow on either side of the river?'⁶⁹ This study's findings resolve the issue, as it takes no stretch of the imagination to envision a single tree between a street and a river. This conclusion is significant because a single tree in Revelation 22 strengthens the passage's thematic continuity with the tree of life in the biblical storyline – from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9; 3:24), to the Tabernacle and Temple (Exodus 25:31-40; 2 Chronicles 13:11), to Proverbs (3:18), to Isaiah (65:22 (LXX)) and elsewhere in the Book of Revelation (2:7; 22:14; 22:19).⁷⁰ Fanning, citing Testament of Levi 18:11, notes that taking the ξύλον ζωῆς to be singular more clearly preserves the allusion to Genesis 2:9,⁷¹ while Craig Keener notes that the expectation of an end-time paradise in many Jewish texts often included the tree of life from the original paradise (1 Enoch 24:4-25:7; 4 Ezra 8:52; 2 Enoch 8:3; T. Levi 18:11).⁷²

Lastly, the proposed punctuation makes clear that ἐν μέσῳ modifies ξύλον ζωῆς, thus more closely echoing the association of ἐν μέσῳ with ξύλον ζωῆς from Genesis 2:9 (καὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς ἐν μέσῳ τῷ παραδείσῳ).⁷³ A survey of the LXX and broader Jewish literature reveals a consistent connection between ἐν μέσῳ, ξύλον ζωῆς, and the Garden of Eden, with T. Desmond Alexander

68. G. K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, 'Revelation', in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker Academic, Apollos, 2007), 1153; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 561; Schreiner, *Revelation*, 747-749.

69. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 1106.

70. Carol L. Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult*, American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series 2 (Scholars Press, 1976), 137-138; Koester, *Revelation*, 823.

71. Fanning, *Revelation*, 554.

72. Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan, 2000), 500.

73. Tonstad, *Revelation*, 323; Mathewson, *Revelation*, 300; Beale and McDonough, 'Revelation', 1153-1154.

noting that the name and location of the tree of life at the centre of the garden of Eden are key features pointing to the tree's significance from Eden to the New Jerusalem.⁷⁴ Of the five instances in the LXX where ἐν μέσῳ and ξύλον appear in the same sentence, four explicitly reference the garden of Eden.⁷⁵ Ἐν μέσῳ is also used in conjunction with the Garden of Eden twice in the Pseudepigrapha,⁷⁶ once in the Apostolic Fathers,⁷⁷ and six times in Philo.⁷⁸

To conclude, this study has used patterns in biblical and wider Graeco-Roman literature to resolve a critical punctuation issue in Revelation 22:2a. This resolution clarifies the city's layout and underscores the author's emphasis on the singular tree of life in the heavenly city.

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74. T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Kregel, 2008), 155–157.

75. Gen 2:9, 3:3, and 3:8 are direct descriptions of the Garden of Eden. Ezek 31:18 references the Garden of Eden, but ἐν μέσῳ is not used with respect to the tree of life. Zech 5:4 is the verse with no apparent reference to the Garden of Eden.

76. Apoc. Sedr. 4:4; LAE 17:5.

77. Diogn. 12:3.

78. *Leg.* 1.56,60; 3.1,28; *Plant.* 44; *Migr.* 37. Ἐν μέσῳ appears a total of twenty times in Philo's writings, making the six occurrences with references to the Garden of Eden a notably high proportion.

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