

**Competing Cosmologies in Early Christianity:**

**Cosmology in the Book of Revelation, Roman Imperial Ideology, and in the  
Province of Asia**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

As Christianity emerged in the first century, individuals and communities that identified with the movement were faced with the need to formulate a Christian identity in the context of their sociopolitical situations and to determine the nature of their engagement with their societies. The rhetoric of the book of Revelation is properly interpreted in this setting with the crucial components of the sociopolitical situation including the Roman Empire and the *poleis* of the province of Asia. In the present thesis, it is argued that a significant aspect of Revelation's rhetoric is its cosmology, which functioned to legitimate a Christian identity which featured opposition to the power and influence of Rome and which required abstention from social practices that might identify a person with the local polis. The function of cosmology in the narrative of Revelation is analysed primarily in relation to the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology but also in relation to the manifestation of these conceptions in the province of Asia. The thesis demonstrates that in Revelation, cosmic powers are reconfigured and redefined to deny Rome heavenly legitimization of its *imperium*, which is instead portrayed as a doomed diabolic stratagem intended to prevent the foundation of the true universal kingdom of God and Christ. This cosmological narrative contrasts with the approach of local elites in the province of Asia who established prestige for both themselves and their cities by affirming aspects of Roman cosmology. It may have also contrasted with a rival Christian cosmology which also accommodated aspects of Rome's cosmology to justify a greater degree of identification with the local polis and participation in its society. The thesis demonstrates that the study of cosmology provides valuable insights into the way early Christian communities established identities in the context of diverse and sometimes competing ideologies.

## Declaration

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical quotations are from *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989). Abbreviations follow *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014) with the following additions: *The Collection of Ancient Greek Inscriptions in the British Museum* (GIBM); *Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas Pertinentes* (IGRR); *The Roman Imperial Coinage* (RIC); *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum* (BMCRE); and Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (*Comm. Apoc.*).

Signed:  Date: 15 December 2017

Paul Henry Yeates (Student No. 42295696)

## **Dedication**

**For Nicole, Ethan, and Jacob**

# 1) Introduction

## 1.1) The Topic of the Thesis

A number of scholars have identified the issue of Christian engagement with society as a key theme of the book of Revelation.<sup>1</sup> The issue belongs to an historical setting in the urban societies in the south-west of the Roman province of Asia during the reign of the last Flavian emperor, Domitian.<sup>2</sup> John, the author of Revelation, railed against social activities he deemed to be in conflict with true Christian identity, such as eating meat which had been sacrificed to idols and ‘fornication’.<sup>3</sup> He also inveighed against those leaders who promoted or condoned such activity. John’s rhetorical strategy involved locating a dispute about social engagement and leadership within a narrative of cosmic conflict ultimately between God and Satan but also manifest in a conflict between the people associated with each power; on one side the saints and on the other Rome and the ‘earth-dwellers’ (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς

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<sup>1</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1984) 126–9, 158; David E. Aune, ‘The Social Matrix of the Apocalypse of John’, *BR* 26 (1981) 26–8; Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 125, 186–97; David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 1998) 169–71; David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2009) 61–4, 70–1; Sean Michael Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries of Vision: Education Informing Cosmology in Revelation 9* (London: T&T Clark, 2012) 77; Hans-Georg Gradl, ‘Kaisertum und Kaiserkult: Ein Vergleich zwischen Philos Legatio ad Gaium und der Offenbarung des Johannes’, *NTS* 56 (2010) 116–19; Ryan Leif Hansen, *Silence and Praise: Rhetorical Cosmology and Political Theology in the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014) 9–10, 58–67. The application of the label ‘Christian’ to groups and individuals in the first century is a contested matter in contemporary scholarship. For example, David Frankfurter, ‘Jews or Not? Reconstructing the “Other” in Rev 2:9 and 3:9’, *HTR* 94 (2001) 408, and Mikael Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus: A Textual Analysis of Early Christian Identity Formation in a Local Perspective* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) 1 n. 1, who prefers ‘Christ-believers’. John calls members of the churches ‘saints’ (ἅγιος) and so this term will be used when referring to these characters of the text. For the sake of simplicity and consistency with most scholarship, the term ‘Christian’ will also be used, though it is acknowledged that Christianity was a movement that arose within Judaism in the first century and over time became distinct from it.

<sup>2</sup> See section 3.2 and 3.4 for a discussion of the date and social setting of Revelation.

<sup>3</sup> See section 3.1 for a discussion of the authorship of Revelation.



γῆς). In the present thesis, the cosmological dimension of John's rhetoric will be investigated in relation to the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology. It will also explore the way that the cities of the province of Asia and John's rivals in the churches of Asia engaged with Rome's cosmology.

Cosmology is an important issue to explore in Revelation in part because it is an important element of the apocalyptic genre in general. The oft-cited definition of John Collins indicates that cosmology is a key component of the genre; he writes that the apocalyptic genre is a form of literature that discloses 'a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world'.<sup>4</sup> The spatially transcendent dimension of apocalypses involves incorporating a cosmological framework into these literary works, and Revelation is a prime example of this. In a study on the theme of heaven and earth in Matthew, Jonathan Pennington tables the occurrence of οὐρανός and related terms in the NT. Of a total of 301 occurrences, 89 occur in Matthew followed by 55 in Revelation, 36 in Luke, and then 33 for the Pauline epistles combined.<sup>5</sup> This data suggests the significance of cosmology in Revelation, which is explicitly recognised by Pennington.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in a chapter of a monograph on cosmology in the NT, Sean McDonough proposes that Revelation is as equally worthy of the designation 'the climax of cosmology' as 'the climax of prophecy', the

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<sup>4</sup> John J. Collins, 'Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre', *Semeia* 14 (1979) 9. See also, Ra'anan S. Boustian and Annette Yoshiko Reed, 'Introduction: "In Heaven as It Is on Earth"', *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (ed. Ra'anan S. Boustian and Annette Yoshiko Reed; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 7.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 67–8. The high number of occurrences of οὐρανός in Matthew is partly explained by the preference for the phrase 'kingdom of heaven' over 'kingdom of God'. In Matthew, οὐρανός occurs in this expression thirty-two times. Pennington includes all texts ascribed to Paul in the NT in his count.

<sup>6</sup> Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 290.

latter expression being coined by Richard Bauckham.<sup>7</sup> Despite its significance, the theme has received limited attention and McDonough comments, ‘A careful book-length treatise on the subject is still a *desideratum*.’<sup>8</sup>

Cosmology is an important dimension of the social and ideological interaction between early Christianity and its surrounding cultures. Cosmologies are ultimately ideological in nature because as individuals and communities construct an understanding of the structure of the cosmos and the relationship of its parts, they necessarily represent their beliefs about the divine, the location and nature of human power, the nature of the material world and being itself, as well as their understanding of themselves and others. Therefore, there is a close connection between the processes of cosmic and social definition. The focus on cosmology in the present study will illuminate the significance of this connection in relation to the book of Revelation. Pennington and McDonough introduced their monograph on cosmology and the NT saying, ‘In light of the importance of cosmological perspectives in the ancient world, it is unfortunate that the study of cosmology has been relatively underserved in New Testament studies ... there remains a need for a systematic and overarching study on this crucial backdrop to the worldview of the early Christians.’<sup>9</sup> While the present study is not ‘systematic and overarching’, it will contribute to an understanding of the role of Revelation’s cosmology in the social and ideological interactions of early Christians in the province of Asia.

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<sup>7</sup> Sean M. McDonough, ‘Revelation: The Climax of Cosmology’, *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough; London: T&T Clark, 2008) 178–88; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> McDonough, ‘Climax of Cosmology’, 178, also quoted in Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, eds., *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2008) 1.

It has often been suggested that of all the NT texts, Revelation is the one that most clearly engages with the subject of the Roman Empire and its power.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, scholarship exploring the topic of empire in Revelation has avoided the criticism that has been directed against empire-critical studies of the NT in general; in particular, the criticism that the presence and importance of anti-imperial rhetoric has been overstated.<sup>11</sup> However, the treatment of empire in Revelation is susceptible to the criticism of an overly simplistic or insufficiently nuanced interpretation of the relationship of the text to the theme of empire. For example, Karl Galinsky has reviewed the discussion of the imperial cult in NT scholarship and finds the claim that the NT contains anti-imperial rhetoric is off-target; in his reading the NT writings are supra-imperial rather than anti-imperial.<sup>12</sup> This study seeks to investigate Revelation's engagement with Roman imperial ideology in a way that avoids generalisations, is attentive to the local social setting and rhetorical situation of the text, and

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006) 97, says, 'Critical scholars of Revelation have customarily read it as the most uncompromising attack on the Roman Empire, and on Christian collusion with the empire, to issue from early Christianity.' See also Bauckham, *Climax*, 338–49.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the conclusions drawn in Joseph B. Modica and Scot McKnight, eds., *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013) 213. See also a response to N. T. Wright's emphasis on empire in Paul in a chapter entitled, 'Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul' in John M. G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 363–88.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Galinsky, 'In the Shadow (or Not) of the Imperial Cult: A Cooperative Agenda', *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (ed. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011) 215–25. Mary Beard, John North, and S. R. F. Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1, a History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 318, has criticised scholars who refer to 'the imperial cult' as if it were a uniform and monolithic phenomenon. The same point was made earlier by P. J. J. Botha, 'God, Emperor Worship and Society: Contemporary Experiences and the Book of Revelation', *Neot* 22 (1988) 87. The point is to be acknowledged and even if the alternative phraseology of 'imperial cults' is not applied exclusively, as in the present thesis, care must be taken to ensure that the imperial cult is not presented as a phenomenon which operated uniformly and signified the same thing in all places and times. For another critique of imperial cults in NT scholarship, see Karl Galinsky, 'The Cult of the Roman Emperor: Uniter or Divider?', *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (ed. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011) 3–6.

that explores the particular rhetorical strategies John employs in contending with the Roman Empire.<sup>13</sup>

Early scholarship considered Revelation to be a response to a conflict between Christianity and the Roman Empire; however, this view has been revised and the ideas that Christians in the province of Asia were persecuted by Domitian and forced to participate in the imperial cult are either no longer maintained or significantly nuanced.<sup>14</sup> Most scholars now maintain that any persecution that occurred was limited, local, and sporadic and that if imperial cults presented a problem to Christians it was as one of the numerous cults that had an important role in civic life.<sup>15</sup> It has also been noted that there are no explicit allusions to Rome in the introductory visions in which the Son of Man figure addresses the churches of Asia (Rev 2–3).<sup>16</sup> Instead, these chapters suggest that the primary concerns of the text were the extent to which Christians should engage with their society, especially those aspects of society with a cultic dimension, and relatedly, internal leadership conflict between Christians with differing views on the matter.<sup>17</sup> It should also be noted that in the major vision narrative

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<sup>13</sup> See S. R. F. Price, 'Response', *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; New York: Trinity, 2004) 175–83, on the importance of establishing the local significance of Roman imperial ideology.

<sup>14</sup> See the discussion in section 3.4.1 for an overview of the scholarship.

<sup>15</sup> For example, David E. Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997–1998) lxiv–lxix; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 69–70; and Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 95–116.

<sup>16</sup> R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920) 1.43–4; Stephen S. Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John's Revelation and John's Community* (Milton Keynes: Nelson Word, 1994) 44; Dwight D. Sheets, 'Something Old, Something New: Revelation and Empire', *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (ed. Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013) 206. On the absence of references to the imperial cult, see Steven J. Friesen, 'Satan's Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation', *JSNT* 27 (2005) 366.

<sup>17</sup> Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1.43–7; David A. deSilva, 'The Social Setting of the Revelation to John: Conflicts within, Fears without', *WTJ* 54 (1992) 287–91; Thomas B. Slater, 'On the Social Setting of the Revelation to John', *NTS* 44 (1998) 233 n. 3; Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 14; and Sheets, 'Something Old', 206.

of Rev 4–22, Rome only appears from Rev 13 onwards where it emerges as the Beast which opposes the saints. The place of Rome in Revelation requires explanation; firstly, as to why it appears at all if the main concern of the text relates to local issues, and secondly, as to why it appears late in the narrative.

The two questions will be addressed in chapter 8 by considering the place of Rome in Revelation's rhetorical strategy and in the context of local cosmologies. In brief, two responses will be developed; first, that local society could be construed to be inextricably bound to the Roman Empire through the assimilation of aspects of its ideology in the formation of local civic identity. Consequently, an attack on Rome amounted to an attack on local society. The second response is influenced by studies such as that of Paul Duff which read Revelation in terms of an internal leadership crisis.<sup>18</sup> It will be proposed that John and his rivals had cosmologies that were largely similar but differed on the position of Rome in the cosmos. Both John and his rivals expected the overthrow of the existing cosmic order with the arrival of Christ's kingdom but for John a prerequisite was God's defeat of Rome which was allied to Satan, whereas his rivals, under the influence of Pauline teaching, viewed Rome as an instrument of God for the maintenance of justice and order until the end arrived. It will be argued that the late appearance of Rome in the narrative relates to John's rhetorical strategy to persuade his audience that Rome is aligned to Satan and not God.

## 1.2) Previous Research on Revelation and Cosmology

The discussion of previous relevant research will be organised by key subject areas. More attention will be given to research that more closely relates to the prime focus of the

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<sup>18</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*; and Robert M. Royalty, Jr., *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998).

present study, especially the study of Ryan Hansen which, though a theological study, deals with the relationship between Revelation's cosmology and Roman imperial ideology.

### *1.2.1) Cosmology and the Roman Empire*

Several studies on the early Roman Empire have focused on dimensions of cosmology, and in some, its relationship with ideology. In *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium*, Philip Hardie undertakes a thorough analysis of the contribution of cosmological terms to the narrative of the *Aeneid* and to the theme of Rome's *imperium* in the text.<sup>19</sup> He investigated the use of universal expressions, also known as cosmological formulae, such as 'heaven and earth' or 'heaven, earth, and sea' and found they established a cosmic setting for the narrative which contributed to the association of Rome's *imperium* with the cosmic order itself.<sup>20</sup> Together with other devices, such as *ekphrasis* on cosmological images and the incorporation of motifs associated with gigantomachies, this served to present the history of Rome's foundation as a cosmogony. Hardie related his findings on the *Aeneid* to a growing interest in cosmology in the late Republic and early Empire and a tendency to include cosmic pretension in expressions of ideology.<sup>21</sup> He lists several examples of iconography and literature which illustrate this trend including the Prima Porta statue of Augustus, the *Gemma Augustae*, the *Ara Pacis*, the horologium of the Campus Martius, and in addition to Virgil, the poetry of Horace, Ovid, Manilius, and Lucan.<sup>22</sup> Many of these will be covered in the

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<sup>19</sup> Philip R. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 293–331, 339, 353.

<sup>21</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 377–9.

<sup>22</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 379. To this list could be added the Boscoreale Cups, discussed in relation to Roman imperial ideology in Ann L. Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire in the Age of Augustus: The Case of the Boscoreale Cups* (California: University of California Press, 1995).

present thesis. Hardie's study is significant because it identified cosmology as an element of Roman imperial ideology and because it highlighted the role of cosmology in narrative.

Hardie influenced two other scholars who also explored the theme of cosmos and *imperium*. Paul Rehak studied the architecture and associated iconography of the Campus Martius in Rome. The title of his study is a clear tribute to Hardie – *Imperium and Cosmos: Augustus and the Northern Campus Martius*.<sup>23</sup> The northern Campus Martius included a horologium consisting of an obelisk from Egypt with a globe at its tip, located near the *Ara Pacis* and the Mausoleum of Augustus. Rehak provides further evidence of a cosmological dimension to Roman imperial ideology and finds that the overall effect of the Campus Martius was to express the notions that Rome was at the centre of the world which it dominated and that Rome, through its emperor Augustus, had restored peace and order to the cosmos.<sup>24</sup> Rehak's study is significant in demonstrating that the connection between cosmology and ideology, which Hardie identified in a literary text, could also be discerned in art and architecture at the heart of Augustan Rome.

Josèphe-Henriette Abry produced a chapter in a book on the *Astronomica* of Marcus Manilius (written from late in the reign of Augustus to early in that of Tiberius) entitled *Cosmos and Imperium: Politicized Digressions in Manilius' Astronomica*.<sup>25</sup> Abry's study supplements those of Hardie and Rehak and interprets a cosmological text, on astronomy and astrology in particular, in relation to architectural monuments in Rome.<sup>26</sup> Abry concluded that Manilius wanted to depict the glory of Rome's founders in the heavens just as Augustus

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos: Augustus and the Northern Campus Martius* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos*, 90–5, 142–5.

<sup>25</sup> Josèphe-Henriette Abry, 'Cosmos and Imperium: Politicized Digressions in Manilius' *Astronomica*', *Forgotten Stars: Rediscovering Manilius' Astronomica* (ed. Steven J. Green and Katharina Volk; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 222–34.

<sup>26</sup> Abry, 'Cosmos and Imperium', 222–3.

had done in the architecture of Rome.<sup>27</sup> The study offers further evidence of the importance of cosmology to Roman imperial ideology and suggests the fruitfulness of reading texts in conversation with the imagery of material artefacts, something which is a feature of the present thesis.

Several scholars have addressed cosmology and the ideology of the Roman Empire from a geographical perspective. In *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Roman Empire*, Claude Nicolet begins with the Augustan age in which he says there was an obsession with space.<sup>28</sup> He considers the works of ancient geographers such as Strabo, references to geographic regions and nationalities in texts such as the *Res gestae* of Augustus, and imagery on coins and art with cosmological iconography such as the globe, rudder, and Capricorn. He also discusses the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias which he considered to have been heavily influenced by Roman representations of the cosmos.<sup>29</sup> Two other studies have a narrower focus in that they look at the geographical limits of Rome's empire. James Romm investigates the notion of 'the edges of the earth' and considers how the representation of this aspect of the cosmos featured in Rome's self-understanding as the centre of a global empire.<sup>30</sup> Romm finds that associations of the periphery with barbarism and chaos are not uniform and that sometimes the typical centre-periphery dynamic is inverted such that the ideal society is on the periphery and the one at the centre is corrupt.<sup>31</sup> C. R. Whittaker also looks at the geographic representation of the Roman Empire and in particular how the idea of

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<sup>27</sup> Abry, 'Cosmos and Imperium', 228.

<sup>28</sup> Claude Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991) 8–9.

<sup>29</sup> Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics*, 8–9, 46–7.

<sup>30</sup> James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> Romm, *Edges of the Earth*, 45–81.



global empire was reconciled with the delimitation of the Empire by its frontiers.<sup>32</sup> He proposes that the Roman rationalisation was that the boundaries to its empire had been established at its will and not imposed upon it by a superior hostile power.<sup>33</sup> Randall Pogorzelski addresses the same tension in his study on Lucan and in contrast to Whittaker suggests the tension was not scrutinised rationally.<sup>34</sup> Together these studies demonstrate that geography was a vehicle for the expression of Roman imperial ideology and that Rome's 'mapping impulse' had cosmological significance.<sup>35</sup> As Whittaker observes on Rome's self-representation as a world-wide empire, 'The perception of empire at that scale was mystical and ideological, as reflected in and created by the cosmologies of the day.'<sup>36</sup>

The studies mentioned so far have focused on the Augustan age. Relating to a later period in the early empire is Harry Hine's study on Seneca's *Naturales quaestiones* (written in the 60s CE) on the topic of cosmology and ideology.<sup>37</sup> He finds that Seneca provided a distinctive cosmological view which challenged the one propagated under Roman imperial ideology to promote moral virtues consonant with his Stoic perspective.<sup>38</sup> Seneca presented a heavenly perspective on the cosmos in which Rome was diminutive in scale. He also

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<sup>32</sup> C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Randall J. Pogorzelski, 'Orbis Romanus: Lucan and the Limits of the Roman World', *TAPA* 141 (2011) 148, 168, concludes that ultimately Lucan maintains the ideology of Rome's world domination by ignoring the existence of the Parthians.

<sup>35</sup> On the mapping impulse in the Augustan age, see Sara H. Lindheim, 'Pomona's Pomarium: The "Mapping Impulse" in Metamorphoses 14 (and 9)', *TAPA* 140 (2010) 163–94. On the mapping impulse under the Flavians, see A. J. Boyle, 'Introduction: Reading Flavian Rome', *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik; Boston: Brill, 2003) 37; and Rhiannon Evans, 'Containment and Corruption: The Discourse of Flavian Empire', *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik; Boston: Brill, 2003) 255–9.

<sup>36</sup> C. R. Whittaker, *Rome and Its Frontiers: The Dynamics of Empire* (London: Routledge, 2004) 81.

<sup>37</sup> Harry M. Hine, 'Rome, the Cosmos, and the Emperor in Seneca's Natural Questions', *JRS* 96 (2006) 42–72.

<sup>38</sup> Hine, 'Rome, the Cosmos', 45.

described the destruction and renewal of the cosmos through the process of *ekpyrosis*.<sup>39</sup> The effect of his cosmology was to relativise Rome's greatness, position, and power. Hine's study is significant in identifying dissonant voices in the Roman deployment of cosmology in relation to ideology. On the Flavian period, to which Revelation belongs, a study by Robin Haydon Darwall-Smith entitled *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome* reviews various texts and material artefacts from the period and finds the continuation and development of Augustan themes and the representation of ideology in cosmological terms.<sup>40</sup>

In terms of studies on the Roman province of Asia in particular, a study by Clifford Ando addresses the propagation of Roman ideology.<sup>41</sup> The mechanisms he identifies include the dissemination of legal letters from the emperor, the issuing of coin types and the influence of Roman art in the provinces, and political rituals such as those of the imperial cults, victory parades, and the taking of oaths.<sup>42</sup> The study on imperial cults in the province of Asia by S. R. F. Price is foundational to any discussion of the topic.<sup>43</sup> A significant concept developed by Price is that the manifestation of the imperial cult in Asia is to be viewed as the result of the negotiation of Roman power and its incorporation in civic social identity in the province. The Sebasteion of Aphrodisias, which has been mentioned already, contained cosmic iconography related to Roman imperial ideology. There is a growing body of literature on Aphrodisias and the Sebasteion in particular, though the key studies are those

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<sup>39</sup> Hine, 'Rome, the Cosmos', 43–5. On similar ideas in Lucan, see Michael Lapidge, 'Lucan's Imagery of Cosmic Dissolution', *Hermes* 107 (1979) 344–70.

<sup>40</sup> Robin Haydon Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome* (Brussels: Latomus, revue d'études latines, 1996), 67, 113–4, 178.

<sup>41</sup> Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, 143–5, 215, 408.

<sup>43</sup> S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Price's study influenced Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). For a study on the Flavian period, see Kenneth Scott, *The Imperial Cult under the Flavians* (New York: Arno, 1975).

of Kennan T. Erim, who provided an early overview of the archaeological findings of the city; R. R. R. Smith, who provides analysis of the imperial reliefs of the Sebasteion including those representing the nations; and Joyce Reynolds, who primarily deals with inscriptions in Aphrodisias.<sup>44</sup> The outcome of this research has been the recognition of provincial engagement with aspects of Roman ideology. As Christopher Frilingos observes, ‘The cosmic proportions and divine approval of Roman rule may have been most apparent in Virgil’s poetry and the *Ara Pacis* in Rome, but populations in places such as Ephesus, Pergamum, and Aphrodisias also saw this theme expressed in the inscriptions and in the images stored in their imperial cult temples.’<sup>45</sup> The Sebasteion at Aphrodisias is especially relevant to the topic of the thesis because of the numerous cosmic depictions in its reliefs.

### *1.2.2) Cosmology in Biblical Studies*

There have been several significant studies investigating the cosmology of the HB, either as the sole focus or in relation to other ancient Near Eastern cosmologies. Hans Bietenhard examined the heavenly realm in early Christian and Jewish texts in his study, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum*.<sup>46</sup> His key findings were that the tripartite concept of the cosmos was predominant, that a significant topos was the correlation between happenings on earth and the heavenly realm, that the HB was influenced by cosmological concepts derived from Mesopotamia, perhaps during the time of exile, and

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<sup>44</sup> Kennan T. Erim, *Aphrodisias: City of Venus Aphrodite* (London: Muller, Blond and White, 1986); R. R. R. Smith, ‘The Imperial Reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias’, *JRS* 77 (1987) 88–138; R. R. R. Smith, ‘Simulacra Gentium: The Ethne from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias’, *JRS* 78 (1988) 50–77; and Joyce Reynolds, ‘New Evidence for the Imperial Cult in Julio Claudian Aphrodisias’, *ZPE* 43 (1981) 317–27.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 26.

<sup>46</sup> Hans Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1951).

finally that there were a variety of *Weltbilder*, or cosmological concepts, in late Judaism and early Christianity.<sup>47</sup> Another early study with a more narrow focus was that of Luis Stadelmann on the Hebrew conception of the world.<sup>48</sup> Overall, he observed that the Hebrew concept of the world was of a unified cosmos partitioned at creation to establish order with different kinds of beings assigned to their proper realms.<sup>49</sup> As was the case in neighbouring cultures, there was a tripartite concept of the cosmos including heaven, the earth, and under the earth, or Sheol.<sup>50</sup> He also suggested that at first there was only an interest in relating geographic and topographic features to the concept of the cosmos but that a truly cosmological interest arose with the development of a theology of YHWH as the universal lord.<sup>51</sup> A study by Richard Clifford, published shortly after Stadelmann's, focused on the concept of the cosmic mountain and concluded that while there was little evidence in western Semitic or Biblical texts supporting the concept of a cosmic mountain that spanned heaven and earth, there was widespread support for the idea of sacred mountains on which deities dwelt and which were conceptualised as cosmic centres.<sup>52</sup> A study by Cornelis Houtman examined the concept of heaven, and the word pair 'heaven and earth', in the HB.<sup>53</sup> He concluded that in the HB the cosmos was not viewed as a unity but as a duality consisting of heaven and earth. The two parts of the cosmos were in a precarious harmony that produced a

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<sup>47</sup> Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt*, 11–15, 256–7. Martin Metzger, 'Himmlische und irdische Wohnstatt Jahwes', *Ugarit-Forschungen* 2 (1970) 139–58, explored the correlation between heaven and earth regarding the Temple and the concept of the mountain of God.

<sup>48</sup> Luis Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World: A Philological and Literary Study* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970).

<sup>49</sup> Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 2–3.

<sup>50</sup> Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 9–13, 126. Also supported by J. Edward Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 30–7, 53–8.

<sup>51</sup> Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 147.

<sup>52</sup> Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) 190–1.

<sup>53</sup> Cornelis Houtman, *Der Himmel im Alten Testament: Israels Weltbild und Weltanschauung* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

fear that chaos might return. Following Bietenhard, he challenged the idea that in ancient Israel there was a single *Weltbild*.<sup>54</sup> Instead, he posited the existence of various concepts of the cosmos which coexisted despite essential incompatibilities. In ancient Israel there was, however, a single worldview (*Weltanschauung*), namely that YHWH was the sole creator and sustainer of the cosmos. Othmar Keel looked at the iconography of the Psalms in relation to symbolism in the ancient Near East and included a substantial amount of material on cosmology.<sup>55</sup> He made a significant observation when he stated that in the ancient Near East, the primary interest was the functioning of the cosmos and the location of various cosmic powers rather than in the description of its structure alone.<sup>56</sup> This observation was echoed by John Walton who said that in the ancient Near East, cosmology was concerned with metaphysics rather than physics and function rather than substance.<sup>57</sup> Cosmologies reflected beliefs about authority and jurisdiction in the cosmos.<sup>58</sup> This understanding of cosmology will undergird the discussion in the present thesis.<sup>59</sup>

Turning to the NT, Ulrich Mauser studied the concept of heaven and found a variety of views in the corpus.<sup>60</sup> One key concept, however, was the idea of heaven as the throne room of the cosmos and the place that represented the manifestation of the will of God.<sup>61</sup> Stemming from this concept are several NT motifs including the determination in heaven of events on earth, the ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ moral imperative, and the eschatological idea

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<sup>54</sup> Houtman, *Der Himmel*, 283–317.

<sup>55</sup> Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1997).

<sup>56</sup> Keel, *Symbolism*, 56–7.

<sup>57</sup> John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) 181.

<sup>58</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 181.

<sup>59</sup> See section 4.1.

<sup>60</sup> Ulrich W. Mauser, “‘Heaven’ in the World View of the New Testament”, *HBT* 9 (1987) 34–5.

<sup>61</sup> Mauser, “‘Heaven’”, 39.

of heaven coming to earth.<sup>62</sup> Edward Adams undertook a study of Paul's cosmological language, involving a literary analysis of the use of the word κόσμος and the application of sociological theory to explore his thesis that, 'Paul's letter-writing activity may be thought of as a world-constructing endeavour, an attempt to influence the social and ideological formation of the communities addressed.'<sup>63</sup> His study is significant in its aim of relating cosmology to rhetorical strategy as well as the social and ideological aspects of the historical setting. In this, Adams's study has been influential on the present thesis, though distinguishing it from Adams's will be the investigation of a wider range of cosmological expressions and their interpretation within the text's narrative framework.

Another study on cosmology in Paul by George H. van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School: Colossians and Ephesians in the Context of Graeco-Roman Cosmology, with a New Synopsis of the Greek Texts*, is significant in drawing attention to Paul's utilisation of Stoic cosmology to relate the eschatological opponents of Christ to powers associated with the cosmos itself.<sup>64</sup> His study suggests it is plausible that NT authors were familiar with Greco-Roman cosmologies and were capable of using them as an element of their rhetorical strategy. Peter Oakes considered cosmology and Paul's engagement with

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<sup>62</sup> Mauser, "“Heaven”", 41–8. Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt*, 13, states that it was a basic belief in the ancient Near East that everything on earth was prefigured by its heavenly counterpart. Furthermore, there was a correlation between heaven and earth such that each land, river, city or temple had its *Vorbild* in heaven.

<sup>63</sup> Edward Adams, *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul's Cosmological Language* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) 24. He also published Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall from Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and Its World* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), a study of the language of cosmic catastrophe in the NT which argued that the language pointed to a real cosmic crisis, not just a geopolitical one as argued by N. T. Wright and G. B. Caird. Mark B. Stephens, *Annihilation or Renewal?: The Meaning and Function of New Creation in the Book of Revelation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) discussed the issue in Revelation.

<sup>64</sup> George H. van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School: Colossians and Ephesians in the Context of Graeco-Roman Cosmology, with a New Synopsis of the Greek Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 129–34, 209.

Roman imperial ideology in a study on 1 Thessalonians and Philippians.<sup>65</sup> He found that Paul ‘re-mapped’ the universe in shifting the Christian communities from the periphery to the centre by associating them with the heavenly realm.<sup>66</sup> Oakes’s study addressed the aspect of cosmology that Keel and Walton suggested was most significant in ancient cosmology, that is, the demarcation of the cosmos according to powers and authorities.

Finally, mention should be made of the study by Pennington on heaven and earth in Matthew. This study builds upon the literature on cosmology in the HB which has been discussed and follows a similar approach in reading the language of heaven and earth in the context of Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures, while also relating cosmology to the theology of the text. The relationship between cosmology and theology in the NT was explored in a monograph edited by Pennington and McDonough entitled, *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*.<sup>67</sup> While the topic of this study will necessarily have theological implications, it will not be concerned with relating John’s cosmology to his theology or that of the NT or HB more broadly.

### *1.2.3) Cosmology in Apocalyptic Literature*

As has been stated already, cosmology is a defining feature of the apocalyptic genre. John Collins analysed the temporal and spatial transcendence of the book of Daniel, which he discussed as the horizontal and vertical axes of the text.<sup>68</sup> He stated that Daniel’s interest in the vertical dimension was a significant development in Jewish eschatology.<sup>69</sup> In later Jewish

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<sup>65</sup> Peter Oakes, ‘Re-Mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians’, *JSNT* 27 (2005) 301–22.

<sup>66</sup> Oakes, ‘Re-Mapping the Universe’, 319–22.

<sup>67</sup> Pennington and McDonough, eds., *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*.

<sup>68</sup> John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel* (Montana: Scholars, 1977) 175. Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982) 2, also focused on the ‘vertical’ dimension of apocalypses, which he suggested had been neglected.

<sup>69</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Vision*, 176.

and early Christian apocalypses, spatial transcendence typically involved the heavenly realm, though it might also involve the ends of the earth, as in 1 Enoch, or the underworld, as in the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, the Apocalypse of Paul, and the Apocalypse of Peter.<sup>70</sup>

It has been observed that two types of apocalypses can be distinguished; historical apocalypses which usually feature a periodisation of history, and apocalypses with an otherworldly journey.<sup>71</sup> Martha Himmelfarb studied the latter in relation to apocalypses involving ascent to heaven or descent to hell, or the underworld.<sup>72</sup> In his commentary on 1 Enoch, George W. E. Nickelsburg states that Enoch's cosmological tours have eschatological significance, that is, the apocalypticist reveals in the present places of spatial transcendence the future realities that will be manifest at the eschaton.<sup>73</sup> Thus the two dimensions of transcendence in apocalypses, cosmology and eschatology, are interrelated, which is a concept that Adela Yarbro Collins explores in her monograph, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*.<sup>74</sup> This work addresses various topics in illustrating

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<sup>70</sup> For discussion on the underworld, or 'hell', in apocalypses, see Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) and Richard Bauckham, 'Early Jewish Visions of Hell', *JTS* 41 (1990) 355–85.

<sup>71</sup> John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998) 6–8, though Collins notes that some apocalypses fit both categories and that historical apocalypses still have cosmological features. The book of Revelation illustrates the difficulty of applying categories to apocalyptic literature as it involves only a limited periodisation of history (Rev 17.9–18) and while John is taken up to heaven, his actual ascent is not narrated.

<sup>72</sup> Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*; and Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>73</sup> George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) 39–41, 278–90. See also Pieter M. Venter, 'Spatiality in Enoch's Journeys [1 Enoch 12–36]', *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition* (ed. Florentino Garcia Martinez; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003) 229, and John J. Collins, 'Cosmos and Salvation: Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Age', *HR* 17 (1977) 136, who states that cosmology relates to personal eschatology in 1 En. 39.4 where the tour of heaven reveals the place of the righteous and so the afterlife is provided for in the structure of the universe.

<sup>74</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).



the theme, including a demonstration of how numbers are utilised in Revelation to establish cosmological motifs and a discussion of the political implications of John's deployment of holy war traditions.<sup>75</sup> Regarding the latter, she concludes that Revelation advocates a non-violent though activist response to the Roman Empire; for example, through the saints' martyrdom the eschaton was advanced.<sup>76</sup> In contrast to the majority of studies on Revelation, the present study will focus on cosmology rather than eschatology, though the interrelatedness of the two means that at times the eschatological dimension of the text will be illuminated.

#### *1.2.4) Cosmology and the Book of Revelation*

We now turn to literature on cosmology and the book of Revelation, firstly treating those works for which cosmology was the primary topic and then those that contribute to the topic while focusing on another subject. The first item of scholarship devoted to the cosmology of Revelation was a book chapter by Paul Minear, 'The Cosmology of the Apocalypse'.<sup>77</sup> Minear concentrated on the relationship between heaven and earth in Revelation and found that the realms are strongly interconnected in the narrative with happenings on earth determined by events in heaven.<sup>78</sup> He wrestled with the ambiguity in the use of οὐρανός, which can refer to both the physical heavens, as in the sky and astral realm, or the transcendent realm of divine beings. He arrived at a somewhat awkward resolution in

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<sup>75</sup> Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 90–134, 198–217, for example, the number four relates to the cardinal points of the earth and twelve, in addition to its association with the tribes of Israel, connoted the twelve signs of the zodiac.

<sup>76</sup> Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 216–17; and Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John', *JBL* 96 (1977) 246.

<sup>77</sup> Paul S. Minear, 'The Cosmology of the Apocalypse', *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honour of Otto A. Piper* (ed. William Klassen and Grayden F. Snyder; London: SCM, 1962) 23–37.

<sup>78</sup> Minear, 'Cosmology of the Apocalypse', 24–7.

describing a ‘third heaven’ or ‘the above the above’, which is where God resides and out of which both the new heaven and new earth emerge.<sup>79</sup> Other scholars are content to let the ambiguity stand unresolved, which is the better approach given the undefined relationship between the material heavens and transcendent heaven in cosmologies of the ancient world.<sup>80</sup>

Minear also raised a question that others would return to, that is, whether Revelation has a cosmology at all, where cosmology is understood to involve description of the physical cosmos.<sup>81</sup> Minear does not firmly answer the question, though McDonough decides that because of the visionary nature of Revelation we cannot gain insights from it on John’s view of the physical cosmos; instead, John presents us with a dream world, though he acknowledges it is a dream about *this* world.<sup>82</sup> The question revolves around the definition of cosmology. If it is primarily a ‘scientific’ description of the physical world, as John Collins suggests was the case when it was developed in the sixth century by the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers, then there is not much cosmological material in Revelation.<sup>83</sup> However, in this study cosmology will be defined more broadly to include the description of the existence, spatial location, and relationships of various powers and entities through a process which involves mapping them onto the cosmos.<sup>84</sup> By this definition Revelation presents a genuine cosmology. An example of such an approach to cosmology is Michael Labahn’s study of Revelation’s *apokalyptische Geographie* and its *Sinnatlas*, or meaning map.<sup>85</sup> Labahn’s

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<sup>79</sup> Minear, ‘Cosmology of the Apocalypse’, 32–3.

<sup>80</sup> For example, McDonough, ‘Climax of Cosmology’, 180; Michael Labahn, ‘„Apokalyptische“ Geographie: Einführende Überlegungen zu einer Toponomie der Johannesoffenbarung’, *Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (ed. Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu; Leuven: Peeters, 2011) 111; and on the relationship between the material and transcendent heavens, Mauser, “Heaven”, 33.

<sup>81</sup> Minear, ‘Cosmology of the Apocalypse’, 37.

<sup>82</sup> McDonough, ‘Climax of Cosmology’, 178–80.

<sup>83</sup> John J. Collins, ‘Cosmology: Time and History’, *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (ed. Sarah Iles Johnston; Cambridge: Belknap, 2004) 59.

<sup>84</sup> See section 4.1 for a detailed definition of cosmology.

<sup>85</sup> Even though Labahn ‘„Apokalyptische“ Geographie’, 110, distinguishes his concepts from cosmology.

contribution is significant because he considered how Revelation's *Sinnatlas* functioned in positioning the communities addressed in relation to their social and political environment.<sup>86</sup> He proposed that the function was to set John's communities in opposition to other Christian communities more accommodating of the surrounding culture and against society in general, especially regarding the worship of Roman emperors.<sup>87</sup> Like Labahn, the present thesis will interpret Revelation's cosmology in relation to its social setting.

There are four other recent studies on cosmology and Revelation which will be commented on before a lengthier treatment of Hansen's study. John Marshall interpreted Revelation in relation to Roman historians such as Tacitus and Dio Cassius, proposing that both Revelation and these histories were written in response to the period of political uncertainty that followed the death of Nero.<sup>88</sup> He justified the comparison on the basis that both kinds of text operated within a shared cosmological framework by which earthly phenomena were explained with reference to heavenly realities.<sup>89</sup> For the Roman historians it was that legitimate earthly rule was divinely indicated by astrological phenomena and other signs. In Revelation, the place of Christian communities on earth was justified by Christ's position in heaven.<sup>90</sup> The significance of Marshall's brief study is its recognition of the potential for bringing Revelation into dialogue with Roman sources. Furthermore, Marshall comments, 'This study has proceeded with primarily narrative literary data, but the understandings of heaven and earth that underpin the conversations I have tracked have their roots in a more widely distributed coordination of heavenly and earthly rule.'<sup>91</sup> The present

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<sup>86</sup> Labahn, '„Apokalyptische“ Geographie', 121, 141–3.

<sup>87</sup> Labahn, '„Apokalyptische“ Geographie', 121.

<sup>88</sup> John W. Marshall, 'Who's on the Throne? Revelation in the Long Year', *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (ed. Ra'anan S. Boustán and Annette Yoshiko Reed; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 123–41.

<sup>89</sup> Marshall, 'Who's on the Throne?', 124–5.

<sup>90</sup> Marshall, 'Who's on the Throne?', 127.

<sup>91</sup> Marshall, 'Who's on the Throne?', 141.

thesis will explore the ‘widely distributed’ heaven and earth framework and consider how the cosmologies of Revelation and Rome were both similar and different.

Sigve Tonstad looked at the cosmological narrative of Revelation in relation to the theological function of ‘*Pistis Iesou*’.<sup>92</sup> In keeping with the theological focus of the study, he identified a concern in the text beyond the pressures faced by Christians living in the Roman Empire, that is, that Revelation is a theodicy that demonstrates the ultimacy of God’s rule by narrating his victory over evil in heaven and then earth.<sup>93</sup> Tonstad’s recognition of the importance of following the cosmic narrative in interpreting Revelation is valuable.<sup>94</sup> Sean Michael Ryan adopted a novel approach in his attempt to determine how the educational level of an ancient ‘hearer’ of the text might impact on their understanding of the cosmological language in Rev 9.<sup>95</sup> He formulated two ‘hearer constructs’, one with a more basic Greek education that only included the poets, such as Homer, and which therefore exposed the student only to the mythological three-tier cosmology. The second had a higher level of education and was exposed to the teachings of Greek philosophers and so was acquainted with the Platonic-Aristotelean cosmology. His study illustrates the complexity of determining how contrasting cosmologies, for example the ‘mythological’ three-tier cosmos and the ‘scientific’ Platonic-Aristotelian multi-spheric geocentric cosmos, were related in ancient thinking. His framework, which assigns them to social strata of various educational levels, is problematic because individuals we would presume to be highly educated at times utilise the three-tier cosmology Ryan associated with a lower level of education. Such examples would include Virgil in the *Aeneid* and Plato himself in his concluding book of the

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<sup>92</sup> Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

<sup>93</sup> Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 36–7, 151, 193.

<sup>94</sup> Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 154.

<sup>95</sup> Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 1–6.

*Republic* known as the ‘Myth of Er’.<sup>96</sup> Accordingly, Ryan’s view that John’s lack of engagement with Platonic-Aristotelean cosmology indicates a limited education seems unwarranted.<sup>97</sup> Ryan also shows a limited awareness of various models of interaction between dominating and dominated cultures in imperial systems when he suggests that John would not have adopted the cosmology associated with Rome when his intention is to challenge the ideological centring of space and time in Rome. Postcolonial theory has identified various ways in which dominated cultures subversively adopt and adapt elements of the ideology of the culture to which they are subject.<sup>98</sup> It should be acknowledged that the relationship of John’s cosmology to Roman imperial cosmology is not a focus of Ryan’s study, as it is here.

The final study is a brief article by Gert Jordaan entitled, ‘Cosmology in the Book of Revelation’.<sup>99</sup> Jordaan engaged with the question of whether Revelation reveals to us John’s actual conception of the physical cosmos. His argument is captured in a concluding statement,

It is clear from the above that, although John in Revelation refers to heaven, earth and sea as the three basic components of the creation, he does not thereby subscribe to the three storied cosmology so typical to the ancient worldview, nor does he present any cosmology in the normal sense of the word. Rather, he tends to use heaven, earth and sea in a

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<sup>96</sup> See also Plato, *Phaed.* 112A–113C, where Tartarus is described.

<sup>97</sup> Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 71–2, who also suggests John’s inelegant use of the Greek language is evidence of his limited Greek *encyclical* education.

<sup>98</sup> For example, Homi Bhabha’s concepts of mimicry and hybridity by which a colonised group utilises the colonial discourse to negotiate its identity in relation to the colonial power. Jean-Pierre Ruiz, ‘Taking a Stand on the Seashore: A Postcolonial Exploration of Revelation 13’, *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (ed. David L. Barr; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 127, utilises such concepts in his analysis of Rev 13 and the imperial cult. In addition, postcolonial critics have used the term *catachresis*, originally a Greek term meaning misapplication, to describe how colonised entities subversively adapt colonial discourse. The concept was developed by Gayatri Spivak. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 105–6, employs this concept in his postcolonial reading of Revelation.

<sup>99</sup> Gert J. C. Jordaan, ‘Cosmology in the Book of Revelation’, *IDS* 47 (2013) 1–8.

metaphoric sense that ‘clearly transcended man’s definition of space. Certainly we cannot accuse him of holding a naïve three-storied idea of the physical world’.<sup>100</sup>

The matter of whether Revelation has a cosmology has been discussed already. Regarding Jordaan’s conclusion it may be argued that identifying the metaphoric value of features in John’s cosmology need not necessarily deny that those features also functioned as basic spatial referents; for example, heaven can be both a realm of transcendence as well as up above the stars. Another difference between our approach and that of Jordaan’s is that this thesis will endeavour to describe the cosmos as it appears in the narrative rather than diminish the significance of all spatial references in a quest to extract the metaphorical meaning of the text.

In a recent monograph, Hansen sets out to explore the theological and political implications of the cosmology of Revelation. He coins the phrase ‘rhetorical cosmology’, which he defines as ‘a discourse that participates in and constructs a particular world system’.<sup>101</sup> To further clarify the concept Hansen states that John is not simply interested in presenting the cosmos as it appeared to him but provides a cosmology in order to persuade his audience.<sup>102</sup> In particular, John shows the dismantling of the cosmos in its current form, which manifests Roman imperial discourse, and its replacement with the cosmos of Christ to reveal the superiority of the Christ over Caesar. He writes, ‘My argument in this study is that

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<sup>100</sup> Jordaan, ‘Cosmology’, 7. The quotation is from Minear, ‘Cosmology of the Apocalypse’, 34. In a similar fashion, Houtman, *Der Himmel*, 290–1, defended the ancient Israelites against claims of such naivety, saying that it should not be thought that the Israelites literally believed that heaven rested on the tops of mountains or that there were pillars under the earth.

<sup>101</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 2. He includes ‘participates in’ because he wishes to avoid implications he thinks stem from concepts such as ‘symbolic universe’ and ‘worldview’, that is, that cosmology is an exercise in developing concepts of the cosmos with no relation to objective reality.

<sup>102</sup> All cosmologies offer a perspective on the world and therefore seek to persuade an audience of a view of reality. In this sense, all cosmology is rhetorical. It is now commonly recognised that cartography, a discipline related to cosmology in that both seek to define and relate spaces, is not value neutral and that maps can be analysed for their ideological and even rhetorical content; see Emily Albu, *The Medieval Peutinger Map: Imperial Roman Revival in a German Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 29.

John's discourse about the world is not intended to reveal the secret and mysterious inner workings of the cosmos, but rather that John intends to pit his own cosmological discourse in opposition to this cultic discourse concerning the world.'<sup>103</sup>

While his is a theological study, Hansen recognises the necessity of grounding theology in history.<sup>104</sup> Accordingly he attempts a construction of Roman imperial cosmology based on historical evidence, especially the imperial cult which he thinks played a major role in the establishment and maintenance of that cosmology. Hansen writes, 'In Asia Minor under Roman rule in the first century, the discourse that sustained and shaped the world was centered around the gods, Caesar, and Imperial Rome. This discourse originated and was maintained by the imperial cult.'<sup>105</sup> Elsewhere he asserts that 'the imperial cult's primary function was the building of a cosmology'.<sup>106</sup> Hansen drew upon Steven Friesen's discussion of imperial cults and Revelation to establish that the cosmological implications of the administration of provincial and municipal imperial cults in the province of Asia was to establish Rome as a cosmic centre.<sup>107</sup> He also discussed the function of cults in general in establishing a contract between society and the gods which served to preserve the cosmic order.<sup>108</sup> So in Hansen's opinion, Roman cosmology was fundamentally cultic; the imperial cult established Rome as the centre of the cosmos and cults in general maintained the order of the cosmos.

Hansen's exegesis of the text of Revelation focused on the three septets of seals, trumpets, and bowls and he proposed that these series of judgments affected the dismantling

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<sup>103</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 8.

<sup>104</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 3. That said, the discussion of authorship and date is limited to a single footnote.

<sup>105</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 8.

<sup>106</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 52. It seems more reasonable to argue that imperial cults were an expression of that discourse and, as Price argued in *Rituals and Power*, a response to the recognition of Roman power and an attempt to accommodate that into the social fabric of various cultures in the Empire.

<sup>107</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 40; and Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 124–7, 152–66.

<sup>108</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 50–6.

of the cosmos. God acts against the cosmos because, ‘The judgment and defeat of Rome requires that the world that sustains and makes Rome possible must be dismantled—the world of idolatry must be unmade.’<sup>109</sup> Hansen thinks that John’s rhetorical aim is to exhort the churches to participate in God’s cosmic demolition by aligning themselves to his coming kingdom. This is achieved through non-participation in the imperial cult and the economy in general, and through declaring God’s coming kingdom in praise.<sup>110</sup> These two activities are labelled silence and praise, hence the title of his book.

There are several points at which Hansen’s study and ours intersect. Both consider cosmology an important theme of Revelation and see it as instrumental in the rhetorical strategy of the text. Furthermore, both envision a clash between the cosmology of John and that of Roman imperial ideology. Hansen makes an important point, saying, ‘This sets up a collision between two worlds, or rather two accounts of the world, existing in the same space and time. Two rhetorical cosmologies exist as alternatives.’<sup>111</sup> He also recognises the value of images in constructing Roman imperial cosmology and uses as evidence the Tellus relief of the *Ara Pacis*, the Prima Porta statue of Augustus, and a coin type showing Julius Caesar

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<sup>109</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 154.

<sup>110</sup> Hansen does not elaborate on what it would involve for the saints living in the province of Asia to not participate in the Roman economy. It does not seem he has in mind only the avoidance of trade guilds, as Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 30, suggests, but rather any activity that would involve handling Roman coinage. Beyond that, his explanations are somewhat cryptic; for example, Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 60, ‘In other words, non-participation is not just a call out from society, but is the means of interacting with others within society and the economy. Non-participation is John’s strategy for participation in society’.

<sup>111</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 69.



with a comet, the *sidus Iulium*, overhead.<sup>112</sup> However, it must be said that his analysis is somewhat limited and typically relays the findings of a couple of key scholars.<sup>113</sup>

There are several points at which our study will build upon and complement the work of Hansen. Firstly, a more thorough historical construction of Roman imperial cosmology will be attempted by drawing on a wider range of sources and using these to establish the defining elements of this cosmology. This analysis will lead to a significant observation not recognised in Hansen's discussion, namely, that crucial elements of Rome's cosmos are *not* depicted in Revelation. These include that Roman rule was in harmony with the gods and that Roman rule was legitimated by the presence of the emperors in heaven. It should be noted that both elements would be essential features of a cultic cosmology as cultic activity was typically undergirded by the notion of the heavenly dwelling of the object of the cult.<sup>114</sup> This observation leads to a more nuanced reading of John's rhetorical strategy in engaging Rome which shows how he critiques it in the process of distorting its cosmology to accommodate it to his own. Furthermore, John's rhetorical strategy revolves more around his denial of the Roman cosmos than his destruction of it.

In the present thesis, the historical investigation will also seek to analyse Revelation's cosmology in its local setting, that is, in the province of Asia at the end of the first century. Therefore, an attempt is made to describe how Roman imperial cosmology was received and adapted in the construction of a cosmology belonging to the cities of Asia. John's cosmology will be compared to this Asian cosmology and its engagement with Roman imperial ideology. This will allow for the consideration of not only the way that cosmologies may

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<sup>112</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 54–6, states that in addition to the imperial cult, images have a key role in establishing cosmology. Hansen writes that images 'constructed the entire cosmos in which Roman citizens lived'.

<sup>113</sup> Especially the views of Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (U.S.A.: University of Michigan Press, 1990).

<sup>114</sup> Though some deities occupied other realms in the cosmos, such as the underworld or the sea.

clash and compete but also how they may be assimilated, as was the case by civic elites in the province of Asia as well as by some within the Christian communities of Asia.

Secondly, our study will consider how Revelation's cosmology develops in relation to the narrative of the text and its plot development. This approach will provide some important insights, for example, that the story of the conflict between Rome and the saints is not the main subject of the narrative but rather features as a subplot of the greater narrative of the conflict between God and Satan. This approach also assists with explaining why Rome, which is supposedly the central concern in the theme of cosmic conflict, is absent from the narrative not only in the oracles to the churches (Rev 2–3) which set the scene for the extended vision narrative but also in the first half of the extended vision narratives themselves (Rev 4–12).<sup>115</sup> The explanation relates to an aspect of the rhetorical situation addressed below; in brief, John introduces Rome later in the narrative because while he considers Rome a crucial source of opposition to the unfolding of God's plans, his rivals did not and the delay in Rome's appearance in the narrative is designed for maximal rhetorical impact. John draws his audience into the narrative before dramatically confronting them with the view that Rome is nothing less than an instrument of Satan.

Finally, our study will build on Hansen's by exploring cosmology in a rhetorical situation involving internal rivalry between John and other Christian leaders named in the text as 'Jezebel', 'Balaam', and the 'Nicolaitans'. This rhetorical situation had been outlined by Duff and others.<sup>116</sup> If John was primarily seeking to persuade those potentially under the influence of the teaching of his rivals, then the following questions are suggested, *Which aspects of John's cosmology would stand out to such an audience?* And, relatedly, *How*

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<sup>115</sup> The Beast appears in Rev 11.7 but it is not until Rev 13 that it becomes clear that John has Rome in mind when he refers to the Beast. In the septets, which are the focus of Hansen's exegesis, it is only the final septet of the bowls in which Rome is an object of judgment.

<sup>116</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*; and Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*.

*might John's cosmology compare and contrast with that of his rivals?* The present study will address these questions by following the suggestion of numerous scholars that John's rivals may have been influenced by elements of Paul's teaching, and based on this supposition, a hypothetical cosmology of John's rivals will be proposed and compared to John's.<sup>117</sup> Consequently, John's cosmology will be contrasted not only to Rome's but also to a rival Christian cosmology.

Having considered those studies primarily focused on Revelation's cosmology, a few other studies that make a significant contribution will be mentioned. Dieter Georgi, in his essay 'Who Is the True Prophet?', contrasts John with Roman 'prophets' such as Horace and Virgil.<sup>118</sup> His argument is that John's vision questioned the official view of reality and the political ideology of the principate in part through relating the historical experience of the churches to the heavenly sphere.<sup>119</sup> He therefore recognised that Revelation's cosmology was a factor in the text's engagement with Roman ideology. David A. deSilva developed this idea in his article, 'The Construction and Social Function of a Counter-Cosmos in the Revelation of John', and concluded that Revelation's alternative cosmology functioned to relativise what was presented as absolute in the sociopolitical domain of the Roman order.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> The view was developed by the Tübingen School but recent support is in Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 122–4; Panayotis Coutsoumpas, 'The Social Implication of Idolatry in Revelation 2:14: Christ or Caesar?', *BTB* 27 (1997) 24–5; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 195; Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 58; Paul B. Duff, 'Wolves in Sheep's Clothing: Literary Opposition and Social Tension in the Revelation of John', *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (ed. David L. Barr; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 79 n. 22; Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004) 335; and Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus*, 19. Frankfurter, 'Jews or Not?', 419–22, thinks the 'so-called Jews', along with Jezebel and the Nicolaitans, belonged to the Pauline or neo-Pauline section of the 'Jesus movement'.

<sup>118</sup> Dieter Georgi, 'Who Is the True Prophet?', *HTR* 79 (1986) 100–26.

<sup>119</sup> Georgi, 'True Prophet', 123–4.

<sup>120</sup> David A. deSilva, 'The Construction and Social Function of a Counter-Cosmos in the Revelation of John', *Forum* 9 (1993) 55.

Several scholars have applied the sociological concept of a ‘symbolic universe’ in their interpretation of Revelation. The idea was developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in relation to their concept of ‘legitimation’ of social orders.<sup>121</sup> One such example is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who states, ‘The symbolic universe and world vision in Rev., I argue in chapter 7, is a “fitting response” to its socio-political “rhetorical situation.” It seeks to alienate the audience from the symbolic persuasion of the imperial cult, to help them overcome their fear so that they not only can decide for the worship and power of God and against that of the emperor but also to stake their lives on this decision.’<sup>122</sup> The concept of a symbolic universe, as developed by Berger and Luckmann at least, includes but extends beyond representations of the cosmos to include the entire system of symbolic values that shape human actions and interactions. Nonetheless, the concept is useful in relating conceptions of the world to the social location and interactions of groups and individuals in a society.

Leonard Thompson is one of the few commentators on Revelation who considered cosmology in any detail. In particular, he explored the significance of cosmic boundaries and the crossing of them in relation to social groups.<sup>123</sup> He suggested that Revelation’s cosmos has soft boundaries because homologous aspects exist either side of them and because they

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<sup>121</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1966) 110–34.

<sup>122</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 6, 187. To further illustrate, Judy Diehl, “‘Babylon’: Then, Now and “Not Yet”: Anti-Roman Rhetoric in the Book of Revelation’, *CBR* 11 (2013) 184, comments, ‘Instead, Revelation is offered as a ‘symbolic universe’ (an eschatological future) that gives permission for the Christian believers to resist the opposing, prevailing representations of the imperial society.’ Leonard Thompson, ‘A Sociological Analysis of Tribulation in the Apocalypse of John’, *Semeia* 36 (1986) 147, 164–5, is critical of the application of this concept where it reduces Revelation to having only a socio-psychological function as it does not allow enough reality to the alternative symbolic universe which he sees as participating in society itself. See too, Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 28. Also critical is Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 6–7, who thinks the concept denies the reality of John’s message.

<sup>123</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 75–91.

can be crossed, for example, the saints rise to heaven and Satan is expelled from heaven to earth.<sup>124</sup> He even stated there was no impermeable boundary between God and Satan because of similarities in their depiction, for example, both have thrones (Rev 2.13; 4.2).<sup>125</sup> However, as Friesen has observed, in Revelation these similarities are compared in order to be contrasted and so actually reinforce boundaries rather than weaken them.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, while Thompson suggests that boundary-crossing experiences were transformational in nature, it may be better to consider them as declarative in nature. For example, Satan is not transformed from a state of power and honour to weakness and shame when he moves from heaven to earth, rather, he is expelled from heaven because he is defeated and hence weak, and because he opposed God and so is morally corrupt.

Friesen's study on imperial cults and Revelation included a section on Revelation's cosmology and analysed the imperial cult in terms of its cosmological implications.<sup>127</sup> His thesis is that the imperial cults served to centre cosmic space on Rome. He also related these cosmologies to John's rhetorical strategy, arguing that for John's audience Jerusalem and Rome competed as cosmic centres but in Revelation both are decentralised in favour of the heavenly throne room of God.<sup>128</sup> Finally, the commentaries on Revelation by David Barr and James Resseguie are significant because they provide a narratological study of Revelation's cosmology in terms of setting, plot, and point of view.<sup>129</sup>

To conclude this review of the literature the distinctive features of the present study will be outlined. This study will build on previous work by providing a detailed

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<sup>124</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 86–7.

<sup>125</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 82.

<sup>126</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 161–2.

<sup>127</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 12–13, 124–5, 152–7.

<sup>128</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 162–3.

<sup>129</sup> Barr, *Tales of the End*, 4, 62–7, 90, 104, 115–17; and James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 3, 7–8, 15–18, 23, 38–43, 80–91, 152–3, 166–7, 191.

reconstruction of Roman imperial cosmology based on a range of sources including literary texts and material artefacts. It will consider the local manifestation of Roman imperial cosmology in the province of Asia during the Flavian era and especially how the province incorporated and adapted that cosmology. It will also read Revelation's cosmology as an aspect of John's rhetorical strategy aimed at those potentially under the influence of his Christian rivals. Finally, an understanding of Revelation's cosmology will be developed out of a narrative reading of the text.

### 1.3) Outline of the Thesis

The structure of the thesis will be outlined along with the provision of an overview of each chapter. In chapter 2, the methodology to be applied in the thesis will be established. This will be a literary and historical study which is attentive to the ideological and social dimensions of the text of Revelation. The text will be studied as a narrative and its rhetorical dimensions explored partly by the application of sociological theory developed by Peter Berger. Chapter 3, 'The Context and Content of Revelation', will provide the historical and literary setting of the text of Revelation. Chapter 4, 'Cosmology and Its Relationship to Ideology and Social Identity', will discuss the nature of cosmology and provide a framework for relating it to ideology and the formation of social identity. Chapter 5, 'Ancient Cosmologies', will include a discussion of cosmologies from the ancient Near East and Greco-Roman world, including early Jewish and Christian cosmologies. Chapter 6, 'The Cosmological Dimension of Roman Imperial Ideology', will investigate the place of cosmology in Roman imperial ideology. Key features of this cosmology will be discussed in three subsections: 'Heaven and Earth in Harmony under Roman *Imperium*' (6.1); 'Roman Rule to the Ends of the Earth' (6.2); 'A Flavian Heaven: Roman Rule in Heaven' (6.3); and 'Roman Cosmology in the *Poleis* of the Province of Asia' (6.4). Chapter 7, 'The Cosmology of the Book of Revelation', contains a detailed analysis of Revelation's cosmology, first in terms of the key cosmological referents in the text and then in terms of the function of its

cosmology in the narrative. Chapter 8, 'The Cosmology of Revelation: Engaging with Rome, the Province, and John's Rivals', will bring together the discussions of cosmology in relation to Rome, the province of Asia, and John's rivals in the churches. The aim is to locate the rhetorical function of cosmology in Revelation in the context of engagement with Roman imperial cosmology, with civic ideology in the province of Asia, and with the cosmology of John's rivals. A summary of the argument and presentation of the conclusions will be set out in the final chapter.

## 2) Methodology

Methodologies suited to the varied nature of the evidence will be used to analyse the cosmology of Revelation in relation to the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology. The approach will be to examine cosmological conceptions in the expression of Roman imperial ideology, firstly as issued from Rome itself and then as it was developed and deployed in the province of Asia under the Flavians. The function of Revelation's cosmology in its rhetorical strategy will be analysed in relation to Rome's cosmology and then in relation to a proposed cosmological framework belonging to John's rivals. In the present chapter, the methodology of the thesis will be outlined and its relationship to other relevant methodologies described. In brief, the thesis is an historical and literary study focusing on the ideological and social dimensions of the text of Revelation. Nickelsburg introduces the methodology employed in his commentary on 1 Enoch by observing the complementarity of literary and historical approaches.<sup>1</sup> Historical investigation contributes to an understanding of the text's images and symbolism as well as its social setting and rhetorical strategy.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as Thompson has observed, a literary text is an integrated component of a historical, social setting and so literary analysis of the text provides insights into that setting.<sup>3</sup> The two approaches also recognise the nature of the text as both a literary creation and a historical artefact. The literary form invites examination of its literary nature. In the present study, the narrative and rhetorical dimensions of the text will be examined. By considering

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<sup>1</sup> Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 1–3. Literary studies which focus on a text as narrative sometimes do not consider the historical setting, though narrative and historical approaches are compatible; see Mark A. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 83, 98, and S. Scott Bartchy, 'Narrative Criticism', *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments* (ed. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1997) 787–92.

<sup>2</sup> Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 74.

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 28–30. A text may have multiple social settings, both within one historical setting due to diversity in the social situation of the audience, as well as between various historical settings. The study of reception history explores the second of these possibilities.



the place of cosmology in the entire narrative rather than only in sections, observations may be made on cosmological developments that occur as the plot progresses and reaches its resolution. As an historical artefact, the text engages with social, cultural, and ideological dimensions of its setting. These dimensions will be explored in relation to historical literary sources as well as material artefacts and the images associated with them. In the following section, the methodology will be outlined according to statements about the nature of the text of Revelation.

### 2.1) Revelation Is an Historical Artefact – Historical Criticism

In a review of contemporary methods in reading Revelation, David Barr commented that varying approaches typically take historical analysis as the starting point.<sup>4</sup> So too here, investigation of the historical situation is of primary importance. The focus will be upon the original historical context which, as will be argued for at a later point, is late in the reign of Domitian, around 95 CE, in the Roman province of Asia, also known as Asia Minor.<sup>5</sup> To some extent, the text of Revelation provides information about its intended audience, though caution must be exercised whenever an argument is made to establish the historical audience based on the representation of the audience in the text.<sup>6</sup> Beyond the text itself, other early Jewish and Christian texts are the primary sources that may be used to develop an idea of the sociohistorical situation of the audience.<sup>7</sup> The position to be argued for in the present study is

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<sup>4</sup> David L. Barr, 'Reading Revelation Today: Consensus and Innovations', *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (ed. David L. Barr; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 5–6.

<sup>5</sup> Some recent studies, such as Eva Maria Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City in the Apocalypse of John* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), interpret the text in various historical settings.

<sup>6</sup> Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*, 97, considers it a small yet permissible hermeneutic leap to suggest what is likely regarding the historical author and readers based on the presentation of them in the text.

<sup>7</sup> Some recent studies of the NT have also drawn upon archaeology to construct a plausible social setting as a framework for interpretation; for example, Peter Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level* (London: SPCK, 2009).

that John's intended audience were to varying degrees under the influence of the rivals he identifies in Rev 2–3; that is, Jezebel, Balaam, and the Nicolaitans. In the final section of the thesis an attempt will be made to imagine how John's rivals and those under their influence might have represented the cosmos. This will allow for a comparison of the cosmologies of John and his rivals. Any construction of a rival cosmology must be tentative in nature due to the lack of certainty about their identity and the absence of explicit cosmological statements pertaining to them. The suggestion made by several scholars that John's rivals may have been influenced by Paul's teaching will provide the rationale for constructing a cosmology based on the Pauline corpus.<sup>8</sup> This approach is in some ways similar to that of Ryan, who developed various hypothetical 'hearer constructs' based on educational level and then interpreted Rev 9 with respect to each construct.<sup>9</sup> Here, John's cosmology will be contrasted to a hypothetical yet plausible alternative Christian cosmology that could have been used to legitimise support for Roman power and to allow for greater sociopolitical engagement than John seems to permit.

Before considering the local provincial setting for Revelation, the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology will be constructed based on a range of sources including literary texts and images on a range of material artefacts including coins. These sources are derived primarily from the early imperial period spanning the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties. The approach will be to start with the Augustan era and trace themes into the Flavian era where possible. The reason for this approach is that under Augustus the

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<sup>8</sup> See section 8.3.3. There will be some analysis of NT texts considered deuterio-Pauline, such as Ephesians and Colossians, on the basis that they may represent a Pauline trajectory in early Christian cosmology. This trajectory is significant to the present thesis because, as Robert M. Royalty, Jr., *The Origin of Heresy: A History of Discourse in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2013) 165, observes, the composition of the deuterio-Pauline texts and John's prophetic activity probably took place during the same period of time in the province of Asia, and in section 8.3 the cosmology of Revelation will be compared to possible interpretations of Paul's cosmology in the province of Asia late in the first century.

<sup>9</sup> Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 1–6.

parameters of Roman imperial discourse were substantially established and later developments can be analysed in relation to that framework.<sup>10</sup> There was a particularly strong connection between Vespasian and Augustus because in many ways the former modelled himself on the latter to present himself as a founder of a new dynasty. For this reason, there was a resurgence of Augustan themes in iconography under the Flavians.<sup>11</sup>

The incorporation of a range of sources encompassing both literature and material artefacts is one feature of an approach that has become known as ‘new historicism’. According to Gina Hens-Piazza, this approach has four key tenets: 1. Literature is integrally tied to material realities which together establish the social context; 2. Literature should not be privileged over material artefacts or other social practices; 3. A sharp distinction between literature and history should not be made; and 4. Constructions of the past are intimately tied to the present.<sup>12</sup> These tenets of new historicism can be seen to occur in the present study apart from the fourth as there will be no discussion of contemporary contexts or issues. Another feature of this study which distinguishes it from the practice of new historicism is the focus on the text of Revelation as a whole rather than adopting a ‘close reading’ approach focused on a narrow selection, the latter being preferred by scholars practicing new historicism.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to tracing developments through time from Augustus to Domitian, there is also the need to shift the focus from the centre of the empire to the province of Asia.<sup>14</sup> This

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<sup>10</sup> Zanker, *Power of Images*, 4, 338.

<sup>11</sup> Scott, *Imperial Cult*, 25–39.

<sup>12</sup> Gina Hens-Piazza, *The New Historicism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002) 6. See also the discussion of the method in Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000) 2, 19, who state that New Historicism is not in fact a repeatable methodology. See also the discussion of the method in Mark K. George, *Israel's Tabernacle as Social Space* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009) 34–5, for an application in biblical studies.

<sup>13</sup> Gallagher and Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism*, 31–41.

<sup>14</sup> This relates to the broader issue of Romanisation, which is addressed in section 6.4.

task is crucial to the study of Revelation in its historical setting. Price is rightly critical of studies that fail to attend to the task, observing with regard to Empire-critical studies of Paul in particular that it is not legitimate to move smoothly from imperial Rome to the provinces, for example, from the *Ara Pacis* and poetry of Horace to the Greek East.<sup>15</sup> Rather, attention must be paid to the local reception of such imagery and concepts.<sup>16</sup> David Aune also comments on the issue in an article on the influence of Roman imperial court ceremonial on Revelation, ‘Yet a third difficulty is the problem of how a provincial resident of the eastern Mediterranean world could possibly know enough about the ceremonial of the imperial court to use it as a model for the ceremonial of the heavenly throne room.’<sup>17</sup> Ann Kuttner proposes that there is a need to supply a plausible mechanism by which the audience could have viewed the images, or other artefacts, supposed to have influenced them.<sup>18</sup> Aune does this in his study of imperial court ceremonial, suggesting knowledge was spread to the provinces through Greek and Latin panegyric and in the rhetorical works of the Second Sophistic, through Roman art, and by coinage.<sup>19</sup> However, sometimes there is a lack of evidence on which to propose a mechanism yet an influence can be considered likely based on the similarity of the provincial artefact to one known in Rome. Mary Beard *et al.* make such an inference with reference to sculptured reliefs in Carthage that appear to be influenced by the Tellus relief of the *Ara Pacis*.<sup>20</sup> In addition, John J. Collins, in discussing apocalyptic literature in general, appealed to a common atmosphere of ideas and attitudes which

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<sup>15</sup> Price, ‘Response’, 177.

<sup>16</sup> Price, ‘Response’, 177.

<sup>17</sup> David E. Aune, ‘The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John’, *BR* 28 (1983) 6.

<sup>18</sup> Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 201.

<sup>19</sup> Aune, ‘Court Ceremonial’, 6. To this list Beard *et al.*, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1*, 319, would add inscriptions and note that images were significant in communicating aspects of imperial ideology to the less educated population.

<sup>20</sup> Beard *et al.*, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1*, 331–3, which explicitly states that it is not clear how knowledge of the Roman monuments was transmitted to Carthage.

influenced the literature even when direct borrowings could not be documented.<sup>21</sup> By this understanding it is not necessary to suppose that John and his audience directly encountered the images or texts that represent imperial discourse, rather, it can be suggested that these illustrate and are indicative of an atmosphere of ideas which John and his audience encountered in various ways, many of which could be unknown to modern scholars. Nonetheless, there is evidence that demonstrates that certain concepts featuring in Roman imperial discourse and originating in or around Rome did spread to the provinces where they were imitated but also adapted to suit local purposes. This local evidence enables us to establish distinctive manifestations of Roman imperial ideology in provincial discourses. A prime example is the municipal imperial cult at Aphrodisias which featured an impressive array of cosmological imagery.<sup>22</sup> Such historical evidence will be used to construct a plausible cosmology of residents living in the cities of Asia. This cosmology is likely to more directly represent the views of the elite who were responsible for producing artefacts such as imperial cult temples.<sup>23</sup> The extent to which they also reflect the views of the general populace cannot be known with certainty; however, participation in imperial cults and associated festivals and games was not limited to the elite of society and so all sections of Asian society were exposed to the images and inscriptions connected with them and took part in the ritual activity.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Aphrodisias is in the southwestern region of the province of Asia, where the seven churches listed in Revelation were located. That it is not one of those seven churches is not problematic because the Sebasteion and its iconography attests to regional responses to Rome.

<sup>23</sup> Ruiz, 'Taking a Stand', 129; Steven J. Friesen, 'Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13', *JBL* 123 (2004) 309–10; and Greg Carey, 'The Book of Revelation as Counter-Imperial Script', *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2008) 166.

<sup>24</sup> Price, *Rituals and Power*, 105–7; Steven J. Friesen, 'The Cult of the Roman Emperors in Ephesos: Temple Wardens, City Titles, and the Interpretation of the Revelation of John', *Ephesos Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture* (ed. Helmut Koester; Pennsylvania:

## 2.2) Revelation Is Narrative – Narrative Criticism

According to Mark Allan Powell, narrative criticism developed in the 1940s to counter the idea that the author's historical situation was the key factor in interpreting a text.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to this view, narrative critics explored the meaning of the text within the bounds of the features of the text itself. They also maintained that reading a text in this way was an end in itself, that is, it did not need to provide insights into the author or the historical situation in which the text was produced. In terms of the study of the NT as narrative, pioneering critics were David Rhoads, who coined the term 'narrative criticism', Jack D. Kingsbury, Robert C. Tannehill, and R. Alan Culpepper.<sup>26</sup> Narrative criticism assumes the unity of the text and does not engage with the issue of source criticism.<sup>27</sup> It reads a text in terms of standard narrative features, including plot, setting, characters, and point of view or focalisation, and in terms of narrative devices like repetition, intercalation, inclusion, rhythm, climax, and shifts in narrative time. In doing so it assumes that essential features of narratives are continuous over time and in various localities and so anachronism is an inherent risk.<sup>28</sup> Narrative criticism distinguishes between the actual author and reader(s) and those implied

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Trinity, 1995) 249–50; and David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 18. Determining the significance of participation in rituals is a fraught process. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) 2–29, 55–66, 91–3, shows that subordinate groups can appear to show support in acting out such rituals while simultaneously acting in resistance to the dominant power they seemingly defer to.

<sup>25</sup> Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 4–5.

<sup>26</sup> Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, cvi–cx, is critical of this assumption of narrative criticism and adopts a source-critical methodology. He is not convinced by scholars like Bauckham, *Climax*, 1, who find Revelation to be one of the most unified works in the NT. However, the assumption of unity made in narrative critical readings of Revelation does not necessarily deny a complex compositional history but only recognises benefit in viewing the text as a unity.

<sup>28</sup> Mark A. Powell, 'Narrative Criticism', *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. J. B. Green; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 255.

by the text, it also distinguishes the implied author from the narrator.<sup>29</sup> Such distinctions are helpful in reading Revelation; for example, they highlight the fact that Rev 2–3 depict the churches of Asia as *John* sees them or wants them to be seen. So too, in Revelation John is a character-narrator and so it is valid to distinguish this John from an historical ‘John of Patmos’ and to consider the narrative function of how his character is constructed. Key narrative commentaries on Revelation are those of Resseguie and David Barr, though many other studies apply narrative-critical techniques.<sup>30</sup>

Narrative criticism is applied in the present study because, as numerous scholars have observed, the story of Revelation is told as a cosmological narrative.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, instead of piecing together scattered cosmological references in the text to construct ‘the cosmology of Revelation’, the narrative will be followed to determine how the picture of the cosmos emerges and develops with the plot. The overall contribution of cosmology to the narrative will also be considered. The narrative critical approach is also fitting to the present study because it is well-suited to the investigation of ideology. Mieke Bal has pointed out that narrative analysis can be utilised to identify ideological positions.<sup>32</sup> This is because ideology is sometimes manifested in mythic narratives and Revelation itself can be viewed as a myth in narrative form.<sup>33</sup> In fact, Nicolas Wyatt has stated that myth can be defined as either

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<sup>29</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1978) 28. According to Bartchy, ‘Narrative Criticism’, 787–92, the aim of narrative criticism is to enable an actual reader to encounter the text from the perspective of the implied reader.

<sup>30</sup> Barr, *Tales of the End*; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*; also, Stephens, *Annihilation or Renewal?*

<sup>31</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘The Eschatology and Composition of the Apocalypse’, *CBQ* 30 (1968) 569; Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 193; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 23, 166–7, 191; and Labahn ‘„Apokalyptische“ Geographie’, 110–11.

<sup>32</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 13.

<sup>33</sup> Celia Deutsch, ‘Transformation of Symbols: The New Jerusalem in Rv 21:1–22:5’, *ZNW* 78 (1987) 108; and DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 286–7.

‘narrative theology’ or ‘narrative ideology’.<sup>34</sup> In summary, a narrative reading of Revelation will illuminate the place of cosmology in its theology or ideology and, once established, this may then be related to other cosmological and ideological constructions, such as those of imperial Rome, provincial elites in Asia, and John’s rivals. The features of Revelation’s narrative that will be analysed in detail are its structure, setting, plot, and to a lesser extent, its characters. Point of view is another aspect of Revelation that has been studied and is one that would be suited to a study of cosmology due to the spatial element of this aspect of a narrative but it will not feature significantly in this study as it provides relatively few substantial unique insights.<sup>35</sup>

### 2.3) Revelation Is a Persuasive Text – Rhetorical Criticism

Revelation was composed to have a persuasive effect on its audience and rhetorical criticism focuses on this dimension of texts. Aristotle described rhetoric as ‘the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion’ (*Rhet.* 1.2.1 [Freese]) and rhetorical criticism at its most basic level is the discernment of textual strategies that constitute a text’s persuasive design.<sup>36</sup> Rhetorical criticism involves either the analysis of a text in relation to ancient rhetorical techniques, as established in the handbooks of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, or the application of contemporary methods of rhetorical analysis. In the present

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<sup>34</sup> Nicolas Wyatt, ‘The Mythic Mind’, *SJOT* 15 (2001) 44–5; see also the discussion in Nicolas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001) 209.

<sup>35</sup> Note that spatial point of view is only one form of point of view that may be considered in a narrative reading of a text. For discussion of point of view in Revelation, see Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 3–8, 38–43; James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) 71; and Barr, *Tales of the End*, 90.

<sup>36</sup> Greg Carey, ‘Introduction: Apocalyptic Discourse, Apocalyptic Rhetoric’, *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. Greg Carey and L. Gregory Bloomquist; Missouri: Chalice, 1999) 13.



study, the latter approach will be taken.<sup>37</sup> Vernon K. Robbins introduced and developed a form of rhetorical criticism known as sociohistorical rhetorical criticism.<sup>38</sup> The elements of this method, as established by Robbins, are analysis of:

- ‘innertexture’ – looking at the words of the text itself;
- ‘intertexture’ – a text’s dialogue with other texts, and non-texts such as images and ritual acts; also known as intertextuality;
- ‘social texture’ and ‘cultural texture’ – looking at how a text engages with social and cultural dimensions of its world;
- ‘ideological texture’ – belief systems that are either explicitly or implicitly attested in the text; and
- ‘sacred texture’ – experiences of the divine in the text.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, loosely applies ancient rhetorical techniques in his rhetorical study of Revelation. On the validity of using such categories in Revelation, see Edith M. Humphrey, ‘In Search of a Voice: Rhetoric through Sight and Sound in Revelation 11:15–12:17’, *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. Greg Carey and L. Gregory Bloomquist; Missouri: Chalice, 1999) 145.

<sup>38</sup> The first comprehensive application of the method was in Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). Robbins went on to further define the method in Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretations* (Pennsylvania: Trinity International, 1996); and Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996). For an overview of the method, see David B. Gowler, ‘Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation: Textures of a Text and its Reception’, *JSNT* 33 (2010) 191–206; and Vernon K. Robbins, ‘Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation’, *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (ed. David E. Aune; West Sussex: Wiley & Sons, 2010) 192–219.

<sup>39</sup> Robbins, *Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*, 16. This summary is based on L. Gregory. Bloomquist, ‘Methodological Criteria for Apocalyptic Rhetoric: A Suggestion for the Expanded Uses of Sociorhetorical Analysis’, *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. Greg Carey and L. Gregory Bloomquist; Missouri: Chalice, 1999) 185–8. Note that Gowler, ‘Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation’, 195, thinks that the sacred texture is really an aspect of ideological texture.

Certain aspects of the methodology of the present thesis relate to the categories of analysis set out by Robbins. The analysis of Revelation's narrative clearly relates to innertexture.<sup>40</sup> The intertextuality of Revelation will be illuminated in the historical analysis of the text, for example, in relating it to other early Jewish and Christian writings, Greco-Roman texts, and to material artefacts. The social and ideological textures of Revelation will also be explored and to a lesser extent its cultural texture. While the divine is a core concern of Revelation, experiences of the divine in and through the text will not be addressed. Robbins has indicated that a sociorhetorical analysis need not include all those features he outlined and so the absence of some need not automatically disqualify the present study from being categorised as such. However, there are some significant differences between the methodology to be applied and a sociorhetorical analysis.<sup>41</sup> Firstly, a distinguishing characteristic of the sociorhetorical method is engagement with sources from the first century through to the modern day whereas in the present thesis only sources related to the original historical setting will be considered.<sup>42</sup> Secondly, this thesis is not organised or structured around the defining elements of the methodology as are many studies that purposively adopt a sociorhetorical approach.

In a study on Revelation's cosmology, Hansen comments, 'John presents for his audience, not a meditation on a sturdy and stable cosmos, but rather a *rhetorical* cosmology.'<sup>43</sup> A more critical view might recognise that all cosmological constructions seek to persuade someone of something, especially those involving the representation of a 'sturdy

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<sup>40</sup> In Greg Carey, 'The Ascension of Isaiah: Characterization and Conflict', *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. Greg Carey and L. Gregory Bloomquist; Missouri: Chalice, 1999) 163, the rhetorical approach involves determining how narrative dynamics serve argumentative purposes.

<sup>41</sup> Robbins, *Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Gowler, 'Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation', 192–3. Robbins, 'Socio-Rhetorical Criticism', 192–6, also notes that the method brings texts from different religious traditions into dialogue with one another.

<sup>43</sup> According to Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 2, a rhetorical cosmology is 'a discourse that participates in and constructs a particular world system'.

and stable cosmos', and therefore have a rhetorical dimension. An aim of this study is to determine through the analysis of Revelation's rhetoric the way that John employs cosmology to persuade his audience of the legitimacy of his perspective on proper engagement with society.

#### 2.4) Revelation Is a Social Product and Social Agent – Sociological Criticism

To properly interpret the book of Revelation it is important to recognise that the text is a social product and consequently its symbolism and meaning is rooted in its social setting.<sup>44</sup> It must also be recognised that the text is a social agent, that is, as a piece of rhetoric it was intended to effect social change and potentially did.<sup>45</sup> For these reasons an understanding of the social setting of Revelation is crucial. Methodologies which attempt to reconstruct a social setting based on a range of historical sources may be labelled sociohistorical or social-scientific. These approaches may be distinguished from a sociological approach which, in addition to analysis of historical sources, applies sociological theory to explain the social realities that appear in the sources.<sup>46</sup> The present thesis will adopt a sociological approach to explore Revelation's social function and to study its cosmology in relation to the identity and social location of the communities with which it was engaged.

Useful theoretical concepts for the sociological study of Revelation may be derived from several key studies belonging to the field of study known as the sociology of religion. Berger discusses cosmology in relation to social institutions including religious institutions.

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<sup>44</sup> John H. Elliott, *What Is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 11, states that comprehending the meaning of a text requires knowledge of the social system to which it belongs. This provides the 'reading scenario' and is important in preventing anachronistic and ethnocentric readings.

<sup>45</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 28–30, states that John's symbolic universe is part of the social setting and that the text of Revelation was a 'social exchange'.

<sup>46</sup> A distinction between sociohistorical and social-scientific methodologies and sociological approaches is discussed in Aune, 'Social Matrix', 16–17; and Elliott, *Social-Scientific Criticism*, 19–20.

He observes that, ‘Whatever the historical variations, the tendency is for the meanings of the humanly constructed order to be projected into the universe as such.’<sup>47</sup> He describes two related processes that connect social institutions to the cosmos; the first is ‘cosmization’, which he defines as the identification of the social order with the structure of the cosmos such that the former is grounded in the latter.<sup>48</sup> The second is ‘legitimation’, a broader process that involves the application of knowledge to explain or justify the social order.<sup>49</sup> Cosmization provides knowledge that serves legitimation. Keith Roberts applies Berger’s theory to situations in which there exist alternative paradigms and cosmologies in a society and observes that in such situations there is the potential for an individual’s or group’s worldview to become unconvincing, threatening the social values which rely upon it.<sup>50</sup> In such situations cosmization and legitimation are competitive processes and become mechanisms of preserving the identity of a group. Thompson discusses Revelation in similar terms, describing Revelation as a form of ‘deviant knowledge’ which John applied to justify the existence of his communities by attacking the cosmic order asserted by the Roman Empire.<sup>51</sup> Adams also applied Berger’s theory in relation to Paul’s cosmological language and concluded that Paul sometimes employed cosmology to legitimate the existing social order, for example in Romans, and sometimes to challenge it, for example in 1 Corinthians.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Garden City, 1967) 25.

<sup>48</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 27. Mircea Eliade, ‘Australian Religions: An Introduction. Part II’, *HR* 6 (1967) 215, also used the term ‘cosmicize’ in discussing Australian aboriginal religions and Georges Balandier, *Political Anthropology* (London: Allen Lane, 1970) 101, describes a similar context regarding ancient African societies. Daniel Miller, ‘The Limits of Dominance’, *Domination and Resistance* (ed. Michael Rowlands, Christopher Tilley, and Daniel Miller; London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) 66, provides a similar account of the role of ideological encounters between dominating and dominated social entities.

<sup>49</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 32.

<sup>50</sup> Keith A. Roberts, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (California: Wadsworth, 1990) 92.

<sup>51</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 181.

<sup>52</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 245–6.

Berger's sociological theory provides a valuable theoretical basis for analysing cosmology in relation to the formation of social identity. Some key elements of social identity are the nature and location of power and authority, the position of a group in relation to that power and authority, the nature of privilege and its social distribution, and the values of society in general. Sociological theory provides a framework for analysing the way that cosmology is used to explain, legitimate, and contest these elements.

Sociological studies have also discussed social order in terms of 'symbolic geography' or more commonly the 'symbolic universe'.<sup>53</sup> Lawrence Sullivan, who prefers an equivalent term 'religious geography', defines it as 'imaginal territory', which consists of things such as the heavenly realm, earthly worlds, watery depths, mountains, and forests.<sup>54</sup> Studies such as these tend to focus on the representation of the centre and periphery in the cosmos as well as boundaries and their crossing, which are categories of cosmological thought that will be used in the analysis of cosmology in Revelation and Roman imperial ideology.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Stephen Barton, 'Historical Criticism and Social Scientific Perspectives in New Testament Study', *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. J. B. Green; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 42.

Significant studies include Nicolas Wyatt, 'Sea and Desert: Symbolic Geography in West Semitic Religious Thought', *Ugarit-Forschungen* 19 (1987) 375–89; Wyatt, *Space and Time*; and Lawrence E. Sullivan, *Icanchu's Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions* (New York: Macmillan, 1988).

<sup>54</sup> Sullivan, *Icanchu's Drum*, 112.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (London: Harvill, 1961) 40–51; Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965) 9–17; Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); J. Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1978) 109–13, 291–3; Sullivan, *Icanchu's Drum*, 130–4, 139–52, 561–78; and Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 74–87.

## 2.5) Other Related Methodologies: Critical Spatiality

Before closing this chapter, two methodologies which have been applied to topics like that of the present study will be discussed in brief. The first is critical spatiality, which developed out of the work on spatiality by the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre contained in his book, *The Production of Space*.<sup>56</sup> Lefebvre analysed space according to three categories: spatial practice – the use of physical space; representations of space – how space is conceived mentally; and spaces of representation – the symbolic values attributed to space.<sup>57</sup> His key argument is that space is socially produced and this production can be scrutinised.<sup>58</sup> James W. Flanagan, and more recently Jon Berquist, have pioneered the application of critical spatiality to the field of biblical studies.<sup>59</sup> The value of critical spatiality to the present thesis is in the recognition of the close association between ideology and the conceptualisation, representation, and utilisation of space. Critical spatiality asserts that representations of space are not neutral but are driven by political and ideological perspectives.<sup>60</sup> A similar understanding of cosmology is applied in this thesis. Finally,

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<sup>56</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). The works of Edward Soja have also been influential. Like Lefebvre, Soja adopted a tripartite conceptualisation of space and his ‘Thirdspace’ became the focus of spatial critical studies of the NT, see Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden, MA.: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>57</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 33–40. Soja, *Thirdspace*, 66–87, has similar categories, labelled Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace.

<sup>58</sup> Note that such insights are not restricted to critical spatiality, for example, Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 291, states, ‘Religion is the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate ones “situation” so as to have “space” in which to meaningfully dwell.’

<sup>59</sup> James W. Flanagan, ‘Ancient Perceptions of Space/Perceptions of Ancient Space’, *Semeia* 87 (1999) 15–43; Jon L. Berquist, ‘Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World’, *‘Imagining’ Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social, and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan* (ed. David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002) 14–29; and Jon L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp, eds., *Constructions of Space I: Theory, Geography, and Narrative* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007). For a recent review of critical spatiality in NT studies, see Eric C. Stewart, ‘New Testament Space/Spatiality’, *BTB* 42 (2012) 139–50.

<sup>60</sup> Berquist, ‘Critical Spatiality’, 19; see also George, *Israel’s Tabernacle*, 25.

Lefebvre reasoned that social entities must produce space to survive and in a competitive environment a ‘trial by space’ occurs.<sup>61</sup> This echoes an observation made earlier about the possibility for cosmologies to be in competition.

## 2.6) Other Related Methodologies: Empire-critical and Postcolonial Studies

Empire-critical and postcolonial studies of biblical texts share some common elements and are sometimes grouped together. Despite this there are notable differences. Empire-critical studies, as the name suggests, are characterised by their focus on the theme of empire and they employ a range of interpretive techniques to explore how biblical texts engage with the topic. Empire-critical approaches have largely focused on Pauline writings due to the influence of scholars including Richard Horsley and N. T. Wright, and several studies in the ‘X and Empire’ and the ‘Paul in Critical Contexts’ series.<sup>62</sup> The empire-critical approach has been criticised by some scholars, such as John Barclay, for overstating the importance of empire in the NT and for the potential for eisegesis in relation to the identification of ‘hidden transcripts’ in the texts.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 219–20.

<sup>62</sup> For example, N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Pennsylvania: Trinity International, 1997); Richard A. Horsley, ed., *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2008); Davina C. Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul’s Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); and Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> For example, Barclay, *Pauline Churches*, 363–88, has a chapter entitled, ‘Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul’, which contains the substance of a debate between Barclay and N. T. Wright held at the 2007 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. For another recent evaluation of empire-critical studies, see Price, ‘Response’, 175–83; and McKnight and Modica, eds., *Jesus Is Lord*. On hidden transcripts, see Scott, *Hidden Transcripts*, and for the concept in NT interpretation, Judy Diehl, ‘Anti-Imperial Rhetoric in the New Testament’, *CBR* 10 (2011) 21–2; and James R. Harrison, *Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome: A Study in the Conflict of Ideology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 2, 28–37, which helpfully establishes criteria for identifying anti-imperial rhetoric.

Stephen Moore has argued that empire-critical studies should be differentiated from postcolonial studies because while they share an interest in the topic of empire, postcolonial studies have several distinguishing features.<sup>64</sup> Postcolonialism developed in the 1970s and became prominent in the 1990s under the influence of scholars such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, who in turn were influenced by post-structuralist philosophers such as Michel Foucault.<sup>65</sup> Postcolonial studies typically engage with the theory of philosophers such as these. The approach analyses texts to unveil the underlying relationships of power operating between the coloniser and colonised. In NT studies, the postcolonial approach has been applied both to detect forms of anti-imperial rhetoric as well as instances where the texts serve to reinforce or reinscribe aspects of imperial ideology.<sup>66</sup> Another distinctive feature of postcolonial studies is that they sometimes focus on reception history, exploring how texts have been used in history by colonisers and the colonised. In addition, they often relate texts to contemporary issues raised by colonialism.

There are elements of the approaches of empire-critical and postcolonial studies that are relevant to the present thesis. An obvious instance is the treatment of the topic of empire. It has often been observed that of all the NT texts, Revelation is the one which most clearly engages with the topic of empire and so to some extent interaction with empire-critical and postcolonial studies is inevitable.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, some postcolonial theoretical concepts are useful in relating Roman imperial ideology to the province of Asia and to John and the

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<sup>64</sup> Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 19.

<sup>65</sup> Influential works of these authors are Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>66</sup> Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 13–14.

<sup>67</sup> For example, Diehl, “‘Babylon’”, 169, writes that Revelation is ‘the literary climax of politically charged rhetoric in the New Testament’ and ‘Revelation is the premier example of anti-imperial rhetoric and anti-emperor worship in the New Testament.’ Similarly, Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 97, states, ‘Critical scholars of Revelation have customarily read it as the most uncompromising attack on the Roman Empire, and on Christian collusion with the empire, to issue from early Christianity.’



Christian communities he addressed. In particular, the concept of ‘hegemony’, which is taken to mean domination by consent, may be applied to the manifestations of imperial cults in the province of Asia.<sup>68</sup> Also relevant are Bhabha’s concepts of mimicry and hybridity, by which a colonised group adopts and adapts elements of the colonial discourse to negotiate its identity and location in relation to the colonial power. Finally, postcolonial critics have used the term ‘*catachresis*’, a Greek term meaning misapplication, to describe how colonised entities subversively adapt colonial discourse to create something akin to parody as a means of resistance.<sup>69</sup> The redeployment of Roman imperial cosmology in the cosmology of Revelation is an example of this kind of resistance. Some features of the present study that distinguish it from empire-critical and postcolonial studies are; firstly, its focus on the Roman Empire in particular and not empire in general. Secondly, this study will not consider the implications of Revelation’s engagement with empire in other historical or contemporary contexts. And thirdly, there will be no substantial interaction with postcolonial theorists.

## 2.7) Summary

This study will employ an eclectic approach that touches on several methodologies. Two factors that have influenced the approach adopted are; firstly, the nature of the primary subject matter – the book of Revelation; and secondly, the topic to be explored – cosmology as an aspect of ideology and its social implications. The text of Revelation will be studied from historical and literary perspectives with a focus on its narrative and rhetorical features.

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<sup>68</sup> Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 101–2, discusses hegemony in relation to Revelation. He attributes the definition of the concept to Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist. Scott, *Hidden Transcripts*, 72–9, provides a critical review of the concept of hegemony.

<sup>69</sup> Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 105–6, employs the concept in his postcolonial reading of Revelation. The concept was developed by Gayatri Spivak. See also David A. Sánchez, *From Patmos to the Barrio: Subverting Imperial Myths* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008) 12–45, while the term is not used in this study the author adopts a postcolonial approach and draws on a similar concept in his discussion of Revelation’s ‘re-mythologising’.

A range of historical sources will be used to develop a picture of other cosmologies, specifically those of Rome, the province of Asia, and John's rivals. The relationships between these cosmologies as well as their social implications will be analysed by utilising the sociological theory of Berger and others who have built upon his approach.

### 3) The Context and Content of Revelation

To properly understand the meaning and rhetorical function of Revelation's cosmological symbolism it is important to situate the text historically and discern its literary characteristics. The discussion in the present chapter will focus on the authorship, date, and social setting of the text. In addition, an outline of the literary structure of the text will be provided to supply the basis of the analysis of Revelation's cosmology in chapter 7.

#### 3.1) Authorship

The author of the book of Revelation identifies himself as 'John' and this self-designation occurs in several places in the introductory and closing sections (Rev 1.1, 4, 9; 22.8).<sup>1</sup> Early Christian traditions came to identify the author as John son of Zebedee, the Apostle. The earliest attestation to this view is Justin Martyr in the mid-second century (Justin, *Dial.* 81.4) and then Irenaeus, the latter claiming that John the Apostle wrote Revelation, the Gospel of John, as well as 1 and 2 John (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.16.3; 2.22.5; 3.1.1; 3.11.1; 3.16.5, 7–8; 4.21.3; 5.26.1). While some scholars still maintain apostolic authorship of Revelation, for example, Stephen Smalley, most do not.<sup>2</sup> The apostolic view was disputed as early as the third century by Dionysius of Alexandria who noted differences of style and content between Revelation and both the Gospel of John and 1 John and so concluded the former could not have been written by the Apostle (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.25.22–27).<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, xlix, suggests that the occurrence of the name John only in Rev 1.1–3.21 and Rev 22.6–21 may indicate that the intervening sections derive from another source which John incorporated. However, the occurrence of the name only in Rev 1 and Rev 22 may be attributed to the epistolary character of those sections, as is established in section 3.3.

<sup>2</sup> Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 16–40; and recently, Murray J. Smith, 'The Book of Revelation: A Call to Worship, Witness, and Wait in the Midst of Violence', *Into All the World: Emergent Christianity in Its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context* (ed. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017) 335.

<sup>3</sup> There may have been theological reasons behind this position as the millennialism associated with Revelation made it suspect for those who identified millennialism with Montanism. There also may have been a theological

modern times, the Tübingen School was influential in challenging the traditional view.<sup>4</sup> It focused on the theological differences between Revelation and the Gospel of John and on that basis decided that John the Apostle could not be the author of Revelation. It may be noted that differences between Revelation and the Johannine corpus do not on their own deny apostolic authorship of Revelation because it could be argued that the Apostle wrote Revelation and not the other works. Furthermore, the positing of a Johannine school responsible for a corpus of literature, including Revelation, could account for the differences of style; that is, variation was introduced through the editorial work of John's disciples. Such an argument is presented by Schüssler Fiorenza.<sup>5</sup>

One argument for rejecting John the Apostle as the author of Revelation is that John does not identify himself as an apostle when there are reasons for him to do so if it were the case. For example, he embeds his visions in an epistolary frame (Rev 1.1–8; 22.21) which connects his apocalypse to other early Christian writings such as the Pauline corpus. Paul is identified as an apostle in all NT writings ascribed to him except where an epistle is sent in partnership with another person (1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon), so too, Peter is called an apostle in 1 Pet 1.1. If John was aware of these writings he might have imitated their form and identified himself as an apostle to imbue his text with authority.

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reason for the identification of John with the Apostle since the case for Revelation's authority was partly based on apostolic authorship.

<sup>4</sup> More recently, Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 19–20, has argued that the differences in style and theology relate to difference in form and do not necessitate assigning the works to different authors. Similarly, Beale, *Revelation*, 35. On the other hand, Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 107, 125, has shown there is a greater similarity in the theology of Revelation and the Pauline epistles than there is between Revelation and the Johannine literature. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014) 83–4, also observes similarities in the traditions developed in Revelation and the Pauline writings.

<sup>5</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 89–106, who thinks that the author of Revelation was not part of a Johannine School but was the leader of an early Christian school of prophets. For this view, see also Aune, 'Social Matrix', 18–19, and Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 41, who is critical of the idea.

Furthermore, John seems to be speaking to a situation where there is rivalry in leadership between himself and others claiming authority as prophets or apostles (Rev 2.2, 14–15, 20) but he does not claim to be a true apostle himself, instead he relies upon a visionary encounter with the risen Christ as the basis for challenging his rivals' authority.<sup>6</sup> When the group of twelve apostles are spoken of in Rev 21.14, John does not suggest they are a group to which he belongs. In fact, John identifies himself as a prophet and labels his book a prophecy (Rev 1.3; 10.11; 22.7, 9–10, 18–19).<sup>7</sup> Robert Royalty has observed that in Revelation, apart from the false apostles alluded to in Rev 2.2, apostles are only in heaven or the New Jerusalem and he suggests this may indicate that John considered the apostolic age to have ended.<sup>8</sup>

The author of Revelation has also been identified as John the Elder/Presbyter. Eusebius cited Papias (who wrote around 120–130 CE) to provide evidence for the existence of John the Presbyter in distinction to the Apostle and then to assert the former was the author of Revelation (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.2–4; 7.25.12–16).<sup>9</sup> There is no other historical evidence for supporting this view and there is no evidence provided by the text of Revelation. Other possibilities for the authorship of Revelation are that an unknown writer produced a pseudonymous work in the name of John the Apostle, or possibly the Elder. While pseudonymity is a common feature of apocalypses, Aune makes a compelling point when he questions why John the Apostle is not clearly named if Revelation was pseudonymous.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Paul also reported having a post-ascension vision of Christ, though unlike John for Paul it provided evidence of his apostolic authority; see 1 Cor 9.1, and Acts 9.1–30.

<sup>7</sup> Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 30; Royalty, *Origin of Heresy*, 123.

<sup>9</sup> Though Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 38, thinks Eusebius has misunderstood Papias and that the cited material refers to John as one of the apostles but also as an apostle who was still alive and fulfilling the role of elder.

<sup>10</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 1; followed by Beale, *Revelation*, 34, and Koester, *Revelation*, 67.

Given the lack of strong evidence for the historical identity of the author of Revelation, it seems best to follow scholars such as Aune, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Collins in locating the author socially rather than identifying him with a particular historical figure.<sup>11</sup> Using information derived largely from the text of Revelation, it may be inferred that John was a Jewish Christian, perhaps from Palestine, who was a leader of a group of early Christian prophets and who was himself an itinerant prophet.<sup>12</sup> In Revelation, John displayed a concern about the corrupting influence of wealth and so may have been among the poor himself.<sup>13</sup> His poor mastery of Greek may also be an indicator that he was not highly educated, at least in the Greek system. His rejection of cultic activities and eating meat sacrificed to idols would have excluded him from numerous communal activities of the cities in which he resided. This together with his vocation as an itinerant prophet may have made him an ‘outsider’ in society, an identity he seems to have embraced given his appeal to the churches to ‘come out’ of ‘Babylon’. If John was in exile on Patmos then he was also a political outsider, which could explain his hostile stance towards Roman administration and

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<sup>11</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, liv; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 34–50; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 106; Beale, *Revelation*, 36; and Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1974) 9–11, who rejects John the Apostle as author and simply states the author was an early Christian prophet named John.

<sup>12</sup> Leonard Thompson, ‘Ordinary Lives: John and His First Readers’, *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (ed. David L. Barr; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 42, suggests that John was a Palestinian Jew who witnessed the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which explains his resentment of Rome. Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 15–16, says that John’s use of Greek, being heavily influenced by the Hebrew language, supports a Palestinian origin. An argument against this view is presented in Koester, *Revelation*, 69. W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 171–96, observed that the seven cities of the churches form a circuit and were a possible route for John’s itinerant prophetic activity; also noted in Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986) 15; and DeSilva, ‘Social Setting’, 273. For more on the social location of John, see Aune, *Revelation*, liv; Aune, ‘Social Matrix’, 27; Beale, *Revelation*, 36; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 105–6; and Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 34, 49–50.

<sup>13</sup> Though as Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 88–93, points out, there were Stoic and even Cynic philosophers who warned of the dangers of wealth, or of relying upon it, and yet were wealthy themselves.

local elites supportive of Rome. And in terms of cosmology, his self-understanding as a prophet would contribute to a strong interest in the heavenly realm as it was the source of his revelations. This disposition may have made him especially sensitive to alternative claims to the heavenly realm, such as were made in Roman imperial ideology.

### 3.2) Date

The majority position in recent scholarship dates Revelation to late in the reign of Domitian, around 94 to 95 CE.<sup>14</sup> The major alternative is a date under Nero, or the years following his death during the short-lived reigns of the three emperors Galba, Otho, and Vitellius.<sup>15</sup> The key external evidence for the Domitianic dating is Irenaeus who, writing late in the second century, reported that John's vision 'was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign' (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3).<sup>16</sup> The reliability of Irenaeus's testimony is questioned by some scholars because he supports another position deemed untenable, that is, that both Revelation and the Gospel of John were written by John the Apostle.<sup>17</sup> However, his testimony on authorship and date need not stand or fall together, as Collins demonstrates in her argument that Irenaeus's presumption of apostolic authorship indicates he may have had good evidence for the Domitianic date as it

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<sup>14</sup> During the twentieth century, commentaries or major works with a Domitianic date include Charles, H. B. Swete, Beckwith, Kraft, Yarbrow Collins, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Thompson.

<sup>15</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976) 238–42, dates Revelation to 68–69 CE. Albert A. Bell, 'The Date of John's Apocalypse: The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered', *NTS* 25 (1978) 93, dates it to 68 CE. Christian Wilson, 'The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation', *NTS* 39 (1993) 605, dates Revelation to June 68–January 69 CE, or late under Nero, 64–65 CE.

<sup>16</sup> Translation from *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325. Volume 1: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus* (ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885); see also Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.3.

<sup>17</sup> Robinson, *Redating*, 222.

required that John the Apostle be very old at the time of its composition.<sup>18</sup> The Domitianic dating is also found in later Christian tradition including Victorinus in the third century (*Comm. Apoc.* 10.11). There are later traditions that date Revelation to the reign of Claudius (Epiphanius of Salamis, fourth century) and Nero (Theophylact, bishop of Achrida, eleventh century).<sup>19</sup>

Internal evidence on the date of composition includes the use of ‘Babylon’ as a name for Rome, which, it is argued, is fitting only after Rome destroyed the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE as the Babylonians had done centuries earlier.<sup>20</sup> However, Thomas Slater points out that this need not be the case because Babylon can symbolise any great empire opposed to God’s people and so could be used with similar meaning prior to the destruction of the Temple.<sup>21</sup> Slater’s argument that the book of Daniel uses Babylon as a ‘code word’ for the Seleucid Empire, which did not destroy the Temple, does not recognise the difference in usage between Daniel and Revelation. Daniel, an ostensibly historical narrative, is set in Babylon and the reader is invited to find parallels with their contemporary situation but ‘Babylon’ is not a symbolic name, it refers to the city itself. In Revelation, ‘Babylon’ is given as a mysterious name (Rev 17.5), signalling its symbolic use. Other symbolic uses of Babylon for Rome are found after the destruction of the Temple and so its use in Revelation still constitutes evidence for a post-70 CE composition.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, ‘Myth and History in the Book of Revelation: The Problem of Its Date’, *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith (Festschrift for Frank M. Cross, Jr.)* (ed. B. Halpern and J. D. Levenson; Winona Lake, IL: Eisenbrauns, 1981) 380.

<sup>19</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, lx; Collins, ‘Myth and History’, 379.

<sup>20</sup> Collins, ‘Myth and History’, 382, considers the use of the name Babylon as weighty internal evidence for a date after 70 CE and so considers composition under Nero or Galba unlikely. Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 14, also finds the evidence compelling for a post-70 CE date.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas B. Slater, ‘Dating the Apocalypse to John’, *Bib* 84 (2003) 254.

<sup>22</sup> Texts which use Babylon as a symbolic name for Rome include: 4 Ezra 3.1–2, 28–31; 15.44, 46, 60; 16.1; 2 Bar. 10.2; 11.1; 67.7; 1 Pet 5.13; Sib. Or. 5.143, 159. See discussion in Michael Naylor, ‘The Roman Imperial Cult and Revelation’, *CBR* 8 (2010) 217.



Further internal evidence includes the appearance of the *Nero redivivus* myth in Rev 13.3 and 17.8–11. The myth involved the belief that Nero did not in fact die by suicide as was reported but had fled Rome and Italy to the East and would one day return to Rome in vengeance.<sup>23</sup> This belief existed from as early as 69 CE when the first Nero-pretender was reported and appeared in Jewish-Christian texts as late as 130 CE.<sup>24</sup> If this myth did influence Revelation, and it must be acknowledged that there are some scholars who dispute this, then a date from 69 CE onwards is likely.<sup>25</sup>

The interpretation of Rev 17.9–11 is crucial to dating the text; it reads, ‘This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings, of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while. As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.’ These verses explain the symbolism of the seven heads of the Beast, firstly with reference to the seven hills of Rome and then the seven kings of Rome, one of which comes twice to give a series of eight. The vision states that the sixth king is the current one and so identifying that person would seem to also date the composition of Revelation. The extensive discussion of these verses in the literature indicates that identifying the kings with particular Roman emperors is

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<sup>23</sup> Ancient sources include: Suetonius, *Nero* 57.1–2; Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.8; Dio Cass. 63.9.3; 66.19.3, as well as Sib. Or. 4.119–39; 5.93–110, 137–54, 214–27, 361–85; 8.68–72, 139–59; 12.78–94; and Ascen. Isa. 4.1–13. In relation to Revelation, see Hans-Josef Klauck, ‘Do They Never Come Back? Nero Redivivus and the Apocalypse of John’, *CBQ* 63 (2001) 683–98.

<sup>24</sup> Bell, ‘Date of John’s Apocalypse’, 98. See also Sib. Or. 5.28–34, which was probably written under Hadrian, it speaks of Nero returning and declaring himself equal to God.

<sup>25</sup> Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906) 120, believed the evidence for the presence of the myth was undeniable though it was challenged in later scholarship, including: Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1970) 142; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 254–7; and Sigve Tonstad, ‘Appraising the Myth of Nero Redivivus in the Interpretation of Revelation’, *AUSS* 46 (2008) 175–99.

far from simple.<sup>26</sup> The key points of contention are whether to commence with Julius Caesar or Augustus, though there are some scholars who commence with Caligula and Nero, and then whether to include the three emperors who each ruled very briefly during the year of 69 CE.<sup>27</sup> Further complications arise from the fact that these passages may represent a source that either was or was not updated and that John may have antedated the prophecy to create a *vaticinium ex eventu*.<sup>28</sup> Finally, some scholars suggest the number of heads is purely symbolic and that historical referents were not intended.<sup>29</sup> Given the extensive use of numerical symbolism in Revelation, especially with the number seven, it seems probable that the number has significance for that reason.<sup>30</sup> For example, the seven horns/kings may represent the complete number of rulers that were to come. While identifying all the kings of the series is of scholarly interest, it may be that John's focus was only on the end of the series because he wanted to relate the present time of his audience to the eschatological end time

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<sup>26</sup> For an overview of the various positions, see Collins, 'Myth and History', 383–9; Aune, *Revelation*, 945–9; and Larry J. Kreitzer, *Striking New Images: Roman Imperial Coinage and the New Testament World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996) 189–90.

<sup>27</sup> Bell, 'Date of John's Apocalypse', 100, followed by Slater, 'Dating', 255, who finds no justification for omitting the three interregnum emperors when contemporary Roman and Jewish sources included them; for example, Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*; 4 Ezra 12; and Sib. Or. 5.12–51; 8.65; 12.176. Collins, 'Myth and History', 384–5, points out that these sources aim to provide a comprehensive list of emperors whereas it is possible that Revelation, being an apocalypse, prioritises use of the symbolically significant number seven above historical precision.

<sup>28</sup> André Feuillet, 'Le chapitre X de l'Apocalypse, son rapport dans la solution du problème eschatologique', *Sacra Pagina* 12–17 (1959) 426–7, dates Revelation to late under Domitian but thinks the writer presents it as written under Vespasian; so too Marius Heemstra, *The Fiscus Judaicus and the Parting of the Ways* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 112. Collins, 'Myth and History', 388, argues convincingly against *vaticinium ex eventu* being employed in Revelation as its typical function of providing a sense of authority to the text by the remarkable fulfilment of prophecy is lacking. See also, Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 40–2.

<sup>29</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 869–71; Koester, *Revelation*, 77, and Aune, *Revelation*, 948, who considers the symbolic approach to be of some merit. See

<sup>30</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins 'Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature', *ANRW* 21:1221–87.

and the succession of rulers was a device employed for that purpose.<sup>31</sup> John directs the audience to imagine themselves as living towards the end of the series with only the brief reign of the seventh king to occur before the eighth and final, who is *Nero redivivus* in the role of an anti-Christ.<sup>32</sup> Revelation 17.9–11 thereby reinforces the notion that the final judgment of God is imminent.<sup>33</sup> This section of the text characterises the time of the narrative but does not determine the date of the text. In fact, knowledge of the date is required to accurately interpret the meaning of the vision. Other evidence for a post-Neronian date, outlined in this section, provides warrant for not following what may be considered the more straightforward interpretation that starts with Julius Caesar and has Nero as the sixth.

Another contentious matter in the dating of Revelation is whether Rev 11.1–2 implies that the Jerusalem temple is still standing, requiring a date before 70 CE. J. A. T. Robinson is one scholar who argues along these lines.<sup>34</sup> Others accept that the text implies the Temple is standing but think it is an early source included in the text which was composed much later.<sup>35</sup> Once more this passage is open to symbolic interpretation which need not require the Temple to be physically standing. For example, Charles Giblin persuasively argues that the outer court symbolises the earthly realm where the saints are exposed to persecution and the sanctuary symbolises the heavenly realm where the deceased saints are secure.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the

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<sup>31</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*, 406–7, thinks that the first five kings need not be identified but the sixth is crucial, as is the sense of nearness of the final king. See also Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 42.

<sup>32</sup> Collins, ‘Myth and History’, 383–9, articulates such a view but in dating Revelation to Domitian also calculates that Caligula was the first emperor and the three interregnum emperors are omitted. She follows A. Strobel, ‘Abfassung und Geschichts Theologie der Apokalypse nach Kap. XVII. 9–12’, *NTS* 10 (1964) 433–45.

<sup>33</sup> A notion also evident in Rev 1.1; 2.16; 3.11; 11.14; 22.6, 7, 12, 20.

<sup>34</sup> Robinson, *Redating*, 238–42, who dates Revelation to 68–69 CE, also Wilson, ‘Domitianic Date’, 604–5.

<sup>35</sup> Scholars who suggest Rev 11.1–2 is an early source include Collins, ‘Myth and History’, 390–1; and David Flusser, ‘Hystaspes and John of Patmos’, *Irano-Judaica: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture Throughout the Ages* (ed. Shaul Shaked; Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1982) 13.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Homer Giblin, ‘Revelation 11.1–13: Its Form, Function, and Contextual Integration’, *NTS* 30 (1984) 433–59.

theme of persecution in Revelation has been used to support a Domitianic date until recent scholarship questioned the historical evidence for a widespread persecution of Christians under Domitian.<sup>37</sup> Doubt about a Domitianic persecution was used by scholars such as Robinson and Albert Bell to also question the Domitianic dating; however, the Domitianic date does not require a widespread persecution as is illustrated by the fact that Thompson, who strongly contests a Domitianic persecution, still maintains a Domitianic date.<sup>38</sup> In summary, the internal evidence favours a date after the death of Nero and the destruction of the Temple. The possibility of symbolic interpretations of Rev 11.1–2 and Rev 17.9–11 means that these passages cannot provide a more precise date and they therefore do not discount the external evidence provided by Irenaeus.<sup>39</sup> On this basis, the majority position should be maintained that Revelation was composed late in the reign of Domitian.

### 3.3) The Structure of Revelation and a Final Series of Eight Visions

In this section, a structure for the text of Revelation will be outlined and the contentious elements of the proposal will be defended, in particular, the existence of

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<sup>37</sup> Robinson, *Redating*, 221–53; Bell, ‘Date of John’s Apocalypse’, 94–101; and Wilson, ‘Domitianic Date’, 587–605. Duane Warden, ‘Imperial Persecution and the Dating of 1 Peter and Revelation’, *JETS* 34 (1991) 205–8, 212, argues the evidence for a Domitianic persecution is not relevant because it does not support a widespread persecution that could have impacted the province of Asia. He also argues that Domitian did not significantly promote imperial cults in Asia, though Giancarlo Biguzzi, ‘Ephesus, Its Artemision, Its Temple to the Flavian Emperors, and Idolatry in Revelation’, *NovT* 40 (1998) 289–90, disputes his conclusion by focusing on the impact of a temple in civic space rather than simply the number of temples built; see also Justin K. Hardin, *Galatians and the Imperial Cult* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 30–2.

<sup>38</sup> Robinson, *Redating*, 236–43; Bell, ‘Date of John’s Apocalypse’, 93–102; and Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 15. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 69–71, also accepts there was no widespread persecution of Christians under Domitian yet maintains a date late in his reign.

<sup>39</sup> Contra Wilson, ‘Domitianic Date’, 597, who finds that the internal evidence for an earlier date outweighs the external evidence of Irenaeus.

unnumbered series.<sup>40</sup> The unique feature of the structure to be outlined is the occurrence of an unnumbered series of eight visions in Rev 19.11–21.8, which precipitates the final resolution of the plot. As the structure relies on the use of καὶ εἶδον as a structural marker to identify unnumbered series, a defence of this technique will be offered first. The expression καὶ εἶδον, has been widely used by commentators in establishing a structure for Revelation. In a study of the expression, Ralph J. Korner lists fifteen such commentators beginning with H. B. Swete in 1908.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, the validity of using καὶ εἶδον to determine structure has been disputed. Bauckham argues against it in relation to Rev 19.11–21.8 and his conclusion is worth quoting in full as it raises several points that must be addressed.

In fact, these eight visions would be such an unsatisfactory way of dividing the section that it is not conceivable that John intended the formula καὶ εἶδον as a structural marker. In any case, when John intends a *number* of sections to have a structural significance he makes the enumeration explicit, as with the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven bowls, the three woes (8:13; 9:12; 11:14) and the three angels flying in midheaven (14:6-11). In a text intended for oral performance he had to do so.<sup>42</sup>

One of Bauckham's objections is that an unnumbered series based on καὶ εἶδον would be too subtle for an audience hearing the text to detect.<sup>43</sup> Korner's study provides some evidence

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<sup>40</sup> The structure of Revelation that will be outlined most closely resembles that of Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1976) 13–29. A diagram representing the structure described is included in Appendix 1.

<sup>41</sup> Ralph J. Korner, "'And I Saw...': An Apocalyptic Literary Convention for Structural Identification in the Apocalypse', *NovT* 52 (2000) 162–3 n. 15; H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1908) 66.

<sup>42</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*, 6. Felise Tavo, 'The Structure of the Apocalypse: Re-Examining a Perennial Problem', *NovT* 47 (2005) 60, agrees that John explicitly numbers series when he intends his audience to do so.

<sup>43</sup> David L. Barr, 'The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment', *Int* 40 (1986) 244, has approached the text of Revelation from the perspective of oral performance and follows Bauckham in thinking that an audience hearing Revelation would not pick up on such indicators of structure; so too, Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 131. Alan S. Bandy, 'The Layers of the Apocalypse: An Integrative Approach to Revelation's Macrostructure', *JSNT* 31 (2009) 476, is also critical saying the unnumbered series seem contrived.

that addresses the objection. He follows the observation of Charles that καὶ εἶδον, along with μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, are characteristic expressions in apocalyptic literature and he explores their use in texts including Daniel, 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, and 4 Ezra.<sup>44</sup> Based on this analysis, he proposes that a first-century Jewish-Christian audience which was familiar with this literature would recognise the expressions as structural devices.<sup>45</sup> If this is the case then the device may not be as subtle as it at first appears.

The ease with which an audience hearing an oral performance of Revelation might pick up on the structure under discussion relates not only to their knowledge and skill as listeners but also to the quality of the performance. And if the reader of the text, after careful study, noticed a pattern of unnumbered series they could employ various oratory devices to highlight the patterns, including tone, pitch, volume, rhythm, and the use of physical gestures. In addition to the guidance of the orator, the structure of the narrative itself primes the audience to look for series of a particular number, especially seven.<sup>46</sup> By the time we reach the first proposed unnumbered series in Rev 13.1, the number seven has occurred thirty times in the text and there has been a series of seven oracles to seven churches, seven seals, and seven trumpets.<sup>47</sup> This makes it plausible that when an audience noticed that a standard expression commenced each vision it would occur to them to count how many times the expression had been used. If this is true for the first unnumbered series, in which seven visions would be counted, then the audience would expect to also find seven visions when

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<sup>44</sup> Korner, “‘And I Saw’”, 162–71. Note that Korner’s analysis included equivalent expressions in Greek and relied on the English translation of texts which lacked a Greek manuscript. Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1.106, also notes that these expressions occur in Testament of Joseph and Testament of Levi.

<sup>45</sup> Korner, “‘And I Saw’”, 176.

<sup>46</sup> Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John’s Apocalypse* (Great Britain: University Press, 1949) 46. Barr, ‘Oral Enactment’, 244, discusses numbering as a device that aids memorisation of the structure for recital. In terms of the number four, the four living creatures around the throne in Rev 4 then relates to the four horses that emerge with the opening of seals one to four (Rev 6.1–8).

<sup>47</sup> As will be seen, the structure proposed has the first unnumbered series commence in Rev 13.1.

they began counting the same expression from Rev 19.11 onwards. As will be discussed, they will in fact discover eight, resulting in surprise and emphasis with the eighth occurrence. Finally, it should be noted that Revelation was just as much written to be read as it was to be heard.<sup>48</sup> It may be assumed that John wrote the text intending that his circle of prophets would read and interpret it as they would the prophets of the HB.<sup>49</sup> That audience may have noticed literary devices that other audiences did not. In a section on numerical symbolism in Revelation, Bauckham describes the ‘meticulous literary artistry’ of the text, which includes the precise usage of key words and phrases such that the total number of occurrences equated to a symbolic number.<sup>50</sup> To provide just a few examples, scattered through the text are references to seven blessings, the title Χριστός occurs seven times as does ‘Lord God Almighty’ (κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ), and there are fourteen occurrences of Ἰησοῦς and the same number of references to the Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα).<sup>51</sup> Significantly, Bauckham comments that such patterns would not be evident to hearers of the text though they may have been discovered by a circle of prophets who closely scrutinised it.<sup>52</sup> The question then is why such readers might not also discover the series of unnumbered visions through the same process. Bauckham’s observation on the meticulous composition of the text also provides a response to those scholars who question why John would leave some series of visions

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<sup>48</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*, 86–8, acknowledges the point himself.

<sup>49</sup> Aune, ‘Social Matrix’, 18–19. A key text supporting the thesis is a reference to John’s ‘comrades the prophets’ in Rev 22.9 and the plural second person (ὑμῖν) given as the recipients of the visions in Rev 22.16. See also David E. Aune, ‘The Prophetic Circle of John of Patmos and the Exegesis of Revelation 22.16’, *JSNT* 37 (1989) 103–16; Bauckham, *Climax*, 86–8; and Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 18. Gregory L. Linton, ‘Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse: The Limits of Genre’, *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (ed. David L. Barr; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006) 29, notes that Rev 1.1–8 foregrounds conventions readers would associate with prophecy of the HB.

<sup>50</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*, 29–37.

<sup>51</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*, 35, comments that there are too many examples of such precise numbering to attribute it to coincidence.

<sup>52</sup> Bauckham, *Climax*, 29–30.

unnumbered, that is, to embed concealed meanings in the text for his audience to uncover. When the reader discovered these hidden meanings, it would instil in them a sense that the text was full of meaning, like the scriptures.

The structure of Revelation proposed here largely follows that of Collins, which is itself a modification of Farrer.<sup>53</sup> The text has a relatively simple structure on the surface combined with embedded complexities such as excurses, shifts in narrated time, and interlocking passages. The surface structure is taken to be that which would be apparent in the oral performance of the text.<sup>54</sup> This structure is established by textual markers such as repeated words or phrases, series of seven or four, and images that connect one section to another.<sup>55</sup> These markers provide the audience with a way of breaking up the material into units to assist with comprehension and to aid recollection. Explicit numbering of visions is the most apparent structural device and provides the following four series: seven oracles to churches (Rev 2–3), seven seals (Rev 6.1–8.1), seven trumpets (Rev 8.2–11.19), and seven bowls (Rev 15.1, 5–16.1). These series are closely connected to one of two visions; the seven oracles each open with reference to an aspect of the vision of Christ in Rev 1.9–20.<sup>56</sup> The other three septets develop out of the vision of the heavenly throne room in Rev 4–5.<sup>57</sup> The septets represent the development of the major plotline, resolving the tension established when John sees a scroll that cannot be opened (Rev 5.1–4). The result is a structure involving two major sections: the vision of Christ and his oracles to the churches of Asia (Rev 1–3); and the vision of the heavenly throne and the opening of the scroll which involves the three

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<sup>53</sup> Collins, *Combat Myth*, 19; and Farrer, *Rebirth*, 45.

<sup>54</sup> See Bandy, 'Layers', 469–74, 490–1, for a discussion of the concept of a surface layer.

<sup>55</sup> Bandy, 'Layers', 479, states the image of the open temple forms an *inclusio* for the combat myth of Rev 12–14.

<sup>56</sup> There is a corresponding final vision of Christ in Rev 22.7, 12–20.

<sup>57</sup> They include references to the scene of the heavenly throne room (Rev 6.1; 8.2; 15.5).



septets – the seals, trumpets, and bowls (Rev 4–22).<sup>58</sup> The three septets are interlocked through various literary devices.<sup>59</sup> The first trumpet vision immediately follows the narration of the seventh seal and begins with the expression καὶ εἶδον, which suggests continuity with the previous vision series.<sup>60</sup> The seventh trumpet introduces the opened heavenly sanctuary in Rev 11.19, which is next mentioned in Rev 15.5, and the narrative that follows describes seven angels emerging from the sanctuary and receiving seven bowls. In this case the narrative resumes with the repetition of an image connecting the trumpets and bowls.<sup>61</sup> The two major sections exist within an epistolary frame consisting of Rev 1.1–8 and Rev 22.21.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> This structure may be suggested by Rev 1.19, ‘Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this’; ‘what is’ relates to the first section which is a vision of the world in the present, and Rev 4–22 narrates what will take place ‘after this’. In support of this proposition is the similar phrasing in Rev 1.19; 4.1. Earlier commentators such as Swete, *Apocalypse*, 21; Bousset, *Die Offenbarung*, 198; and Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1.33, interpreted Rev 1.19 to establish a tripartite structure; the visions of the past are Rev 1.9–20, the present are Rev 2–3, and the future are Rev 4–22. However, the aorist verb εἶδεν does not indicate past-time but refers to the visions as a whole and the καὶ ... καὶ construction is used to draw a distinction between the first group of visions, which in some way relate to the present, and the second group, which relate to the eschatological future. Christopher R. Smith, ‘Revelation 1:19: An Eschatologically Escalated Prophetic Convention’, *JETS* 33 (1990) 461–6, interprets the text in this way and Aune, *Revelation*, 105–6, has a similar position. W. C. Van Unnik, ‘A Formula Describing Prophecy’, *NTS* 9 (1963) 86–94, discusses the formula in light of ancient Greek and Roman parallels. For a survey of views, see Gregory K. Beale, ‘The Interpretative Problem of Rev. 1:19’, *NovT* 34 (1992) 360–86.

<sup>59</sup> On the compositional device of interlocking, see Collins, *Combat Myth*, 16–17; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Composition and Structure of the Book of Revelation’, *CBQ* 39 (1977) 360–3; Bauckham, *Climax*, 9; and Korner, “‘And I Saw’”, 160. Günther Bornkamm, ‘Die Komposition der apokalyptischen Visionen in der Offenbarung Johannis’, *ZNW* 36 (1937) 133, states that the three septets are connected such that all three are to be imagined arising from the opening of the seven-sealed scroll.

<sup>60</sup> Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1.106, recognises a distinction in the use of these terms with μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον introducing new major visions and καὶ εἶδον introducing similar and closely related visions. Korner, “‘And I Saw’”, 164, makes a similar distinction. Aune, *Revelation*, 338, describes a range of functions for the terms.

<sup>61</sup> Collins, *Combat Myth*, 20–7, has also argued that Revelation consists of two major parts but places the division at Rev 12. Her argument is that the septet of trumpets is connected to the septet of seals by the technique of interlocking but the septet of the bowls is not connected to the first two. In fact, the seven bowls are joined to the trumpets by the image of the open temple (Rev 11.19; 15.5–16.1).

<sup>62</sup> Supporting the idea of an epistolary frame are: Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 175–6, 364–6; Aune, *Revelation*, c–cv; David E. Aune, ‘Apocalypse Renewed: An Intertextual Reading of the Apocalypse of

The three septets in Rev 4–22 also include or are separated by sections that function as excurses to the main plotline. Between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals is an excursus spanning Rev 7.1–17, and between the sixth and seventh trumpets is an excursus spanning Rev 10.1–11.13. These sections delay progress in plot development and treat topics of theological and pastoral significance: in the case of Rev 7.1–17, the protection of the saints on earth and in heaven from the judgment of God; and in Rev 10.1–11.13, the role of the faithful testimony of the saints amidst persecution in bringing about repentance among the nations.<sup>63</sup>

Revelation 12.1–15.4 lies between the series of trumpets and bowls and includes what Collins discussed as the ‘combat myth’ (Rev 12) and an unnumbered series of seven visions each beginning with καὶ εἶδον (Rev 13.1–15.4). The unnumbered series will be discussed below. Rather than functioning as an excursus, this section involves a shift in narrative time. Revelation 12 acts as a kind of cosmogony that establishes the basis of the current cosmic conflict between God and Satan which is revealed to be presently manifest in the conflict between the Beast and the saints. The section introduces a sociopolitical dimension to what to this point constituted a more general cosmic conflict.<sup>64</sup> The section which follows the seventh bowl includes Rev 17.1–22.11 and consists of a pair of parallel and contrasting visions of the fall of Babylon the Great (Rev 17.1–19.10) and the rise of the New Jerusalem which descends from heaven (Rev 21.9–22.11). Interconnecting the two visions is a final conflict

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John’, *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (ed. David L. Barr; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006) 48; Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 101; and Barr, *Tales of the End*, 149.

<sup>63</sup> They also build tension before the final seventh vision. On the rhetorical and theological significance of the excurses, see Peter S. Perry, *The Rhetoric of Digressions: Revelation 7:1-17 and 10:1-11:13 and Ancient Communication* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), which relates the technique to an ancient rhetorical device known as παρέκβασις.

<sup>64</sup> The political dimension is continued in the series of bowls with references to the Beast in Rev 16.2, 10, 13; persecution of the saints in Rev 16.6; the destruction of Babylon/Rome in Rev 16.19; and people blaspheming God, a characteristic activity of the Beast, in Rev 13.5–6; 16.9, 11, 21. Biguzzi, ‘Ephesus’, 277, thinks the bowls septet focuses the judgment of God on the emperor cult, its worshippers, and the Empire in general.

narrative which consists of a second unnumbered series of visions, each commencing with καὶ εἶδον, though this time there are eight visions.<sup>65</sup> This final section contains the ultimate visions of the narrative which resolve the plot tension with the descent of the New Jerusalem to replace the fallen Babylon. The cosmic conflict is ultimately expressed in civic terms as one city replaces another.

Having established the overall structure of Revelation we will now examine more closely the two unnumbered series. As noted above, there are two expressions of prime importance to the structure of these sections, καὶ εἶδον and μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον. These phrases are instances in which the narrator of the visions interrupts the narration with self-reference, directing the audience to pause and prepare for a development. In the case of μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, the audience is invited to complete and round off what has been envisioned to allow for a different focus or to view that vision from another perspective. And καὶ εἶδον directs the audience to a new vision which has some continuity with what precedes it. In the structure outlined by Collins, the unnumbered series of seven visions begins in Rev 12.1 because she follows Farrer in using both εἶδον and ὥφθη (which occurs twice in Rev 12.1) as structural markers for this unnumbered series.<sup>66</sup> However, if only καὶ εἶδον is used there are exactly seven visions that commence with the expression in this section.<sup>67</sup> Revelation 12 is a prologue to the series of visions in Rev 13–15, providing the background to the conflict in these visions by introducing two great signs in heaven – the Woman and the Dragon. The

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<sup>65</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, ciii–civ, identifies the same section (Rev 19.11–21.9) but has only four subsections (commencing Rev 19.11; 20.1; 20.11; 21.8) all of which start with καὶ εἶδον. In general, Aune bases structure on the thematic content of the visions.

<sup>66</sup> Collins, *Combat Myth*, 14, though she slightly modifies Farrer’s structure by counting Rev 15.2 and not Rev 15.1 as the start of the seventh vision.

<sup>67</sup> 1. The Beast from the Sea (Rev 13.1–10); 2. The Beast from the Earth (Rev 13.11–18); 3. The Lamb and the 144,000 (Rev 14.1–5); 4. Three angels of proclamation (Rev 14.6–13); 5. Three angels of judgment (Rev 14.14–20); 6. Introduction of the seven bowls (Rev 15.1, 5–6.1); and 7. The heavenly song of victory (Rev 15.2–4).

appearance of another great sign with the sixth unnumbered vision (Rev 15.1) indicates the close of the section but also connects it to the next as the sign in heaven introduces the series of seven bowls that follows. The fact that the bowl septet is introduced with the penultimate vision in the unnumbered series creates a degree of complexity in the text.<sup>68</sup> This complex structure may be explained by John's arrangement of the unnumbered series which has it conclude with a scene of heavenly victory on the seventh (Rev 15.2–4). Such an arrangement corresponds to the pattern of the trumpets and bowls which also finish on the seventh with a declaration of God's victory in heaven. At the same time, by already starting the next series of judgment visions it is made clear that the ultimate end has not been reached.

The second unnumbered series is Rev 19.11–21.8, which, as has been discussed already, has eight visions starting with καὶ εἶδον. They are:

1. Rev 19.11 καὶ εἶδον...a rider on a white horse
2. Rev 19.17 καὶ εἶδον...an angel standing in the sun
3. Rev 19.19 καὶ εἶδον...the Beast and kings gather for war
4. Rev 20.1 καὶ εἶδον...an angel binds Satan in the abyss
5. Rev 20.4 καὶ εἶδον...Satan's last battle and defeat
6. Rev 20.11 καὶ εἶδον...a white throne, heaven and earth flee
7. Rev 20.12 καὶ εἶδον...the dead face judgment
8. Rev 21.1 καὶ εἶδον...a new heaven and earth.

Revelation 20.12 is omitted from the structures of Farrer and Collins, perhaps because of its proximity to Rev 20.11 which makes the sixth vision very short, and because of the similar subject matter of the sixth and seventh visions. In Rev 21.2, another vision is introduced by καὶ εἶδον, however, it is used with the object separating the words (καὶ τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν

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<sup>68</sup> The introduction to the bowls is continued in Rev 15.5 with the structural marker μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον indicating a new major vision.

Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ νῆν ἐῖδον).<sup>69</sup> This clear change in usage suggests intentionality in the use of the expression to introduce a particular number of visions.<sup>70</sup>

The significance of the eighth vision in Rev 21.1 becomes apparent when the structure of Revelation is related to its rhetorical strategy. A notable aspect of the structure outlined here is that the two major sections are disproportionate in length; the first spans three chapters, the second nineteen. This aspect of the structure is explained by a rhetorical strategy which delays the resolution of tension.<sup>71</sup> John does this in two ways; through the repetitive use of cycles and through the excurses. Revelation 5 establishes the expectation that at the opening of the seventh seal the scroll will be opened and all of God's purposes will be fulfilled. At the sixth seal, the end seems imminent as the cosmos is filled with signs of the end including a darkened sky, stars falling from heaven, and a great earthquake but when the seventh seal is opened in Rev 8.1 it is anti-climactic, 'there was silence in heaven for about half an hour'. The disappointment arising from the abortive progression to the end is compounded by the immediate introduction of another series of seven, the trumpets. Rather than signifying the end, the number seven takes the audience back to the start. This process is repeated at the end of the seven trumpets with the introduction of seven seals. These cycles in the plot delay or forestall the anticipated resolution.

The use of cycles in the plot is complemented by the introduction of excurses which fall between the sixth and seventh seal (Rev 7.1–17), the sixth and seventh trumpet (Rev

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<sup>69</sup> The use of καὶ ἐῖδον in Rev 19.11–21.1 resembles the waw-consecutive pattern and uses the typical Hebrew word order in which the object follows the verb. The change in the expected word order in Rev 21.2 is an example of hyperbaton. This device is typically thought to place emphasis on some aspect of the clause, in this case the New Jerusalem. However, in Daniel Markovic, 'Hyperbaton in the Greek Literary Sentence', *GRBS* 46 (2006) 127–46, the device is demonstrated to have a role in marking the end of a sentence. In Rev 21.2, the hyperbaton achieves both effects.

<sup>70</sup> Collins, *Combat Myth*, 15–16.

<sup>71</sup> Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Almond, 1989) 160, describes 'psychological time' as the pace of time based on the reader's subjective feeling. In this sense, these narrative techniques cause time to slow down.

10.1–11.13), and between the end of the trumpets and the start of the bowls (Rev 12.1–16.1). These excurses delay progress in the plot at the very moment that anticipation is at its greatest. What is more, as the narrative unfolds the length of these excurses extends with the first consisting of seventeen verses, the next twenty-four verses, and the final one sixty-five verses. The closer the audience gets to the end, the further away it feels. At the opening of the fifth seal in Rev 6.10, the martyred souls in heaven cry out, ‘Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?’ John invites his audience to feel the same longing and one of the techniques he employs is delaying the resolution of the tension in the plot.<sup>72</sup> For the audience, while the number seven may have initially symbolised completeness, as the narrative develops it becomes associated with frustrated anticipation.

By the time the final unnumbered series in Rev 19.11 is reached, seven cycles of seals, trumpets, bowls, and another unnumbered series of seven have already passed. This is the point in the plot at which John introduces another series of visions introduced by the expression καὶ εἶδον and again the counting begins. This time, in contrast to what has come before, there is only one verse between the sixth and seventh visions. Even more surprising is that just a few verses later an eighth vision occurs, ‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away’ (Rev 21.1). The structure breaks out of the cycle of seven just as John announces the end of the old order and the arrival of a new cosmic order.

In her study on the structure and composition of Revelation, Schüssler Fiorenza suggested that structure is not a mere container of content but also a device that conveys meaning.<sup>73</sup> To this it may be added that the structure of a text can also contribute to its

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<sup>72</sup> Perry, *Rhetoric of Digressions*, 243, discusses the emotional impact of these digressions and argues that they prepare the audience for the consoling messages that come with the seventh in the series.

<sup>73</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 159; see also Perry, *Rhetoric of Digressions*, 243.

rhetorical strategy. In the structure of Revelation, the number eight is significant as the point at which the development of the plot is released from cycles of seven to finally reach its denouement. At the point of the eighth, judgment has finished, the promised blessings of Rev 2–3 arrive, and the cosmos is renewed. The structure of the text is itself a rhetorical device which highlights the importance of cosmological transformation to the narrative.

### 3.4) Social Setting and Rhetorical Situation

The social setting and rhetorical situation of the book of Revelation will now be established. The two concepts are related though distinct. The social setting is a description of the social elements of the historical situation of the author and audience of a text. In terms of narrative criticism, the social setting informs the interpretation of the text by supplying information that may be used to construct the implied reader's assumed knowledge.<sup>74</sup> The rhetorical situation will draw upon aspects of the social setting but is defined by the connection of historical events and relations to the rhetorical strategy of the text. Lloyd Bitzer defines rhetorical situation along these lines as 'a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence'.<sup>75</sup> In other words, the rhetorical situation of the text is that which is addressed by the rhetorical strategy. While Bitzer understands the rhetorical situation as the events that generate the rhetoric, Richard E. Vatz has argued that in fact the rhetoric generates the situation; he writes, 'I would not say

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<sup>74</sup> Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 97.

<sup>75</sup> Lloyd F. Bitzer, 'The Rhetorical Situation', *PR* 1 (1968) 6. Elliott, *Social-Scientific Criticism?*, 74, adopts a similar definition as does Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 192, who writes, 'rhetorical discourse obtains its rhetorical character from the exigency and urgency of the situation that generates it'.

“rhetoric is situational,” but situations are rhetorical’.<sup>76</sup> Vatz makes the valid point that a text contains the author’s perspective on events and that this perspective shapes the representation of the situation both by selecting some events and not others as well as by determining the way the events are portrayed.<sup>77</sup> The distinction between the social setting and rhetorical situation may be put as such; the former is an historical construction of the social elements of the shared context of the author and audience while the latter is the rhetorical construction of a situation that becomes the object of the rhetorical strategy while also being an aspect of the rhetorical strategy. The distinction is especially important in relation to the contentious issue of the existence and nature of a crisis in Revelation’s social setting. At various points in the discussion to follow, consideration of the social setting of Revelation will lead into a discussion of the rhetorical situation.

#### *3.4.1) Is Revelation a Response to a Crisis?*

The existence and nature of a crisis in the social setting and rhetorical situation of Revelation has received much attention in the literature. The expectation that there would be an underlying crisis derived from an understanding of the apocalyptic genre which considered the existence of a crisis a definitional feature.<sup>78</sup> This understanding has been contested in recent scholarship and is no longer unquestioningly maintained.<sup>79</sup> A common

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<sup>76</sup> Richard E. Vatz, ‘The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation’, *PR* 6 (1973) 159; followed by Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 34.

<sup>77</sup> Vatz, ‘Myth’, 156–7.

<sup>78</sup> The position has been most cogently argued in David Hellholm, ‘The Problem of Apocalyptic: Genre and the Apocalypse of John’, *Semeia* 36 (1986) 13–64, who developed previous definitions of the genre by considering its social function, that being to comfort a group in crisis. In addition, John J. Collins, ‘The Symbolism of Transcendence in Jewish Apocalyptic’, *BR* 19 (1974) 8, observed that most apocalypses were written during times of persecution or crisis.

<sup>79</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins argued that John perceived there to be a crisis and Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 174–6, that John created an imaginary crisis to achieve his rhetorical aims. These NT scholars applied the work of scholars of Roman history who revised the prevailing scholarly view of Domitian which saw him as a brutal



view was that Revelation was written in response to a widespread and severe persecution of Christians orchestrated by Domitian.<sup>80</sup> The supposed persecution was prompted by the Christians' refusal to worship the emperor as *dominus et deus noster* (our Lord and God) and to participate in the imperial cult, which was thought to have expanded dramatically late in his reign.<sup>81</sup> Such a construction of the social setting seems plausible given the recurring theme of persecution in the text as well as ancient testimony to Domitian as a tyrant and a persecutor of Christians.<sup>82</sup> However, when the historical evidence for Domitian's persecution of Christians was shown to be weak and the portrayal of Domitian as a tyrant to be unbalanced, the notion of a crisis consisting of persecution came under critical scrutiny. Schüssler Fiorenza stated that there was a consensus that the purpose of Revelation was to give courage and perseverance to Christians facing persecution.<sup>83</sup> If that were the case at the

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tyrant; for example, H. W. Pleket, 'Domitian, the Senate and the Provinces', *Mnemosyne* 14 (1961) 296–315; and E. Mary Smallwood, 'Domitian's Attitude toward the Jews and Judaism', *CP* 51 (1956) 11.

<sup>80</sup> Established in modern scholarship in J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers: Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp: Revised Texts with Introduction, Notes, Dissertations, and Translations* (London: Macmillan, 1890; reprinted by Baker Book House, 1981) 1.104–15.

<sup>81</sup> Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1.56, 58, held that Christians were persecuted by both Jews and the 'heathen' authorities. Other early twentieth century commentaries, such as Swete, *Apocalypse*, lxxxv–vi, supported a setting under a major Domitianic persecution under the influence of Lightfoot; see discussion in Aune, *Revelation*, lxvi, and Wilson, 'Domitianic Date', 587–8. Donald L. Jones, 'Christianity and the Roman Imperial Cult', *ANRW* 23:1033–4, considers it beyond doubt, saying, 'There is no doubt, however, concerning Domitian's persecution of the Christians', and he asserts that Revelation is the Christian text which provides the clearest evidence of persecution. On the use of the expression *dominus et deus*, see Martial, *Ep.* 5.5.3; 7.34.8; 8.82.2; 9.28.7; Dio Chrysostum, *Or.* 45.1; Suetonius, *Dom.* 13.1–2; Dio Cassius, 67.4.7; and Statius, *Silv.* 1.6.81–84, who comments on Domitian refusing the title.

<sup>82</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 17, acknowledges this before outlining an alternative historical reading of Domitian's reign and the place of Christians under it. On the theme of persecution, Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 112, notes that the key messages that recur in various sections of the text are persecution, punishment of persecutors, and salvation of the persecuted.

<sup>83</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 36. Schüssler Fiorenza's own position had developed in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 54, 126–7, where it is stated that Revelation was not a response to persecution but the social pressures the author anticipated would lead to persecution.

time of her publication it is certainly no longer the case. Duff reflects the current perspective on Revelation and persecution when he states, ‘Scholars need to reconcile the apparent tension between history and the literature.’<sup>84</sup> A few proposed reconciliations will now be outlined.

Adela Yarbro Collins thinks the evidence for a Domitianic persecution of Christians is weak, though there may have been occasional harassment.<sup>85</sup> She maintains that Revelation was not written in response to a major social crisis or even a localised one, rather, John *perceived* there to be a crisis and created a visionary experience to draw his audience into that reality.<sup>86</sup> Collins states, ‘The element of persecution represents the present, conflict-ridden, and threatened situation in which the author invites the hearers to see themselves.’<sup>87</sup> John’s rhetorical aim was to elicit feelings of fear in his audience which are then purged through the cathartic experience of the text.<sup>88</sup>

Thompson went beyond the ‘perceived crisis’ notion of Collins and argued that the crisis was a purely literary one. He applied findings of classical scholars who had revised the history of Domitian’s reign to challenge the idea of a Domitianic persecution. In fact, he argued that Christians in the province of Asia late in the first century generally lived peaceably in society, free from conflict and persecution.<sup>89</sup> Persecution was a literary motif of the apocalyptic genre in which John was writing and so the theme does not inform our

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<sup>84</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 5.

<sup>85</sup> Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 69–70.

<sup>86</sup> Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 13, also thinks that John created the crisis for rhetorical purposes but considers the distinction Collins makes between a ‘real’ and ‘perceived’ crisis unhelpful.

<sup>87</sup> Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 154.

<sup>88</sup> Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 153, 161.

<sup>89</sup> Thompson, ‘Sociological Analysis’, 159–61, describes the social setting of Revelation as a time when Rome offered an ordered, stable, and unified society and suggests that in general life flourished in the provinces under the Flavians. See also Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 95–116, 146–7, 164–7; and Thompson, ‘Ordinary Lives’, 39.

understanding of the social setting.<sup>90</sup> Thompson has been highly influential even though many scholars still think that persecution was of some significance in the social setting.<sup>91</sup> The scholarly consensus now concedes there was no widespread persecution of Christians under Domitian that prompted John to produce his apocalypse and scholars typically explain the theme of persecution in the text in relation to its rhetorical strategy and social theory.<sup>92</sup>

#### 3.4.2) *Was the Imperial Cult a Significant Aspect of the Social Setting of Revelation?*

Another contentious matter to consider in determining the social setting of Revelation is the importance of the imperial cult. In early modern scholarship it was considered a key factor as it was believed to have triggered the persecution of Christians in the province of Asia.<sup>93</sup> The view was maintained in Schüssler Fiorenza's earlier studies; for example, she comments that Revelation 'seeks to alienate the audience from the symbolic persuasion of the imperial cult'.<sup>94</sup> The imperial cult is also central to Steven Friesen's reading of Revelation.<sup>95</sup> However, rather than focusing on persecution that may or may not have arisen from the cults,

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<sup>90</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 174–5; and Frankfurter, 'Jews or Not?', 407. Nonetheless, as Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 12, observes, Thompson does speak of a kind of crisis provoked by the 'deviant knowledge' revealed by John to his audience which challenged 'public knowledge'. Thompson is applying the theoretical framework of Berger and derives the terms 'deviant knowledge' and 'public knowledge' from him.

<sup>91</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, lxviii–lxix, finds Thompson's re-evaluation of Domitian's reign convincing. Critics of Thompson's position include Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 54, 126–7. It should be noted that Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 130–2, 173, does acknowledge that there may have been a minority of Christians in Asia who experienced harassment, though probably from the local population rather than Roman authorities.

<sup>92</sup> For example, Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 96, states that talk of persecution can be used to bolster a sense of group identity and unity.

<sup>93</sup> For example, Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1.351. More recently, Steven J. Scherrer, 'Revelation 13 as an Historical Source for the Imperial Cult under Domitian', *HTR* 74 (1981) 406, argued that Rev 13 remains a key historical source on the operation of the imperial cult.

<sup>94</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 6.

<sup>95</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*. Friesen provides an overview of recent views on the imperial cult in Revelation in Friesen, 'Cult of the Roman Emperors', 246–9.

Friesen focuses on the ideological tension that imperial cults created for John and his communities.<sup>96</sup> Despite Friesen's focus on imperial cults, he argues that the key factor of the rhetorical situation is the pressure to assimilate to the prevailing culture. He also explains allusions to the imperial cult in Revelation as a dimension of its rhetorical strategy. He proposed that both John and his rivals were opposed to the cults and so John attempted to indict society more broadly by showing its complicity in the imperial cult.<sup>97</sup> Slater's position is similar, he considers Revelation a response to religious-political pressure applied by the local residents of Asia, of which pressure to participate in the imperial cult may have been only one component.<sup>98</sup> Millar reviewed the historical evidence to demonstrate that it was not the rejection of imperial cults but the cults of other gods that sometimes provoked the persecution of Christians and so Thompson and David Barr have opined that local cults to other deities were more problematic for John and his followers.<sup>99</sup> Giancarlo Biguzzi disagrees on literary grounds, arguing that while the first two septets in Revelation are about judgment on idolatry in general, the final climactic septet of the bowls addresses the imperial cult in particular.<sup>100</sup> This arrangement suggests to Biguzzi that the imperial cult was of greater concern to John than cults in general. However, in the present thesis it will be

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<sup>96</sup> Friesen's discussion of the ideological implications of the imperial cults includes its cosmological dimension, which is treated in chapter 6 of the present thesis.

<sup>97</sup> Friesen, 'Satan's Throne', 368.

<sup>98</sup> Slater, 'Social Setting', 232; similarly, DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 42, thinks John emphasised the imperial cult for rhetorical purposes.

<sup>99</sup> Fergus Millar, 'The Imperial Cult and the Persecutions', *Le Culte des Souverains dans L'Empire Romain* (ed. Elias Bickerman; Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1973) 145–65; Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 130–1, 164; and Barr, *Tales of the End*, 165. Though James R. Harrison, 'The Persecution of Christians from Nero to Hadrian', *Into All the World: Emergent Christianity in Its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context* (ed. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017) 271, helpfully notes that imperial cults typically combined worship of the emperor and other Roman and local deities.

<sup>100</sup> Biguzzi, 'Ephesus', 277.

suggested that the arrangement relates to John's rhetoric against Rome in general and not the imperial cult.

Marius Heemstra also deems imperial cults to be of little significance in Revelation, arguing that persecution stemmed from Domitian's nefarious administration of the *fiscus Iudaicus*, which Nerva announced he had brought to an end on coins issued shortly after he became emperor.<sup>101</sup> Heemstra proposes that under Domitian's administration of the tax late in his reign, Jewish Christians who did not pay the tax were reported by Jews to the governing officials who then punished these Christians with confiscation of property and exile, which possibly explains John's location on Patmos.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, non-Jewish Christians, whose association with Jewish Christians was noted by officials, faced the charge of atheism and of falling into Jewish ways, which was punishable by death.<sup>103</sup> Heemstra provides fresh insights and his construction of the social setting is plausible; however, the textual evidence he provides to connect Revelation, and other NT texts, to this setting is open to alternative interpretations and is far from conclusive. Accordingly, his construction of the social setting stands as an interesting possibility worthy of further exploration.

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<sup>101</sup> Heemstra, *Fiscus Iudaicus*, 105–6, states that the emperor cult 'played no significant role in the circumstances that led to the Book of Revelation and is only part of the wider context'. See Suetonius, *Dom.* 12.2, for a description of the implementation of the tax and RIC II 227 #58, and RIC II 228 #82, for coins issued 96–97 CE announcing Nerva's removal of the *calumnia* of the tax. Goodman, 'Trajan', 20–4, notes it is debated as to whether Nerva stopped the unjust administration of the tax or the tax entirely. If he did stop collecting the tax altogether, the cessation did not last long as there is evidence of it being collected again under Trajan. See the discussion in Martin Goodman, 'The Fiscus Iudaicus and Gentile Attitudes to Judaism in Flavian Rome', *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (ed. Steve Mason, Jonathan Edmondson, and James Rives; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 167–77.

<sup>102</sup> Heemstra, *Fiscus Iudaicus*, 63, 119–20, 202–3. Smallwood, 'Domitian's Attitude', 3, thinks it possible that Domitian applied the tax to Jewish Christians.

<sup>103</sup> Heemstra, *Fiscus Iudaicus*, 63, 119–20, 202–3. Cassius Dio, 67.14.2, Domitian's cousin, Titus Flavius Clemens, was executed on this charge.

### 3.4.3) A 'Crisis' Derived from Pressure to Assimilate

The pressure to assimilate to society is considered a key factor in the social setting of Revelation by numerous scholars.<sup>104</sup> This pressure may have constituted a crisis which prompted John to write his apocalypse. Based on the text of Revelation, three major aspects of engagement with society emerge as concerns. Firstly, the allure of wealth and social advancement (Rev 2.9; 3.17–18; 6.15–17; 17.4; 18.3, 11–24).<sup>105</sup> Zuiderhoek describes an accumulation of wealth among civic elites in the province of Asia in the first two centuries and notes that while the elites grew rich the poor remained static.<sup>106</sup> The result was social tension as non-elites felt the allure of wealth while it remained out of reach, unless they found opportunity to advance socially.<sup>107</sup> Roman rule in the provinces did provide opportunities for such advancement.<sup>108</sup> Rosalinde Kearsley's investigation of epigraphic evidence in Laodicea and Hierapolis found that the introduction of Roman administration and the imperial cult provided new opportunities for women to gain prominence in society.<sup>109</sup> And so to some extent, the desire for and pursuit of wealth directed people towards the civic

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<sup>104</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 125, analysed the seven messages of Rev 2–3 and noted that the communities which are praised did not assimilate to society and are poor while those criticised did assimilate and were rich. He concludes that churches with strict boundaries with society are viewed positively by John and those with soft boundaries are not. See also Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 126–9, 158; Aune, 'Social Matrix', 26–8; Barr, *Tales of the End*, 169–71; DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 61–4, 70–1; David A. deSilva, 'The Strategic Arousal of Emotions in the Apocalypse of John: A Rhetorical-Critical Investigation of the Oracles to the Seven Churches', *NTS* 54 (2008) 107; Craig R. Koester, 'Revelation's Visionary Challenge to Ordinary Empire', *Int* 63 (2009) 8; Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 77; Gradl, 'Kaisertum und Kaiserkult', 116; and Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 9–10, 58–67.

<sup>105</sup> Friesen, 'Satan's Throne', 351–73, considers the pursuit of wealth one of three key social situations in Revelation, the other two being meat sacrificed to idols and martyrdom. See also, Sheets, 'Something Old', 206.

<sup>106</sup> Arjan Zuiderhoek, *The Politics of Munificence in the Roman Empire: Citizens, Elites and Benefactors in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 53–4.

<sup>107</sup> Zuiderhoek, *Politics of Munificence*, 56.

<sup>108</sup> Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 12.

<sup>109</sup> Rosalinde A. Kearsley, 'Epigraphic Evidence for the Social Impact of Roman Government in Laodicea and Hierapolis', *Colossae in Space and Time: Linking to an Ancient City* (ed. Alan H. Cadwallader and Michael Trainor; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011) 132.

elite and Rome. It is possible that John was primarily concerned about the corruptive power of wealth and for that reason demonised Rome and the local elites who supported it. Royalty gives an account of Revelation's rhetoric of wealth along these lines, arguing that John contrasted the true wealth of heaven with the debased wealth of Rome on earth.<sup>110</sup> Alternatively, it may be that John was concerned about wealth because its acquisition inevitably led people to adopt the approach of the civic elites in accommodating Roman power, which John believed to be evil in nature.

Secondly, the practice of eating meat sacrificed to idols is a major concern of the text (Rev 2.14, 20).<sup>111</sup> This issue had ramifications for the level of social engagement possible as such meat was a common aspect of public feasts and festivals, and participation in such activities was taken as an expression of belonging to the local city.<sup>112</sup> It was a widespread and enduring issue in the early church, as is evident from Christian writings including Paul and Irenaeus, as well as a letter from Pliny to Trajan, written around 112 CE, in which he cites the strengthened market for sacrificial meat as evidence of the effectiveness of his interventions against the spread of Christian influence in society (Rom 14.20–1; 1 Cor 8.1–13; 10.25–31; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.6.3; Pliny, *Letters*, 10.96–97).<sup>113</sup> Pliny presents the evidence in making a case for the possibility of successfully reforming Christians. It may be that John had witnessed such 'reform', whether instigated by Roman administration or in response to subtle social pressures, and responded with his apocalypse.<sup>114</sup> There were

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<sup>110</sup> Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 149, 178–83, 236–8.

<sup>111</sup> For discussion on the topic in Revelation, see Aune, *Revelation*, 186; Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 123–4; and David Barr, 'Idol Meat and Satanic Synagogues: From Imagery to History in John's Apocalypse', *Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (ed. Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu; Leuven: Peeters, 2011) 1–10.

<sup>112</sup> Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 97–8; Coutsoumpas, 'Social Implication', 25; Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 51–5; and Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 319.

<sup>113</sup> On Pliny's correspondence, see Mary Beard, John North, and S. R. F. Price, eds., *Religions of Rome: Volume 2, a Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 278.

<sup>114</sup> A possibility considered in Slater, 'Social Setting', 250.

differing views within early Christianity on the legitimacy of eating sacrificial meat. Paul permitted it under certain conditions and so Christians in the province of Asia could have retained their Christian identity while eating sacrificial meat. It is likely that John's Christian rivals endorsed the practice and that this was a factor in the tension between these Christian groups.<sup>115</sup>

Thirdly, John was concerned about participation in cultic activity. This observation relies on the common interpretation of John's objections to πορνεία as a reference to involvement in pagan cultic activity.<sup>116</sup> Revelation 2.14, 20 distinguishes eating sacrificial meat and πορνεία, and so it seems John had something in mind other than eating sacrificial meat alone, though exactly what is not clear. Some scholars, such as Gregory Beale, focus on the issue of participation in trade guilds, which was problematic because of the cultic activity commonly associated with it.<sup>117</sup> Hans-Josef Klauck asks a range of questions about what might constitute involvement with idolatry for a Christian regarding a typical civic festival or parade, for example: *Could they take money from the temple? Could they take part in the procession if they were not holding the statues? Could they watch from the street and sit in the theatre, or was even that idolatry?*<sup>118</sup> Klauck's questions illustrate the diversity of issues that might have confronted Christians and implies that there would have been a spectrum of

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<sup>115</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 58. Also Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 122–4; Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 335; and Tellbe, *Christ-Believers*, 19. The topic is explored further in chapter 8.

<sup>116</sup> As does Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 122; Duff, 'Wolves in Sheep's Clothing', 67; Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 55–7, 107; and Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 313–4.

<sup>117</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 30; see also Travis B. Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter: Differentiating and Contextualizing Early Christian Suffering* (Leiden: Brill, 2012) 242–5. Though Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 26, notes that some of the common assumptions about trade guilds, including even their very existence, need to be re-evaluated in light of the historical data. He concludes that while there were *collegia* around some trades they often served social functions, such as making provision for burial, rather than to regulate the industry. See also Aune, *Revelation*, 186.

<sup>118</sup> Hans-Josef Klauck, 'Die Johannesoffenbarung und die kleinasiatische Archäologie', *Texte, Fakte, Artefakte: Beiträge zur Bedeutung der Archäologie für die neutestamentliche Forschung* (ed. Max Küchler and Karl Matthias Schmidt; Fribourg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006) 206.



beliefs about what was permissible.<sup>119</sup> As has been mentioned already, there are differing views on the importance of the imperial cult in the social setting of Revelation, though given its influence in Asian society it is likely to have been of some concern to John as one possible form of engagement with idolatry.

#### 3.4.4) *An Internal Crisis Involving Rivalry in Authority*

It is likely that the issue of cultural accommodation in terms of sacrificial meat and cultic activity was connected to another aspect of the social setting, that is, internal rivalry between John and his opponents.<sup>120</sup> The idea that Revelation is a response to an internal crisis and not an external one was developed most comprehensively by Duff who defined the crisis as a leadership dispute between John and his rivals – ‘Jezebel’, ‘Balaam’, and the ‘Nicolaitans’.<sup>121</sup> According to Duff, the external conflict suggested in the text between Christians and Rome is simply part of John’s rhetorical strategy. John imaginatively depicted a crisis between the churches and the world at large and then associated his opponents with the antagonists in the narrative – Satan and the Beasts.<sup>122</sup> Paul Trebilco, in a study focused on Ephesus, explored the notion that there was considerable diversity in early Christianity. He

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<sup>119</sup> Klauck, ‘Die Johannesoffenbarung’, 206, rightly suggests that John and the Nicolaitans answered such questions differently. So too, Warren Carter, ‘Roman Imperial Power: A New Testament Perspective’, *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (ed. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011) 140, states that Rev 2–3 is evidence of various Christian responses to Greco-Roman culture.

<sup>120</sup> Thompson, ‘Sociological Analysis’, 162; and Carter, ‘Roman Imperial Power’, 140.

<sup>121</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 14; and Duff, ‘Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing’, 66. It must be noted that while the ‘internal crisis’ perspective is often attributed to Duff there were several scholars who touched on the idea earlier, as he himself acknowledges, including Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 158; Barr, *Tales of the End*, 162; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 107–20; Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 188; and Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 28–33, 241. Richard A. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) 21, has more recently argued that Jewish apocalypses in general were produced in response to internal conflict between rival factions in the Judean aristocracy rather than persecution.

<sup>122</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 72; and Duff, ‘Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing’, 72, 77.

explains this diversity in relation to the house-church structure, which created the potential for differences to develop between the household or church head and itinerant leaders like John, but also between house churches.<sup>123</sup> He argues that differing strands of Christianity co-existed in the cities of Asia and were sometimes in conflict, ‘Thus, one continuing element in the life of Christians in Ephesus was conflict between Christians, and the presence of differing strands of Christian faith.’<sup>124</sup> Trebilco also attempts a categorisation of John and his opponents according to their stance towards society; he labels John an exclusivist, the Nicolaitans and Jezebel as accommodationists, and a third group, which the aforementioned competed to influence, were centrists.<sup>125</sup> While such a categorisation is necessarily speculative given how little we know of John’s opponents, it remains a plausible construction of a social setting for Revelation where prophetic rivalry is a key component.

#### 3.4.5) *Conclusions: The Social Setting and Rhetorical Situation of Revelation*

An outline of Revelation’s social setting will be set out in summary. The majority view should be maintained that if persecution occurred it was probably limited in scope, sporadic, and locally initiated.<sup>126</sup> It may be that by the late first century the persecution of Christians in Rome under Nero was distant enough in time and location that various perspectives had developed in the churches of Asia. Some may have thought that such examples of persecutions were exceptions to the rule and could be attributed to Nero’s

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<sup>123</sup> Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 97–9.

<sup>124</sup> Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 340, 716. Tellbe, *Christ-Believers*, 47, agrees there were diverse groups of Christians in Ephesus but is uncertain that such groups would have been distinguishable. A similar position was stated earlier in Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 107.

<sup>125</sup> Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 327–8.

<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, the Roman governor may have been involved if residents of the province brought charges to them against a Christian. The mention in Pliny, *Letters* 10.96.6, of Christians who had apostatised some time ago, presumably in response to persecution of some kind, may refer to such an instance of local, sporadic persecution. Slater, ‘Social Setting’, 248–50, thinks that Revelation’s rhetorical situation primarily related to an event such as this.

tyrannical nature, and in the case of the Judean War, a harsh response to a foolhardy revolt. On the other hand, others may have maintained that a fundamental opposition existed between Rome and Christians such that the absence of persecution would only be short-lived. A social setting involving diverse and contrasting views on the churches' relationships to Rome illuminates Revelation's rhetorical situation and provides a possible resolution to the apparent tension between John's depiction of persecution and one based on the historical evidence more broadly. Revelation 4–22 is introduced as a vision of 'what must take place after this' and the visions are revealed from the transcendent realm of heaven. The visions constitute the *hidden* reality that John reveals in his apocalypse, the implication being that the persecution envisioned does not yet exist, or that if it does, it is in some latent or not readily discernible form. It is possible to imagine that John's opponents were among those who downplayed or discounted the significance of what persecution had occurred. Perhaps they argued that Roman administration was beneficial for the province of Asia, including for the Christians who lived there, and that those who suffered at its hands brought it upon themselves for defying government established by God. To indulge the imagination a little further, John's rivals may have claimed John was on Patmos not because of 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' but because he was a trouble-maker who refused to live peaceably with others in society.<sup>127</sup> John's rhetorical response was to reveal that Nero, the infamous persecutor of Christians, was not an anomaly of Roman rule but embodied its true character – perhaps that head of the Beast had been cut off but it would soon grow back and attack once more.

The widespread distribution of imperial cults in the province of Asia, including provincial imperial cults in some of the cities mentioned in Rev 2–3, means that it was an unavoidable dimension of life in these cities. It is likely, given its connection to idolatry, that

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<sup>127</sup> Other explanations for John's presence on Patmos include him retreating to a remote location to receive visions and him fleeing the moral corruption of the cities of Asia. See also the discussion in section 7.2.2.

Christians did not participate in some or all activities associated with imperial cults but this would have been the case in relation to other important cults that operated within the cities as well. The prevalent cultic activity in Asian societies presented a tension for Christians to negotiate between the religious and civic dimensions of their identity because participation in cultic activity might threaten their Christian identity and non-participation communicated an anti-social disposition that could have isolated them in society. As G. E. M. de Ste. Croix observes in his study of Christian persecution,

It was not so much the positive beliefs and practices of the Christians which aroused pagan hostility, but above all the negative element in their religion: their total refusal to worship any god but their own. The monotheistic exclusiveness of the Christians was believed to alienate the goodwill of the gods, to endanger what the Romans called the *pax deorum* (the right harmonious relationship between gods and men), and to be responsible for disasters which overtook the community. I shall call this exclusiveness, for convenience, by the name the Greeks gave to it, “atheism”.<sup>128</sup>

De Ste. Croix’s comments illustrate the relationship between ideology, identity, and cosmology because it is suggested that when Christians formed an identity for themselves by removing themselves from society they were perceived not only to reject society but also to disrupt the cosmic order. While imperial cults were not the primary cause of Christian persecution they remained an expression of the fact that the Asian cities had assimilated the ideology of Roman *imperium*.<sup>129</sup> The harmonisation of Roman ideology and civic identity, which is discussed in detail in section 6.4, meant that it would be problematic for a person to simultaneously reject Rome and embrace their polis; and conversely, a person who

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<sup>128</sup> G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, ‘Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?’, *Past and Present* 26 (1963) 24; also, S. R. F. Price, ‘Gods and Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult’, *JHS* 104 (1984) 89.

<sup>129</sup> See section 6.4. Oakes, ‘Re-Mapping the Universe’, 314, notes that the ideological dimension of the imperial cults differentiated them from cults to other deities, which made them more problematic for Christians. Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 97, states that in the province of Asia, the imperial cult was ‘an ideological glue’ connecting disparate cities together by connecting them to the emperors.

disengaged from civic life would simultaneously imply rejection of Rome. These dynamics were significant to John and the churches he addressed as they negotiated their Christian identity in relation to their place in the polis and the Empire.

David Magie has noted that under the Julio-Claudians and the Flavians, Asia enjoyed relative stability, peace, and economic prosperity.<sup>130</sup> Speaking more generally about society in Asia, these were not times of crisis but of relative ease. This is an important aspect of the social setting of Revelation.<sup>131</sup> John wrote to Christian communities finding their place in prospering societies. A range of responses were possible ranging from admiration or envy of the wealthy to disaffection and resentment. Some may have pursued opportunities for social advancement and rationalised the necessary compromises while others distanced themselves from society and found their identity in opposition to societal norms. Opportunities to advance socially and acquire wealth were sometimes connected to Rome. Those Christians who sought prosperity were confronted with the challenge of negotiating their identity regarding both polis and Empire. If Revelation was written in response to a crisis it was primarily the perceived crisis of compromised Christian identity through assimilation to society. To speak of this aspect of the social setting as a crisis is to enter John's rhetorical situation, as it is likely that his opponents, and possibly a good number in the churches, saw

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<sup>130</sup> David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor: To the End of the Third Century after Christ* (2 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950) 1.582–3; see also Barbara Levick, 'Greece (including Crete and Cyprus) and Asia Minor from 43 B.C. to A.D. 69', *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume 10: The Augustan Empire, 43 B.C.–A.D. 69* (ed. Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin, and Andrew Lintott; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 672; and Barbara Levick, 'Greece and Asia Minor', *The Cambridge Ancient History, Chapter 11: The High Empire, A.D. 70–192* (ed. Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey, and Dominic Rathbone; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 608. There were exceptions, for example, hostility to Rome under Vespasian and a grain shortage and famine under Domitian in the province of Asia in the early 90s CE; see Magie, *Roman Rule*, 1.581; Barbara Levick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967) 166–8; Pleket, 'Domitian', 307; and Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 165–6.

<sup>131</sup> Barr, *Tales of the End*, 169; Thompson, 'Ordinary Lives', 39; and Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 146–7.

the process as simply leading a quiet and peaceable life (1 Tim 2.2). But in John's rhetoric, negotiation becomes adultery and proponents of engaging with society are cast as Jezebel.

The value of Duff's contribution to the issue of social setting is to focus the interpreter on the inner dynamics of the groups addressed in Revelation. While John reveals a cosmos in which Rome is at war with Christian saints, it is not the Roman authorities, or even the residents of Asia in general, that John seeks to persuade. Revelation was written to persuade those in the churches of John's way of seeing the world, as Royalty puts it, 'The harsh polemic against Babylon/Rome in Revelation can mask the simple fact that it was written by, for, and to Christians.'<sup>132</sup> Revelation is one side of a Christian dispute about engagement with society and so in considering John's rhetorical deployment of cosmology, in addition to comparing it to the cosmology of the Roman Empire and the cities of the province of Asia, we must also consider how it might compare to the cosmology of John's rivals. The audience addressed by Revelation was not primarily deciding between John's cosmology and Rome's cosmology, or even between John's and that of the civic elite. Rather, it was to decide whether it was John or his rivals that offered the more compelling account of the world. In addressing this context, the present study is distinguished from others, including Hansen's most recently, which adopt a *John versus Rome* (or *Christ versus Caesar*) framework in analysing the rhetoric of Revelation.<sup>133</sup> To be sure, in the narrative Rome emerges as the archrival of the saints but this should not distract the interpreter from the fact that John has his sight set on his opponents, those who in his eyes threaten to lure the faithful away from persevering in their obedience to Christ.

The present chapter has established the historical and social setting of the text of Revelation and framed the situation addressed by its rhetoric. The following chapter will

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<sup>132</sup> Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 28.

<sup>133</sup> See Royalty, *Origin of Heresy*, 166–7, for concerns with 'Revelation against Rome' interpretations.

explore the relationship between cosmology, ideology, and social identity before the discussion of particular cosmologies; firstly, ancient cosmologies in general (chapter 5), secondly, the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology (chapter 6), and finally, the cosmology of Revelation (chapter 7). Chapter 8 will discuss the rhetorical deployment of cosmology in Revelation to show the way in which it addressed the social setting that has been outlined in the present chapter. It will be seen that a comprehensive exploration of the rhetorical function of Revelation's cosmology requires consideration of its engagement with the cosmologies of Rome, the province of Asia, and that of John's rivals within the churches.

## 4) Cosmology and Its Relationship to Ideology and Social Identity

### 4.1) Definitions of Cosmology

Put simply, cosmology is the study of the universe or cosmos. Ancient cultures expressed their understanding of the nature of the cosmos in mythology and ritual activity, though it was in ancient Greek philosophy that cosmology was developed as a field of study. And so John Collins comments that, strictly speaking, cosmology is the rational discussion of the cosmos which developed from the sixth century BCE in Greece.<sup>1</sup> The word cosmology derives from the Greek word κόσμος, which in general means adornment and order and was applied to the universe in the first instance by Pythagoras (*Aetius* 2.1.1) to express the concept of the world as a beautifully ordered unity.<sup>2</sup> By the fifth century, κόσμος had become a technical term for the universe.<sup>3</sup>

The Milesian philosophers of the sixth century discussed the cosmos in terms of its originating material principle, such as water (Thales), ‘the boundless’ (or *apeiron*) (Anaximander), and air (Anaximenes).<sup>4</sup> They explained that the composition and structure of the cosmos resulted from a process involving the generation of material out of pre-existing substances. The result was a cosmos consisting of basic elements, such as fire, water, earth, and air, that existed in a dynamic tension which was balanced overall to achieve cosmic

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, ‘Cosmology’, 59.

<sup>2</sup> M. R. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1995) 3. By universe it is meant the totality of space as it was conceived at the time, which obviously differed significantly from modern concepts of the universe.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, *Cosmology*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Adams, ‘Greco-Roman and Ancient Jewish Cosmology’, *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough; London: T&T Clark, 2008) 8–9; and Keimpe Algra, ‘The Beginnings of Cosmology’, *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (ed. A. A. Long; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 47–58.



stability.<sup>5</sup> This focus, which was maintained under later Greek philosophers, served to define cosmology as a science concerned with the origin and structure of the physical universe.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, some modern scholars restrict their definition of cosmology to the realm of the physical universe; for example, Adams states, ‘Cosmology seeks to explain the origin, structure and destiny of the physical universe.’<sup>7</sup> As has been discussed in the introductory chapter of the present thesis, such an understanding has led several commentators to conclude that Revelation contains little information of cosmological significance.<sup>8</sup> However, this definition of cosmology is overly restrictive when applied outside the Greek philosophic tradition. In the ancient Near East, cosmological thought was utilised to explain the way the cosmos functioned and the location of various cosmic powers including deities.<sup>9</sup> As Walton has observed, in the ancient Near East cosmology was about metaphysics rather than physics and function rather than substance.<sup>10</sup> Cosmologies expressed beliefs about authorities and their jurisdiction in the cosmos.<sup>11</sup> It should also be noted that even the Milesian philosophers related their concept of god to the cosmos; in fact, they thought of the divine as a substance

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<sup>5</sup> Though these tensions were used to explain movement and change. Furthermore, the stability was not thought to last forever, periodically the cosmic forces would trigger cosmic dissolution returning the cosmos to its principle substance. The idea was later developed by the Stoics with the concept of *ekpyrosis*.

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion in Algra, ‘Beginnings of Cosmology’, 60–3, on the accuracy of speaking of this approach to cosmology as ‘scientific’, the conclusion reached is that ‘Just as the activities of the Milesians cannot be labelled ‘philosophical’ in any specifically modern sense of the word, so they are not to be called ‘scientific’ in a specifically Baconian or Popperian sense either.’ Though it is suggested they may be labelled ‘protoscientists’.

<sup>7</sup> Adams, ‘Greco-Roman’, 5.

<sup>8</sup> The same concern is expressed in Joel White, ‘Paul’s Cosmology: The Witness of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians’, *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough; London: T&T Clark, 2008) 91–2.

<sup>9</sup> Keel, *Symbolism*, 56–7; and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, ‘Biblical Cosmology’, *Backgrounds for the Bible* (ed. Michael Patrick O’Connor and David Freedman; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 231.

<sup>10</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 181; and Richard J. Clifford, ‘The Roots of Apocalypticism in near Eastern Myth’, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Volume 1, the Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. John J. Collins; New York: Continuum, 2000) 12.

<sup>11</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 181.

within the cosmos and by modern categories would be considered monists. Consequently, to say that cosmology is concerned with the physical universe, based on its origins in Greek philosophy, is not to say that cosmology is unconcerned with metaphysics and even theology. As Keimpe Algra comments, ‘the Milesians did not abandon the notion of divinity altogether, but introduced a reformed and “physicalized” conception of it’.<sup>12</sup> Like the ancient Near East, ancient Greek cosmology served to establish the relationship of the divine to the cosmos.<sup>13</sup> According to Thomas Dozeman, ancient geography was generally ‘religious geography’ in that it represented space in terms of religious presuppositions.<sup>14</sup> Like so many aspects of ancient life and thought, in ancient cosmology the ‘religious’ or supernatural was intertwined and inseparable from the natural world.

A more broad and all-encompassing definition of cosmology in the ancient world combines two dimensions. Firstly, it involves description of the components of the cosmos; their structure, composition, origin, and interactions. Secondly, it provides an account of the powers and forces that operate in the cosmos, including both deities and other spiritual beings as well as human agents, such as kings and priests. The overall function of cosmology was to situate human life in the cosmos and to provide an understanding of the operation of the cosmos which would facilitate human participation in life. A wide range of aspects of human experience were accounted for in cosmological terms. Knowledge of the heavens, that is, the astral realm, imparted knowledge of the seasons which was applied in agriculture as well as in timing ritual activities and festivals. The location and relationship between divinities established which gods to worship and where. Ethical behaviour was also determined with reference to the cosmos, whether this be through establishing a transcendent point of

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<sup>12</sup> Algra, ‘Beginnings of Cosmology’, 60.

<sup>13</sup> Sometime after the Milesians, Aristotle used the concept of god to ultimately account for movement and causation, describing god as the ‘Unmoved mover’, see Aristotle, *Metaph.* 12.5–8 and *Phys.* 8.5.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, ‘Biblical Geography and Critical Spatial Studies’, *Constructions of Space I: Theory, Geography, and Narrative* (ed. Jon L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp; New York: T&T Clark, 2007) 88.

reference for values in a divinity and demarcating places of punishment and reward in the afterlife, or, as in Stoic philosophy, by defining moral behaviour as that which is in harmony with the cosmos.<sup>15</sup> Cosmology is the activity of describing the cosmos in order to live in the cosmos.

Before moving on from the matter of definitions, a few associated concepts and their definition will be outlined. Some of these do not differ much in substance from cosmology as it has been defined. For example, Horowitz prefers the expression ‘cosmic geography’ to cosmology; however, there is a potential confusion of scope resulting from the terms as ‘geography’ suggests a focus upon the earth while ‘cosmic’ indicates the entire universe is under consideration.<sup>16</sup> That said, in a study on 1 Enoch, Kelley Bautch defended the use of the term ‘geography’ on the basis that ancient geography sometimes included aspects of the entire universe.<sup>17</sup> A better alternative expression is that used by Denis Cosgrove – ‘cosmography’, which he defines simply as the mapping of the cosmos.<sup>18</sup> Finally, the expression ‘symbolic universe’ is often encountered in studies of cosmology. Berger and Luckmann describe the symbolic universe as ‘an all-embracing frame of reference, which now constitutes a universe in the literal sense of the word, because all human experience can now be conceived of as taking place within it’.<sup>19</sup> By this definition, the concept of the symbolic universe is significantly broader than that of cosmology as it encompasses the

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<sup>15</sup> Denis Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008) 38.

<sup>16</sup> Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography*. Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 39, also comments that there is little difference in meaning between ‘cosmic geography’, as it appears in Horowitz, and his own use of ‘cosmology’.

<sup>17</sup> Kelley Coblenz Bautch, *A Study of the Geography of 1 Enoch 17–19: ‘No One Has Seen What I Have Seen’* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 8.

<sup>18</sup> Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision*, 34, who also notes that historically there were strong connections between geography and cosmography and that this connection was only broken with the rise of modern science. As the title indicates, the term is also used in J. E. Wright, ‘The Cosmography of the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch and Its Affinities’ (Diss., Brandeis University, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 114.

totality of human symbolic systems rather than only those coordinated to the physical cosmos. The term ‘worldview’ is also encountered in cosmological studies.<sup>20</sup> It too is a broad concept of which cosmology is a component. Clifford Geertz’s definition of worldview suggests its functional equivalence to the concept of the symbolic universe, he writes, ‘Their world view is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order.’<sup>21</sup>

While cosmology is a component of a symbolic universe or worldview, it should not be thought of as a subset of beliefs disconnected from others in the system. For example, beliefs about the self might involve an understanding of the soul and its relationship to the cosmos. In Stoic philosophy, the soul consisted of the element of fire and would ultimately return to fire either through astral immortality after death or along with everything else through *ekpyrosis*.<sup>22</sup> Or the understanding of society and its political structure may reflect, or rather, be projected onto, the understanding of the heavenly realm. For example, earthly kingship in Babylon corresponded to the divine kingship of Marduk in heaven.<sup>23</sup> The place of cosmology within a symbolic universe or worldview is such that it is appropriate to consider how a cosmology influenced other components of the system, such as ideas about morality, roles in society, the nature of political power, and ritual activity. Conversely, it is appropriate

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<sup>20</sup> Houtman, *Der Himmel, Weltanschauung* may be translated as worldview. Also, Roberts, *Religion*; Barr, *Tales of the End*, 4; Bauckham, *Geography of I Enoch*, 7–8; and Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*.

<sup>21</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973) 127. Adams, *Constructing the World*, 5, suggests that Geertz’s concept of worldview is equivalent to the concept of the symbolic universe used by Berger. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 32, at one point uses the concept of worldview, he writes that the ‘nomos’ of a society is sometimes legitimated by incorporating all less-than-total legitimations into an all-embracing *Weltanschauung*.

<sup>22</sup> See discussion in section 5.4.3.

<sup>23</sup> In addition, John H. Walton, ‘The Mesopotamian Background of the Tower of Babel Account and Its Implications’, *BBR* 5 (1995) 167–8, suggests that the development of urbanisation in Mesopotamia and the associated assembly format of government that developed with it coincided with the formation of the idea of the divine assembly in heaven and the cosmos as a state ruled by the gods.

to ask how an understanding of human nature, of the divine, or of society's values might influence the formation of a cosmology. In the context of the present study, it will be asked how various cosmologies relevant to the book of Revelation related to beliefs about social identity, engagement with society, and the nature of political authority.

#### 4.2) Cosmology, Ideology, and Social Identity

In this section, a definition of ideology will be outlined and the relationship between cosmology, ideology, and social identity will be established. The final part of this section will consider two narrative frameworks that relate these concepts to each other; namely, the 'above-below' and 'centre-periphery' frameworks. These will be described and briefly discussed in relation to the book of Revelation.

##### 4.2.1) *A Definition of Ideology*

Ideology is a topic that has attracted extensive scholarly attention in a variety of fields, including NT studies and the study of the Roman Empire. Many studies that discuss ideology do not provide a definition of the term, which may be because the concept is commonly understood and so does not require definition. However, it has been suggested that the lack of definition in NT studies is a weakness of some studies.<sup>24</sup> A definition is included here to avoid a lack of clarity but also to take the opportunity to elucidate the inherent relationship between the concepts of ideology, cosmology, and social identity.

Kathleen Knight traced the development of the concept of ideology in the twentieth century in the field of political science and found there was a core understanding of the term

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<sup>24</sup> Galinsky, 'In the Shadow (or Not)', 219–20, is critical of the lack of definitional clarity for the concept of ideology in some NT scholarship. He recommends the term be carefully defined or abandoned.

which has persisted in recent decades.<sup>25</sup> She writes, ‘In broader terms, ideology can be defined as the way a system – a single individual or even a whole society – rationalizes itself.’<sup>26</sup> She goes on to explain that an ideology involves a stable and coherent set of attitudes, ideas, and values.<sup>27</sup> The key components of the definition she outlines are: i) a system of ideas; ii) which possesses explanatory power; iii) for a community to which these ideas belong. Such features appear in the definition of ideology in Susan Alcock and Kathleen Morrison’s chapter on imperial ideologies in an edited volume on empires; such ideologies are defined as ‘the broad overlapping spheres of religious belief and ritual, of power negotiations and relations, of self-definition and self-representation, or human understanding of “world order”’.<sup>28</sup> This definition draws attention to the fact that while ideology has often been discussed in relation to politics it is also related to religion. This is because theological constructions are essentially ideological in nature and consequently it is valid to analyse Revelation in terms of its ideological implications, as will be done in this thesis.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4.2.2) *The Relationship of Ideology to Cosmology and Social Identity*

The definition of Alcock and Morrison suggests a connection between ideology and cosmology. They state that ideology is in part an expression of human understanding of ‘world order’ and that it involves the articulation of power relations and negotiations. These

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<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Knight, ‘Transformations of the Concept of Ideology in the Twentieth Century’, *The American Political Science Review* 100 (2006) 625. On the concept of ideology in the history of philosophy, see George Lichtheim, ‘The Concept of Ideology’, *HistTh* 4 (1965) 164–95.

<sup>26</sup> Knight, ‘Transformations’, 619–20.

<sup>27</sup> Knight, ‘Transformations’, 619–20.

<sup>28</sup> Susan E. Alcock and Kathleen D. Morrison, ‘Imperial Ideologies’, *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History* (ed. Terence N. D’Altroy, Susan E. Alcock, Kathleen D. Morrison, and Carla M. Sinopoli; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 279, though it must be acknowledged that the reference to the community is implied rather than explicit.

<sup>29</sup> Elliott, *Social-Scientific Criticism*, 52.

features of ideology directly overlap with the concepts of symbolic universe and worldview; however, the broader understanding of cosmology adopted for this study also encompasses these features. Consideration of a typical ancient Near Eastern cosmology illustrates the point. A cosmos represented in terms of a duality between heaven and earth in which the earthly reign of a king is supported by a deity ruling in heaven functions to establish the legitimacy of the king's reign.<sup>30</sup> This cosmic order defines legitimate political activity as that which supports the king so that political alignment is coordinated with cosmic alignment. Berger considers this to be the most ancient form of legitimation, that is, to suggest the institutional order directly reflects the divine structure of the cosmos.<sup>31</sup> At another point he states, 'When the socially defined reality has come to be identified with the ultimate reality of the universe, then its denial takes on the quality of evil as well as madness.'<sup>32</sup> The impact of cosmology can be to absolutise the social order such that morality and rationality are determined by the ideological system.

The connection between ideology and cosmology is brought out clearly in Berger's sociological approach to religion. His discussion of 'legitimation' and 'cosmization' is particularly relevant.<sup>33</sup> Berger considers cosmization to be the normal means by which ancient societies legitimated the social order.<sup>34</sup> He writes, 'Whatever the historical variations, the tendency is for the meanings of the humanly constructed order to be projected onto the universe as such.'<sup>35</sup> Basically, cosmology can be considered a vehicle for the expression of ideology. The influence of ideology on cosmology may be intended and obvious or subtle and unintended. Either way, the relationship between the two means that no cosmology

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<sup>30</sup> Psalm 2 is illustrative of the cosmology for kingship in ancient Israel.

<sup>31</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 34.

<sup>32</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 27, 32. These terms have been defined and discussed in chapter 2.

<sup>34</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 25, though he thinks this only applies to ancient societies. In contrast, modern society tends to project the social order onto their understanding of humanity, preferring anthropology over cosmology.

<sup>35</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 25.

should be considered value neutral and that it is appropriate to interrogate a cosmology for its ideological implications. By way of example, both Michael Lapidge and Thomas Habinek have observed that in the *Astronomica* of Marcus Manilius, which is significantly influenced by Stoic philosophy, there is no expression of the Stoic concept of *ekpyrosis*.<sup>36</sup> Lapidge comments that Manilius wanted to present a cosmos in order not disorder.<sup>37</sup> An ideological explanation for this preference would be that Manilius has accommodated Stoic cosmology to the Augustan ideology of cosmic harmony, peace, and prosperity.

Berger also outlines three processes that relate to world construction, a concept related to ideological formation. First there is ‘externalization’, by which members of a society construct a world in which they can locate themselves and find identity; secondly, ‘objectification’, by which the society associates this construction with objective reality; and thirdly, ‘internalization’, by which the structures of the constructed world are absorbed into the human consciousness which in turn shapes roles in society.<sup>38</sup> It can be seen that in Berger’s account ideological formation is driven by the need for social identity. An emphasis on social identity also emerges in the definition of ideology adopted by J. Rufus Fears in his study of the cult of Jupiter and Roman imperial ideology. He defines ideology as ‘a system of beliefs held in common by the members of a collectivity, a system of ideas that is oriented to the evaluative integration of the community’.<sup>39</sup> He observes that by this definition ‘ideology forms the matrix of social behaviour and provides the principal means for attaining social

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Lapidge, ‘Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature, First to Third Centuries A.D.’, *ANRW* 36:1396; and Thomas Habinek, ‘Manilius’ Conflicted Stoicism’, *Forgotten Stars: Rediscovering Manilius’ Astronomica* (ed. Steven J. Green and Katharina Volk; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 42.

<sup>37</sup> Lapidge, ‘Stoic Cosmology’, 1396.

<sup>38</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 9–25.

<sup>39</sup> J. Rufus Fears, ‘The Cult of Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology’, *ANRW* 17:7–8. The definition of ideology is from Talcott Parson, *The Social System* (London: Tavistock, 1952).



solidarity and integration'.<sup>40</sup> He also lists identity as one of the functions of ideology, those being: legitimacy, identity, solidarity, agitation, communication, and goal specification.<sup>41</sup>

In relation to groups, identity may be understood to be a set of characteristics or attributes that apply to members belonging to the group. Implicit in this understanding is that identity is just as much concerned with defining who is *not* included in the group. So Mikael Tellbe, in a monograph on the identity formation of early Christian communities in Ephesus, states that identity is about both 'the self/us' as well as 'them'.<sup>42</sup> He comments that recognising boundaries and distinctions forms identity.<sup>43</sup> DeSilva discusses identity formation in relation to the social function of Revelation. His thesis is that the text's function was to maintain the communities' distinctive identity and boundaries based on a counter-definition of reality.<sup>44</sup> The definition of reality in Revelation is both ideological and cosmological in nature. Furthermore, it engages with and responds to rival constructions of reality that may be identified with Rome, the civic elites in the province of Asia, and John's rivals.<sup>45</sup>

In the early stages of the Roman Empire, Rome itself was establishing its identity through a representation of their past, destiny, and unique relationship to the gods and the

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<sup>40</sup> Fears, 'Cult of Jupiter', 7–8.

<sup>41</sup> Fears, 'Cult of Jupiter', 7–8.

<sup>42</sup> Tellbe, *Christ-believers in Ephesus*, 57–8.

<sup>43</sup> Tellbe, *Christ-believers in Ephesus*, 57–8.

<sup>44</sup> DeSilva, 'Social Setting', 301; similarly, Jan A. du Rand, "'Your Kingdom Come "on Earth as It Is in Heaven"": The Theological Motif of the Apocalypse of John', *Neot* 31 (1997) 60, describes the rhetorical function of Revelation in terms of the development of the believer's sense of identity through recalling God's work in salvation.

<sup>45</sup> Tord Olsson, 'The Apocalyptic Activity: The Case of Jāmāsp Namag', *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism Uppsala, August 12–17, 1979* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983) 31, proposes that apocalypticism in general arises as a phenomenon when a community must redefine its identity against a rival community.

cosmos.<sup>46</sup> Gregory Woolf suggests this identity was established by relating Roman history to the cosmic order to represent Roman power as stable and legitimate.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, in the eastern provinces the locus of identity formation remained the polis despite the significant impact of Romanisation.<sup>48</sup> Civic identity in the eastern provinces was maintained and revitalised by a range of means including developing cultic activities and festivals around traditional deities, supporting imperial cults and associated ceremonies, the practice of *euergetism* by civic elites, and through reiteration of foundation myths.<sup>49</sup> While these activities were primarily the responsibility of the elites in society, collective participation in them by the residents of a city fostered a sense of unity and communal identity.<sup>50</sup> As Guy Rogers has shown in relation to the city of Ephesus, the formation of civic identity involved a negotiation of traditions associated with the city and new conceptions of world order manifest in Roman ideology.<sup>51</sup> In particular, Rogers argues that in Ephesus a ‘sacred identity’ for the city was preserved by retaining and even reinforcing the prominence of local foundation myths and civic deities such as Artemis while acknowledging the presence of Roman power by assigning it a place in its ritual life and in the representation of its history.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Gregory Woolf, ‘Inventing Empire in Ancient Rome’, *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History* (ed. Terence N. D’Altroy, Susan E. Alcock, Kathleen D. Morrison, and Carla M. Sinopoli; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 315.

<sup>47</sup> Woolf, ‘Inventing Empire’, 317, illustrates with examples such as the *Res gestae* of Augustus, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and iconography such as that of Augustus with the globe.

<sup>48</sup> Zuiderhoek, *Politics of Munificence*, 71. Fears, ‘Cult of Jupiter’, 7, makes a distinction between Aristotle, whose framework for civilisation was based on the polis, and Celsus (second century CE) for whom it was based on rule of the king under Zeus, to illustrate a polis versus empire dynamic. He proposes that in the Roman Empire the two models were eventually reconciled.

<sup>49</sup> For example, Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 54–5; Guy MacLean Rogers, *The Sacred Identity of Ephesus: Foundation Myths of a Roman City* (London: Routledge, 1991) 140–1; Zuiderhoek, *Politics of Munificence*, 74; and Zahra Newby, ‘Art and Identity in Asia Minor’, *Roman Imperialism and Provincial Art* (ed. Sarah Scott and Jane Webster; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 194.

<sup>50</sup> Zuiderhoek, *Politics of Munificence*, 81.

<sup>51</sup> Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 140–6.

<sup>52</sup> Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 140–6.

In contrast to this approach, in Revelation John sought to create an identity for the Christian communities he addressed which was defined by its opposition to Roman power and exclusion from civic ritual and cultic activity. In doing so he brought about a conflict with rival Christian leadership which adopted an approach like that of the civic elites in attempting a negotiation of their traditions and Roman imperial ideology. These ideas will be explored in greater depth in chapter 8 of the thesis.

#### 4.2.3) *Cosmological Narrative Frameworks: Above–Below and Centre–Periphery*

The relationship between cosmology, ideology, and the formation of social identity has been established. Here it is recognised that ideological constructions are often expressed in the form of narratives with a cosmic setting as well as narratives about the cosmos. There are two commonly occurring cosmological narrative frameworks; the ‘above–below’ and the ‘centre–periphery’.<sup>53</sup> These frameworks have featured in studies of ideology, sociology, and literary narratives and so are pertinent to the present study.<sup>54</sup> The centre–periphery framework identifies a cosmic centre which acts as the locus of power, authority, and reality. Other places are defined in relation to the centre and its antipode is represented by the periphery, which is sometimes conceived of as the ‘ends of the earth’. The framework typically operates on the horizontal dimension in the earthly realm; however, it can also operate in the heavenly realm. The centre often has both political and religious significance

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<sup>53</sup> Wyatt, *Sea and Desert*, 378, discusses these two frameworks in his study on symbolic geography in west Semitic religious thought. He offers an anthropological explanation, stating that the centre–periphery framework developed from the socialisation of the individual who naturally locates themselves at the centre and others towards the periphery, and the above–below framework from the perception of things above the head and below the feet. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 38, uses the same categories in his narrative study of Revelation. He describes them as the two major spatial points of view in the text. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 111–52, 623–5, draws on the centre–periphery model in his analysis of imperial cults and Roman imperial ideology.

<sup>54</sup> For example, Shils, *Center and Periphery*; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 43–8; Barr, *Tales of the End*, 4, 67, 104; Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 12–13, 124–5, 162–4; and Alcock and Morrison, ‘Imperial Ideologies’, 279.

with capital cities and major temples typically identified with the centre.<sup>55</sup> Several ancient states, including Babylon, Egypt, Assyria, Israel, and Rome claimed to occupy the centre of the world while foreign nations were assigned to the ends of the earth.<sup>56</sup> Myths developed to support the claim to centrality, such as the ben-stone myth in Egypt which suggested the sites of their temples were built on the first piece of land to emerge from the cosmic waters.<sup>57</sup> The myth of the sacred mountain was used to identify locations such as Zion, and hence Jerusalem, as the cosmic centre, as was the concept of the *omphalos* which was applied to Delphi as well as other sites.<sup>58</sup>

The centre–periphery framework served imperial ideologies by defining the empire’s chief city as an absolute centre, rendering other cities and nations subordinate. Daniel Miller suggests that every hegemonic system involves its own inversions and in cosmological terms these inversions can be associated with the periphery.<sup>59</sup> An obvious example is the construction of ‘civilisation’ at the centre and ‘barbarism’ at the periphery. According to Beate Ego, in the Zion tradition of Israel the Temple was the cosmic centre and was associated with security and blessing while the periphery was a counter-world (*Gegenwelt*)

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<sup>55</sup> John H. Walton, ‘Mesopotamian Background’, 159–60, discusses the close association of cultic and civic space in the cities of ancient Babylon.

<sup>56</sup> Keel, *Symbolism*, 21–2, claims that the city of Babylon was identified as the centre of the world in a sixth century BCE map of the world; however, Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography*, 20–41, observes that Babylon is in the middle of the map but is not strictly speaking at its centre. See also, Keel, *Symbolism*, 38–9, and Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 149.

<sup>57</sup> Wyatt, *Space and Time*, 57; and Walton, ‘Mesopotamian Background’, 159–60, notes Babylonian ziggurats at Babylon and Dilbat named ‘Temple of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth’.

<sup>58</sup> Wyatt, *Space and Time*, 148, notes that the cosmic mountain was sometimes identified as the *omphalos*; in Palestine this included Jerusalem, Gerazim, and Mount Tabor. See also Samuel Terrien, ‘The Omphalos Myth and Hebrew Religion’, *VT* 20 (1970) 315–38; and Philip S. Alexander, ‘Jerusalem as the Omphalos of the World: On the History of a Geographical Concept’, *Judaism* 46 (1997) 147–58. In the Roman Forum there was a ‘*mundus*’ which was also called the *umbilicus* of the city. It was considered the centre of the city and the gateway to the underworld; see Plutarch, *Rom.* 11.1–3, and for a discussion of the site in the religion of Rome, Beard *et al.*, *Religions of Rome: Volume 2*, 92.

<sup>59</sup> Miller, ‘Limits of Dominance’, 66.

associated with Israel's enemies as well as destructive forces such as water, chaos, and death.<sup>60</sup> Mircea Eliade postulates that the establishment of cosmic centres relates to the archaic ontology of primitive humanity by which people sanctify space and time at the centre through ritual with the effect of re-establishing the reality of the primordial state.<sup>61</sup> Wyatt too sees ontological significance in the distinction made in the ancient Near East between the centre, representing being, and the periphery, representing becoming.<sup>62</sup> The centre maintains the stability and order of the cosmos and the forces that threaten that order must be held at bay at the periphery. Cosmic order is threatened when forces associated with the periphery advance on the centre. The centre is also defined by its connection with the heavenly and underworld realms and as the place of intersection and communication between them it has a special role in maintaining cosmic unity.<sup>63</sup> In the discussion on the cosmology of Revelation it will be seen how the claim of centrality features in its rhetorical strategy.

There are some exceptions to the typical relationship of the centre and periphery. In 1 Enoch, there are positive associations with the centre, including the location of the sacred mountain, Jerusalem, and the Temple, and there are negative associations with the periphery, such as the dwelling place of souls of the deceased and the prison for the watchers and wayward stars (1 En. 18.10–19.1; 21.1–10; 22.1–14; 26.1). However, a holy mountain and the tree of life also reside at the periphery and there is a valley where the wicked will be punished eternally at the centre (1 En. 24.2–25.7; 27.1–4).<sup>64</sup> In 1 Enoch, the firmament of

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<sup>60</sup> Beate Ego, 'Die Wasser der Gottesstadt: Zu einem Motiv der Zionstradition und seinen kosmologischen Implikationen', *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Beate Ego; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 373–7.

<sup>61</sup> Eliade, *Eternal Return*, 5, 17, 20–1.

<sup>62</sup> Wyatt, *Space and Time*, 147.

<sup>63</sup> Sullivan, *Icanchu's Drum*, 130–3.

<sup>64</sup> In Hellenistic thought, the Elysian Fields were sometimes located at the ends of the earth, for example, in Homer, *Od.* 4.561–568, and Hesiod's Islands of the Blessed are at the ocean at the ends of the earth (*Works and Days*, 167–174).

heaven rests on the ends of the earth and it is only at the extreme periphery beyond this where chaos is found, in Enoch's words, 'I travelled to where it was chaotic. And there I saw a terrible thing; I saw neither heaven above, nor firmly founded earth, but a chaotic and terrible place' (1 En. 21.1–2 [Nickelsburg and VanderKam]). Furthermore, Romm discusses instances in which the periphery is represented as the place of ideal civilisation to critique society at the centre, which was perceived to be corrupt.<sup>65</sup>

While the centre–periphery model usually has the earthly realm as its focus, it can also be applied to the heavenly realm. First Enoch 14.8–23 provides an example; Enoch ascends to heaven and then passes through a wall of hailstones into a house of snow and fire then through to a house made of tongues of fire and in that 'great house' he sees the throne of God. Heaven is arranged concentrically with grades of holiness increasing towards the centre. This concept is derived from the idea of the Jerusalem temple and the arrangement of its courts.<sup>66</sup> The vision of the heavenly throne room in Rev 4–5 may also exhibit a centre–periphery arrangement with the throne of God at the centre encircled by various heavenly beings and ultimately the whole of creation in worship of God.

Like the centre–periphery framework, the above–below framework maps power and authority in the cosmos, only in a different way. The establishment of levels in the cosmos allows for the co-existence of multiple loci of power, which may or may not be in harmony. For example, in ancient Greek religion cosmic realms were assigned to various deities; heaven to Zeus, the sea to Poseidon, and the underworld to Hades. It also allows for different orders of beings to exist in their appropriate realms. Friesen relates this to the mythic consciousness which thinks of the cosmos in terms of kinds or orders of being and allocates

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<sup>65</sup> Romm, *Edges of the Earth*, 46–7, 66–7, 163; see also, Laura Nasrallah, 'Mapping the World: Justin, Tatian, Lucian, and the Second Sophistic', *HTR* 98 (2005) 299–306.

<sup>66</sup> Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 13–20. The horizontal movement to the centre of the Temple by the priest or worshipper corresponded to an ascent to God's dwelling in heaven. This concept was reinforced by the stars which according to Josephus, *B.J.* 5.212–214; *Ant.* 3.180–182, decorated the curtain outside the holy of holies.

space to each.<sup>67</sup> For example, the cosmological formula ‘heaven and earth’ is often used to draw a distinction between the divine and human realms.<sup>68</sup> The cosmic tiers can be moralised, typically with the underworld being associated with evil and destructive forces and the heavens with goodness and order. Pennington finds that in the Gospel of Matthew, the heaven and earth word pair is predominantly used antithetically and that a key contrast is between heaven, where the Messiah’s realm is fully manifest, and earth, where it is yet to be realised.<sup>69</sup> Accessibility to knowledge is also differentiated according to these realms, with both the underworld and heaven acting as destinations for journeys in the search of wisdom and knowledge.<sup>70</sup> In the above–below framework, the order of the cosmos is sometimes upset when the boundaries between realms are transgressed, as in the Greek myth of the battle between the Olympians and the Titans and the Jewish myth of the battle of the watchers.<sup>71</sup>

While the centre–periphery and above–below frameworks offer different ways of representing the cosmos they can co-exist and be complementary. The centre is sometimes established by the divine power in the realm above. For example, the Jerusalem temple was established at the place of YHWH’s choice and according to a heavenly design. In the narrative of the *Aeneid*, the city of Rome was founded according to the will of Jupiter. And the *Grand Camée de France* depicts the rule of the earthly centre manifest in Tiberius

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<sup>67</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 13, 152.

<sup>68</sup> Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 181–2, states that in Matthew an ontological dualism underlies the physical dualism in the bipartite structure of the cosmos.

<sup>69</sup> Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 199, 205.

<sup>70</sup> Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 81–2, finds that in several of the ascent apocalypses heaven is identified as the place in which wisdom can be found. In the underworld are souls of the deceased who have knowledge of human affairs and history, for example, Aeneas’s journey to Anchises in *Aen.* 6.548–885. And in heaven are divine beings who possess transcendent knowledge, for example, the angelic guides introduced in 2 En. 1.3–9.

<sup>71</sup> In Statius, *Theb.* 8.1–122, Amphiaraus is swallowed by the earth and goes to Tartarus. With the earth open, Pluto complains about the underworld being exposed to the heavens, a mingling of realms which disturbs cosmic order.

ordained by Augustus in the heavenly realm above.<sup>72</sup> The lowest section of the gem represents the subjugated barbarians who belong to the periphery of the earth. The discussion in chapter 7 will show how both frameworks are utilised in the narrative of Revelation. It will also be argued that John integrates the two frameworks to narrate a cosmic conflict in which tension exists between two centres of power and authority operating concurrently in different levels of the cosmos – the rule of God and Christ in heaven and the rule of Satan and the Beast on earth.

A range of plotlines of cosmic narratives can be told using the centre–periphery and above–below frameworks. To illustrate the point, a few examples are provided here in the form of a summary statement. The following utilise the centre–periphery framework:

- a) The centre was established by heavenly/divine authority and exercises dominion over the whole earth by subduing surrounding peoples to the ends of the earth and thereby maintaining cosmic order.
- b) Society at the centre has become corrupt and is critiqued by an ideal considered in some part lacking at the centre but embodied in a utopian reality at the periphery.
- c) People living at the periphery, or perhaps cosmic forces represented there, rebel against the centre in an attempt to replace it with a new centre and thereby establish an improved cosmic order.

The following utilise the above–below framework:

- a) Parallel conflicts occur in the heavenly realm and earthly realms; a conflict on earth is explained by the heavenly conflict.
- b) A transgression of the boundaries between heaven and earth results in a conflict between beings in the two realms and a disruption of the cosmic order. The

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<sup>72</sup> See discussion in sections 6.2 and 6.3.



transgression may involve either a heavenly being descending to earth or earthly beings attempting to reach heaven.

- c) Heaven and earth are out of alignment because an earthly power lacks divine approval or because earthly worship does not please God/the gods. Heavenly order is appealed to in critiquing the earthly power. Harmony may be restored by divine intervention, human rebellion against the corrupt power, or a combination of both.
- d) There is harmony between heaven and earth because the divine heavenly will is manifest in the earthly domain.

These cosmic narratives illustrate the way in which cosmology and ideology may feature in narratives. Such narratives may be produced by individuals or groups to establish social identity and justify social conduct. In chapters 6–8 it will be shown how cosmological narratives were developed in response to the Roman Empire's cosmic narrative. In the case of Asia's local elites, and in a different way, John's rivals within the Christian communities, these narratives largely accommodated Rome's narrative. However, in the case of Revelation, a counter-narrative was produced in which Rome was recast to express an understanding of the cosmos in which a hostile stance to society could be justified.

## 5) Ancient Cosmologies

The purpose of this chapter is to survey ancient cosmologies from the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions to provide context for the discussion of cosmology in the chapters that will follow. There are other studies entirely devoted to various ancient cosmologies, as well as other brief surveys like that offered here, and so a detailed and comprehensive treatment of the cosmologies discussed is unnecessary.<sup>1</sup> The survey provided here will generally rely upon previous scholarship, though for two areas where broad and substantial scholarship is lacking, namely, cosmology in apocalyptic literature and cosmology in early Christianity, the contribution of a sample of relevant texts will be discussed to illustrate key points.

### 5.1) Hebrew and Early Jewish Cosmologies

Hebrew and early Jewish cosmologies developed alongside and under the influence of other ancient Near Eastern cosmologies including those of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Canaan, and Persia. Bietenhard suggested that the *Weltbild* of the HB had its origins in Mesopotamian culture and that the influence had occurred during the Babylonian exile.<sup>2</sup> There are certainly similarities in the cosmologies of Mesopotamia and the HB, though there are differences as well. Like other ancient Near Eastern creation myths, in Gen 1 the world is created through a

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<sup>1</sup> Substantial studies devoted to an overview of cosmology include: Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt*; Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*; Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*; Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature', 1379–429; Robert B. Todd, 'The Stoics and their Cosmology in the First and Second Centuries A.D.', *ANRW* 36:1365–78; Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998); Houtman, *Der Himmel*; Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity*; Wright, *Early History*; and Jenny Strauss Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Useful overviews are in Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 39–66; Adams, 'Greco-Roman', 5–27; and Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 38–74.

<sup>2</sup> Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt*, 11; similarly, Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 12, thinks the account of creation in Genesis has a strong Mesopotamian influence.

process of separating substances to bring the realms of the cosmos into existence.<sup>3</sup> The Genesis account is more like the Egyptian creation myths which did not involve conflict between gods as did *Enuma Elish* and some Canaanite myths; however, it differs from the Egyptian myths in that while God creates, the bodies of gods are not the substance of the cosmos and nor are the gods represented within the cosmos, as the constellations for example.

It is generally maintained that Hebrew cosmology was fundamentally tripartite, consisting of heaven, the earth, and the underworld (or Sheol).<sup>4</sup> However, Pennington argues that the basic Hebrew concept of the cosmos was bipartite, that is, consisting of heaven and earth, and that the underworld was considered a component of the earth.<sup>5</sup> Houtman's conclusion that Israel had multiple coexisting concepts of the cosmos (*Weltbilder*) suggests it is possible that both the tripartite and bipartite cosmologies were upheld.<sup>6</sup> This acknowledgment of diversity is helpful and raises matters for interpretation; that is, if more than one cosmology was available to an author, how might the selection of cosmology relate to their rhetorical aims?

The Hebrew concept of the cosmos will now be discussed in greater detail in relation to the main components of the tripartite cosmos – heaven, earth, and the underworld. The Hebrew word for heaven is שָׁמַיִם, which is plural in form though in the HB it does not

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<sup>3</sup> Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 17–20, notes that creation by division/separation is common to all ancient Near Eastern mythologies. He also notes that there are examples of conflict creation myths in the HB, for example, YHWH slaying a beast associated with the sea named Rahab or Leviathan, see Job 7.11–12; 9.8, 13; 26.10–13; Ps 74.12–17; Isa 51.9–10. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 181–91, comments that in Genesis creation involved separating, naming, and assigning a role to each entity.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 9, 126; and Wright, *Early History*, 30–7, 53–8.

<sup>5</sup> Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 170–80, building upon Keel, *Symbolism*, 30, who states that in the HB the bipartite formula is at least as significant as the tripartite and that the place of the dead had a lesser reality. Keel also suggests that the bipartite expression was both more common and older in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian traditions.

<sup>6</sup> Houtman, *Der Himmel*, 283–317.

suggest a plurality of heavens but is a plural of extension that expresses the vastness of the heavenly realm.<sup>7</sup> There is no concept of levels or layers in heaven in early Hebrew cosmology, though by the first century CE, Jewish writings had either multiple heavens (Testament of Levi, Apocalypse of Abraham, Ascension of Isaiah, 2 Enoch, 3 Baruch) or only one (4 Ezra, 2 Baruch).<sup>8</sup> In the account of Gen 1, heaven is created by separating the waters above from the waters below resulting in the concept of a vast heavenly ocean held up by the firmament (רָקִיעַ), which was a dome resting on the ends of the earth.<sup>9</sup> The firmament was thought to be perforated, which accounted for rainfall, hail, and snow. David Neiman has observed that belief in a ‘supercaelian sea’ is also found in Canaanite and Mesopotamian myths.<sup>10</sup> In the HB, heaven is characterised as the dwelling place of God and his assembly.<sup>11</sup> It was described as the palace or throne room of God where he was surrounded by heavenly

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<sup>7</sup> Helmut Traub and Gerhard von Rad, ‘οὐρανός’, *TDNT* 5:502; Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 38–9; and Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography*, 223, who notes the Akkadian word for heaven (šamu) is also a plural noun. The word רָקִיעַ was also used for the firmament, as in Gen 1.8.

<sup>8</sup> Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 41; Adams, ‘Greco-Roman’, 21; and Martha Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* (United Kingdom: Wiley & Sons, 2010) 75, who notes that from the turn of the era, apocalypses generally had a seven-tiered heaven primarily under the influence of the Book of the Watchers with features of its cosmic tour incorporated into the seven levels.

<sup>9</sup> Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 56–7, that the firmament was thought solid is suggested by Ezek 1.22–6 and Job 37.18; however, the term רָקִיעַ was used in parallel with שָׁמַיִם suggesting a close association (Gen 1.8; Ps 19.1). Psalm 148.4 has the waters resting above the heavens.

<sup>10</sup> David Neiman, ‘The Supercaelian Sea’, *JNES* 28 (1969) 249. Houtman, *Der Himmel*, 268, claims the heavenly ocean can only be found with certainty in the HB in Gen 1.7 and suggests that, given the mythological nature of Genesis, it was probably not thought of in a realistic way. Though Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 120–1, attributes a degree of realism to the belief, stating ‘it can safely be assumed that the ancient Hebrews actually conceived of an immense ocean located above the firmament supplying water for precipitation’.

<sup>11</sup> On the significance of the divine assembly conception of heaven in the HB, see Patrick D. Miller, ‘Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol’, *HBTh* 9 (1987) 53–78.

beings, though in Job 1.6–12 Satan is also present.<sup>12</sup> For example, Ps 89.6–7 declares, ‘For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD, a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and awesome above all that are around him?’ And Ps 103.19, ‘The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.’ Prophets such as Isaiah and Ezekiel had visions of God on the throne in heaven.<sup>13</sup> Ezekiel’s vision places the throne of God above the firmament, ‘And above the dome (רָקִיעַ) over their heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form’ (Ezek 1.26).<sup>14</sup>

A closely related and equally important characterisation of heaven was that of the temple.<sup>15</sup> The characterisation does not occur frequently in the HB but it became common in early Jewish writings following the destruction of the first Temple, for example, in 1 Enoch and Jubilees.<sup>16</sup> The Dead Sea Scrolls reveal the importance of the concept of the heavenly

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<sup>12</sup> Though it should be noted that the text clarifies that Satan has come from roaming the earth and that after putting his proposition to God he leaves God’s presence. In other ancient Near Eastern traditions, the divine assembly consists of other deities rather than angels.

<sup>13</sup> According to 1 Kgs 22.19–23, the prophet Micaiah also had a vision of God on the throne.

<sup>14</sup> See also Isa 6.1–4. According to the cosmology outlined previously, this would place the throne in the heavenly ocean; however, there is no indication that Ezekiel had such a construction of the cosmos in mind. This is an instance in which tensions between differing cosmologies are left unreconciled. The influence of Ezekiel is evident in Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice; in 4QShirShabb<sup>f</sup> XX–XXII, 1–14, the divine chariot throne is described in heaven, surrounded by a stream of fire, bright light, and the spirits of the gods (angels) in worship.

<sup>15</sup> Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 14, comments that in relation to a god, a temple and palace are two dimensions of the same dwelling.

<sup>16</sup> See Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 1–22, for discussion of heaven as a temple in 1 Enoch, Testament of Levi, and Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice. James M. Scott, *On Earth as in Heaven: The Restoration of Sacred Time and Sacred Space in the Book of Jubilees* (Leiden: Brill, 2005) 4–35, discusses the role of the heavenly cult in Jubilees and proposes that it represented the ideal which contrasted with corrupt worship on earth. Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 177, observes that the idea of the earthly temple as a copy of the heavenly temple was widespread in Canaan.

temple to the Qumran community. In *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, a hierarchically arranged host of angels is described in an act of pure worship of God who is in his sanctuary (4QShirShabb<sup>a</sup> 1 I, 3–4, 14; 4QShirShabb<sup>d</sup> I, 1–46; 4Q405 XX–XXII, 1–14; 23 I, 1–14). The angels function as priests who perform the heavenly cult, but as Florentino García Martínez has observed, the structural components of the heavenly temple itself are represented as animated angelic beings.<sup>17</sup> The members of the community at Qumran were exhorted to join in the angelic worship focused on the heavenly temple, which acted as a substitute for the Jerusalem temple that the community had forsaken through its defilement by the corrupt priesthood (4Q403 I, 40–6).<sup>18</sup> A distinctive feature of the cosmology of the Dead Sea Scrolls was the belief that the community at Qumran and the angelic host were co-mingled. Not only was it possible for the ‘sons of light’ on earth to participate in the heavenly worship but the angels also dwelt among the community on earth and would fight alongside them in the coming eschatological war against the devil – Belial, and the evil earthly empire – the Kittim (4Q403 I, 40–6; 1QS XI, 8; 1QM XII, 7–9).

Some texts suggest that the Hebrew concept of the earth was like the Mesopotamian and Greek view in which the earth was a flat disc surrounded by a cosmic ocean. For example, Ps 72.8 says, ‘May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.’ The verse may suggest that the sea is at each end of the earth. Houtman has contested this idea on the basis that the references to the sea in such texts may simply refer to geographically known bodies of waters; that is, the Mediterranean Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and the Euphrates.<sup>19</sup> However, Ps 139.9 mentions a sea at the end of the

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<sup>17</sup> Florentino García Martínez, ‘Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls’, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism; Volume 1: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. John J. Collins; New York: Continuum, 2000) 183.

<sup>18</sup> For discussion of the function of the heavenly temple and angelic worship, see John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 1997) 140, and Martínez, ‘Apocalypticism’, 184.

<sup>19</sup> Houtman, *Der Himmel*, 270–1.

earth, 'If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea (אֲרָץ)'.

Furthermore, Houtman's position fails to recognise the possibility that the bodies of water referenced had both a geographic and symbolic significance.<sup>20</sup> It is likely that the earth was thought to be surrounded by sea. It was also thought that the earth rested upon the cosmic waters which were separated from the heavenly waters at creation. For example, Ps 136.5–6 praises God in this way, 'who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever; who spread out the earth on the waters, for his steadfast love endures forever'.<sup>21</sup> Supporting the earth are great pillars that explain its stability even though it is not clear what the pillars themselves rest upon (Job 9.6; Ps 75.3). There were also thought to be pillars that held up the heavens (Job 26.11), these may have been thought of as cosmic mountains at the ends of the earth as in Mesopotamian traditions. The image of the cosmos that emerges is of a disc of land enclosed in a bubble surrounded by waters of chaos.<sup>22</sup> The apparently precarious structure of the cosmos is mitigated by the strength of the firmament and the pillars but ultimately the cosmos was thought to depend on God for its stability (Ps 75.3; 104.1–32).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Wyatt, 'Sea and Desert', 375–89, on the Red Sea as both a geographic and symbolic entity. And in general, the observation of Keel, *Symbolism*, 56, 'To the ancient Near East, the empirical world, as manifestation and symbol, points beyond its superficial reality. A continuous osmosis occurs between the actual and the symbolic, and conversely, between the symbolic and the actual.' In relation to 1 En. 17.5, Bautch, *Geography of 1 Enoch*, 83–4, notes that the reference to the 'Great Sea' could suggest either *Okeanos* or the Mediterranean Sea, though he considers the former more likely.

<sup>21</sup> According to Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 127, when in Job 26.7 it states that the earth is suspended on nothing it means it floats on the primeval waters. This seems plausible as the 'nothingness' out of which creation emerged was the watery depths (תְּהוֹמוֹת) (Gen 1.1).

<sup>22</sup> Or as it is expressed in Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 43, earth and heaven were considered two giant discs forced apart by wind creating an inflated bag surrounded by the cosmic waters.

<sup>23</sup> Houtman, *Der Himmel*, 82–3, says there was a fear among ancient people that the order of the cosmos may be destroyed by heaven falling upon earth. Similarly, there was a fear that the subterranean waters may break out as they did at the great flood and consume the earth; see Gen 7.11 where both the waters above the heaven and those from under the earth are released to flood the world. Bartelmus Rüdiger, 'iŠāmajim – Himmel:

Other features of the earth include the four winds, which come from the ends of the earth, and the islands, which were also associated with the western end of the earth. As in other cultures of the ancient Near East, the temple was significant in Israel as the divine dwelling place on earth. In Ex 25.8; 29.44–6, God declared that he would dwell among his people in the tabernacle and later in the Temple at Jerusalem, though it was stressed that his true place of dwelling was in heaven and some texts, such as Deut 12.5–11; 16.2–11, state that it was only God’s name that dwelt in the Temple. Exodus 25.9 suggested that the earthly temple was built according to a heavenly design revealed to Moses and from this idea the concept of a heavenly temple developed in early Judaism.<sup>24</sup> The Jerusalem temple was also associated with Zion, one of Israel’s sacred mountains, and so was considered a centre of the cosmos.<sup>25</sup> The sea can be considered part of the earthly domain and was often characterised as a dangerous place associated with chaos and death.<sup>26</sup> So too was the desert, though it could also function as a place of refuge.<sup>27</sup>

The underworld is typically referred to as Sheol (שְׁאוֹל) in the HB, though sometimes also as the pit (בֹּרַי) (Ps 30.3). The underworld is associated with death and the word שְׁאוֹל is sometimes translated as ‘grave’ (Ps 18.5; 116.3; Isa 28.15). There is also some kind of connection between the abyss or depths (תְּהוֹמוֹת) and Sheol, as may be seen in Ps 71.20 and

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Semantische und traditionsgeschichtliche Aspekte’, *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Beate Ego; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 95–6, thinks that the cosmos being surrounded by chaotic waters was considered positive so long as the structure of the cosmos, like the gates of heaven and springs of the deep, held the waters back. Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 146, notes that geophysical phenomena, such as erosion, landslides, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes also threatened the stability of the cosmos but in the HB were said to be under God’s control.

<sup>24</sup> It is sometimes suggested that the temple described in Ezek 40–8 was imagined in heaven.

<sup>25</sup> Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 190–1, concludes that it is more accurate to speak of a sacred mountain than a cosmic mountain in the region of Canaan. Mount Sinai was a sacred mountain for Israel. Ezekiel 38.12 describes Jerusalem as the centre of the world.

<sup>26</sup> Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 160.

<sup>27</sup> Gerhard Kittel, “ἔρημος”, *TDNT* 2:658–9; and Keel, *Symbolism*, 76–7.



Ezek 31.15. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the underworld is referred to as Sheol, the pit, Abaddon (אבדון), the abyss (or abysses) (תהום), and the place of darkness (חשך), with the terms often used in parallel (1QS IV, 12–14; 1QM X, 8–15; XIII, 11; 1QH IX, 10–14; XI, 15–19; XIV, 14–17; IIXX, 33–4). In these documents from Qumran, the association of the underworld with Belial and darkness established a cosmological dimension to its dualistic worldview such that the ‘sons of light’ were connected with heaven and the ‘sons of darkness’ with the underworld.

According to Bartelmus Rüdiger, Sheol is under the earth but well above the primal ocean.<sup>28</sup> Stadelmann suggests that the concept of Sheol was not well defined, though it is variously described as a place of no return, a place of darkness, oblivion and silence, a city of the dead which was locked shut, and a place of mud and filth.<sup>29</sup> In early Judaism and Christianity, the idea developed of the underworld as a place of punishment after death and the concept of gehenna became prevalent.<sup>30</sup> Many of the Jewish texts in which this conception of the underworld developed were apocalypses, which are addressed in the next section.

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<sup>28</sup> Rüdiger, ‘iŠāmajim’, 96.

<sup>29</sup> Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 176–82, explains the lack of clarity about the nature of Sheol as an outworking of uncertainty in the Israelite understanding of the fate of the dead.

<sup>30</sup> Chaim Milikowsky, ‘Which Gehenna? Retribution and Eschatology in the Synoptic Gospels and in Early Jewish Texts’, *NTS* 34 (1988) 238–49, studied the understanding of gehenna in the NT gospels and early Jewish texts, including 1 En. 27.1–2, which describes an accursed valley next to the mountain at the middle of the world (at Jerusalem) in which the wicked are punished. Furthermore, 1 En. 90.26 tells of an abyss of fire next to ‘that house’ (the Jerusalem temple). In later texts, such as 4 Ezra 7.26–36 and Sib. Or. 4.179–91, gehenna is no longer a geographical location but an eschatological place of punishment that is filled after the resurrection. On this development, see Lloyd R. Bailey, ‘Gehenna: The Topography of Hell’, *BA* 49 (1986) 187–91.

## 5.2) Cosmology in Apocalyptic Literature

In this section, distinctive features of the cosmology of apocalyptic literature will be explored by considering four significant Jewish and early Christian texts.<sup>31</sup> The apocalyptic literature includes a great diversity of writings and so a comprehensive overview of cosmology in the genre will not be attempted; instead, several texts will be used to illustrate the key points. First Enoch contains the most detailed cosmology and so will be discussed at length. It should also be noted that these texts represent a component of the literature of early Judaism and so this section is a continuation of the previous one.<sup>32</sup> So too, the following section on cosmology in early Christianity will deal with material that is closely related to the content of this section in addition to the section on Hebrew and early Jewish cosmology.

### 5.2.1) *1 Enoch*<sup>33</sup>

What is commonly referred to as 1 Enoch is in fact a compilation of several texts thought to be written between the fourth century BCE and the first century CE which are unified in their attribution to the biblical character Enoch.<sup>34</sup> The earliest of these writings, the

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<sup>31</sup> 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch are considered Jewish and the Ascension of Isaiah Christian; however, there is the possibility of Christian redaction of the Jewish works and Jewish influence on the Ascension of Isaiah. On the latter, see the discussion in Robert G. Hall, 'Isaiah's Ascent to See the Beloved: An Ancient Jewish Source for the Ascension of Isaiah', *JBL* 113 (1994) 463–84.

<sup>32</sup> Which is not to deny the influence of other cultures and their literature on Jewish apocalyptic literature. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch* 1, 61–2, 280, discusses the Mesopotamian and Greek influence on 1 Enoch, as does Bautch, *Geography of 1 Enoch*, 287. Anthea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011) 22, discusses the subversive use of Greek and Mesopotamian traditions in 1 Enoch.

<sup>33</sup> For a lengthier overview of the cosmology of 1 Enoch, which treats each section of the work separately, see Wright, 'Cosmography', 87–140.

<sup>34</sup> Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch* 1, 1. Books included in 1 Enoch, as set out in George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), are: The Book of the Watchers (1–36), The Book of Parables (37–71), The Book of Luminaries (72–82) (more commonly known as the Astronomical Book), The Dream Visions (83–90), The Epistle of Enoch (91–105), The Birth of Noah (106–7), and another book by Enoch (108).

Book of the Watchers and the Astronomical Book, pre-date Daniel and are the earliest examples of the apocalyptic genre.<sup>35</sup> A distinctive feature of the Book of the Watchers is its tour of the cosmos including not only an ascent to heaven but also a journey to the ends of the earth. In fact, Himmelfarb notes that the Book of the Watchers is the only apocalypse to include such a tour and Christopher Rowland comments that the comprehensive *Weltbild* provided by the book is rare in the apocalyptic literature.<sup>36</sup> There are actually two tours narrated in the book; the first is in 1 En. 14–19 and involves a brief description of rivers, the winds, meteorological phenomena such as lightning and thunder, and the stars. There is also an extensive description of the place of punishment for the fallen watchers. The second tour in 1 En. 20–36 is less focused on the watchers and instead concentrates on the mythic geography of Jerusalem as well as the places of eschatological significance at the ends of the earth.<sup>37</sup>

Enoch's tour begins with an ascent to heaven where he approaches the divine throne in the heavenly temple. He then descends from heaven by a mountain in the north, goes west to the place of the dead then south to a place with seven mountains associated with Sinai and

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<sup>35</sup> Fragments of the Astronomical Book were found at Qumran in 4QEnast<sup>a-d</sup> and the Book of the Watchers in 4QEnGiants<sup>a</sup>. Michael Edward Stone, 'The Book of Enoch and Judaism in the Third Century B.C.E.', *CBQ* 40 (1978) 483–5, argues that these manuscripts support a date for the two books in the third century BCE. Bob Becking, 'Expectations About the End of Time in the Hebrew Bible', *Apocalyptic in History and Tradition* (ed. Christopher Rowland and J. Barton; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002) 56–7, considers Jer 31–2 proto-apocalyptic. Ezekiel 40–8 may also be considered proto-apocalyptic.

<sup>36</sup> Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 78; and Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 126. There have been several attempts to construct a map of the cosmos based on the narrative of 1 Enoch. Bautch, *Geography of 1 Enoch*, 4–5, 185, discusses those of Pierre Grelot, 'La géographie mythique d'Hénoch et ses sources orientales', *RB* 65 (1958) 46, 65; and J. T. Milik, ed., *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4, with the Collaboration of Matthew Black* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 18, 40, and provides one of his own. Both Grelot and Milik, who are followed by Wright, 'Cosmography', 105–6, suggest the cosmology of 1 Enoch corresponds to the Babylonian *mappa mundi*; however, James C. VanderKam, '1 Enoch 77, 3 and a Babylonian Map of the World', *RevQ* 11 (1983) 271–8, has demonstrated that the arguments they present are tenuous.

<sup>37</sup> Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 73. Bautch, *Geography of 1 Enoch*, 20, suggests the tour of 1 En. 17–19 may be a shortened version of the longer tour in 1 En. 20–36.

finally to the east where he sees Tartarus and the imprisoned rebellious stars.<sup>38</sup> In 1 En. 14.8–23, after Enoch is carried to heaven, he sees a house which was probably imagined as a temple. He sees walls of hail and the floor is made of snow, the ceiling contains shooting stars and the structure is surrounded by tongues of fire. Inside the first house is another house made entirely of fire and inside that Enoch sees the divine throne from which rivers of fire emerge.<sup>39</sup> Heaven is a single level though it is partitioned according to the pattern of the courts of the Jerusalem temple.<sup>40</sup> The visions of heaven present the realm as both a palace and temple, which was common in the ancient Near East.<sup>41</sup> In other parts of 1 Enoch, such as the Book of Parables, heaven is the dwelling place of the righteous, both angels and deceased humans, who have the role of petitioning God on behalf of others (1 En. 39.4–5; 40.1–7). In the Astronomical Book (1 En. 72–82), there appears the astrological notion of a correlation between the movement of celestial bodies and happenings on earth.<sup>42</sup> Michael Stone notes that the Astronomical Book is also significant in providing evidence of a ‘scientific’ interest

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<sup>38</sup> This summary is based on Bautch, *Geography of 1 Enoch*, 155. There is an element of ambiguity in the geographic location of some of the cosmic features, for example, the seven mountains Bautch locates in the south are often considered to be in the North-west, as in Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 285; and Wright, ‘Cosmography’, 100. Bautch, *Geography of 1 Enoch*, 109–12, argues that 1 En. 24–5 places the mountains in the south because the life-giving tree associated with them is later moved north to Jerusalem which is at the centre of the world. An appealing dimension of Bautch’s interpretation of the cosmic tour is that it results in a progressive movement around the points of the compass.

<sup>39</sup> While it may be presumed that God is on the throne, his physical manifestation is not described.

<sup>40</sup> Wright, ‘Cosmography’, 121–2, thinks that in the narrative of Enoch’s ascent to heaven which concludes the Book of Parables (1 En. 71.1–17), at least two levels of heaven are described. However, expressions such as ‘the highest heaven’ may serve to portray the depth and expansiveness of the heavenly realm rather than a partitioned heaven.

<sup>41</sup> Carol A. Newsom, ‘The Development of 1 Enoch 6–19: Cosmology and Judgment’, *CBQ* 42 (1980) 324, suggests that the heavenly tour can be related to the ancient Near Eastern tradition of displaying the wealth and strength of one’s kingdom to visiting courtiers, such as in 2 Kgs 20.13. The suggestion is speculative but the visions are certainly designed to impress or even overwhelm the audience.

<sup>42</sup> First Enoch 80.1–8 says that in the days of the sinners the heavenly laws governing the celestial movements will be disrupted, illustrating the correlation of heaven and earth. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 6, contends that correlation and not antipathy is characteristic of apocalyptic literature.

in cosmology in Judaism from at least the third century BCE, including astronomy and the calendar.<sup>43</sup>

From heaven, Enoch descends to earth on a mountain in the north which is an example of a cosmic or sacred mountain spanning heaven and earth. He then begins a tour of the earthly domain including the ends of the earth and the underworld. The sustained focus on regions at the ends of the earth is a distinctive feature of 1 Enoch and is not common in the genre.<sup>44</sup> Enoch describes numerous features as he moves around the periphery. He sees seven mountains wherein the middle mountain is higher than all the others and stretches to heaven, probably representing the throne of God (1 En. 18.6–8).<sup>45</sup> Beyond the seven mountains is a place of judgment where the watchers and wayward stars are held for punishment. At the extreme perimeter of the world Enoch sees a fearful place of judgment where there is neither heaven nor earth. Nickelsburg suggests this realm is to be imagined as a place where the primordial chaos of Gen 1.2 is manifest and he notes the same word, ἀκατασκεύαστος, is used in early Greek translations of both texts.<sup>46</sup> At this location Enoch sees a deep chasm with pillars of fire, a place reminiscent of Tartarus in the Greek tradition (1 En. 18.11).<sup>47</sup> He also sees the place where the souls of the dead are kept for judgment, the righteous and the wicked are allotted space in separate holes in the side of a large mountain (1 En. 22). Beyond this mountain of the dead are a set of seven mountains consisting of fire where judgment occurs and then another seven mountains of precious stone representing paradise. The tree of life belongs to the latter mountains and it is revealed to Enoch that the

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<sup>43</sup> Stone, 'Book of Enoch', 487–9, who also notes such concerns are lacking in biblical books including Daniel and those of the NT. Wright, 'Cosmography', 125, suggests the material in the Astronomical Book was influenced by Babylonian 'scientific' cosmology.

<sup>44</sup> However, it may be that the conception of the ends of the earth in 1 Enoch was influential on other apocalypses, such as Revelation, where the ends of the earth are mentioned though not described in detail.

<sup>45</sup> It is not clear how this relates to the throne previously seen in heaven.

<sup>46</sup> Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 288–9.

<sup>47</sup> Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 286–7, notes similarities between this place and Tartarus in Hesiod's *Theogony*.

tree will be replanted in Jerusalem when God returns to earth (1 En. 23–5).<sup>48</sup> Also at the ends of the earth are:

- four gates at the cardinal points through which the winds pass to cross the earth and the stars pass to cross the sky (1 En. 34.1–36.3);
- the firmament, which is held up by winds (1 En. 18.2, 5);
- the mouth of the abyss from which water gushes forth into the great rivers (1 En. 17.7–8);
- the great ocean, or *Okeanos*, which surrounds the earth (1 En. 17.5–6).<sup>49</sup>

From the periphery, Enoch travels to the centre of the world and arrives at Jerusalem where a sacred mountain is located.<sup>50</sup> Alongside Jerusalem, and presenting a stark contrast between blessing and curse, is the accursed valley to which the wicked are assigned for eternity. The valley probably represents the Valley of Hinnom, which in the HB was associated with idolatry and judgment and which was later associated with gehenna.<sup>51</sup> The place of judgment beside Jerusalem is also alluded to in 1 En. 90.26, which speaks of a fiery abyss south of ‘that house’, that is, Jerusalem, into which sinners are thrown. Following the description of the abyss in 1 En. 90.24–7, Enoch sees the removal of the old Jerusalem and its replacement by a new and greater Jerusalem which the righteous will occupy, a concept that also featured in the eschatological scheme at Qumran (2Q24). The restored Jerusalem is

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<sup>48</sup> Paradise is also described in 1 En. 28–32, and Bautch, *Geography of 1 Enoch*, 65, thinks that in the Astronomical Book (1 En. 77.3) paradise is located at the ends of the earth as well.

<sup>49</sup> Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 284, suggests the abyss was probably thought of as the source for the waters of the great ocean as well as the rivers. So too, Bautch, *Geography of 1 Enoch*, 94–5.

<sup>50</sup> Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 318, discusses associations of the centre of the world with the idea of the world’s ‘navel’, or in Greek, the *omphalos*. He notes the occurrence of the concept in Ezek 5.5; 38.12; and Jub. 8.12, 19. See also the discussion in Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 183–4; Terrien, ‘Omphalos Myth’, 315–38; and Alexander, ‘Jerusalem as the Omphalos’, 147–58.

<sup>51</sup> 2 Kgs 23.10; 2 Chron 28.3; 33.6; Isa 66.24; Dan 12.2; and for discussion, Milikowsky, ‘Which Gehenna?’, 239.

a part of the broader theme of cosmic renewal, which in 1 En. 91.16–17 involves a new heaven and earth.<sup>52</sup> At the centre of the earth are places of both eternal blessing and eternal curse for righteous and wicked humanity respectively. In contrast, the dead reside *temporarily* at the periphery in the mountain of dead souls, or in the case of at least some of the righteous, in the heavenly throne room.<sup>53</sup>

In summary, 1 Enoch provides a vivid and striking depiction of the major aspects of the ancient Near Eastern tripartite cosmology. There is a flat disc-like earth over a watery abyss, a firmament arching over the earth and supported at the ends of the earth, a heavenly throne room/temple above the firmament, great mountains at the ends of the earth and a sacred mountain at the centre where the city of prime importance is found, in this case Jerusalem. A distinctive element of its cosmology is that it locates the places of eschatological significance along the horizontal plane, that is, at the ends of the earth and the centre of the earth. This is in contrast to other apocalypses in which the vertical plane is of greater significance.<sup>54</sup> As Nickelsburg notes, in 1 Enoch cosmic dualism is as much horizontal (centre–periphery) as it is vertical (above–below).<sup>55</sup> The book of 1 Enoch is a

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<sup>52</sup> Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 41, 49, 450, notes that the earth has been restored by the end of the eighth week in the ten-week schema and a new heaven appears at the tenth week. According to Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 41, the text does envisage a restoration of both heaven and earth, in opposition to Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, ‘The Destruction of the Temple and the Relativisation of the Old Covenant: Mark 13:31 and Matthew 5:18’, *Eschatology in Bible and Theology: Evangelical Essays at the Dawn of a New Millennium* (ed. K. E. Brower and M. W. Elliot; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997) 122, who claims that only heaven is restored. Further support for the transformation of both heaven and earth in 1 Enoch is given in George W. E. Nickelsburg, ‘Where Is the Place of Eschatological Blessing?’, *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone* (ed. David Satran, Esther Glickler Chazon, and Ruth Anne Clements; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 60; and Harry A. Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8:19–22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (London: T&T Clark, 2006) 101, who cites 1 En. 45.4–5; 51.4–5.

<sup>53</sup> The wicked angels, or watchers, however, are eternally punished beyond the ends of the earth in the abyss.

<sup>54</sup> Places at the periphery in 1 Enoch are located at various levels of heaven or in the underworld in other apocalypses; see Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 72, 83, in relation to the development from 1 Enoch to 2 Enoch. See also Bauckham, ‘Visions of Hell’, 359, 375.

<sup>55</sup> Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 40.

prime example of the association of eschatology and cosmology in apocalyptic literature.<sup>56</sup> In terms of personal eschatology, as John Collins puts it, the afterlife is provided for in the structure of the universe.<sup>57</sup> There is also a cosmic eschatology in 1 Enoch in which the cosmos is purified through judgment and then renewed. The cosmology and eschatology of 1 Enoch are closely related to its rhetorical function. First Enoch seeks to assure its audience of the certainty of justice by revealing the spaces in the cosmos already established for judgment as well as by providing a narrative of cosmic transformation which will ultimately provide a home for the righteous.<sup>58</sup>

### 5.2.2) *Daniel*

The book of Daniel is included for discussion both because it is an early apocalypse and because of its significant influence on the book of Revelation.<sup>59</sup> Unlike 1 Enoch, Daniel does not contain visions describing the various realms and features of the cosmos. However, there are references to elements belonging to the ancient Near Eastern cosmology. The ends of the earth are mentioned in Dan 4.11, 22, in a description of the Babylonian Empire, which is represented as a great tree, ‘The tree grew great and strong, its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the ends of the whole earth’.<sup>60</sup> The ends of the earth are also referred to with

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<sup>56</sup> On the association of eschatology and cosmology in apocalypses, see Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*.

<sup>57</sup> Collins, ‘Cosmos and Salvation’, 136.

<sup>58</sup> As Venter, ‘Spatiality’, 229, puts it, ‘It is revealed to Enoch that God has already set his judgment upon evil and those who have brought evil upon earth. The revelation is conceptualised in terms of allocated space on earth.’ Collins, ‘Symbolism of Transcendence’, 11, comments that the purpose was to reassure the righteous that they have a place in the cosmos after death.

<sup>59</sup> Gregory K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984) 297, concludes that Daniel had the greatest influence on Revelation of all the books of the HB.

<sup>60</sup> Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 40–1, notes that a tree spanning heaven and earth was a common image for world empire. The concept also appears at Qumran where it describes the restored Israel, see 1QH XIV, 14–17.



the expression ‘the four winds of heaven’ (Dan 7.2–3; 8.8; 11.4).<sup>61</sup> The four winds are associated with the great sea in Dan 7.2, which given its location at the ends of the earth is probably the cosmic ocean.

The idea of a cosmic mountain may be behind the vision in Dan 2.35 in which God’s kingdom grows as a mountain that expands to fill the whole earth. Heaven is an important realm in Daniel though it is not described in detail apart from the vision of God on the throne in Dan 7.9–10.<sup>62</sup> Collins notes there is debate about whether the throne vision should be imagined in heaven or on earth and decides to say no more than that it is located in ‘mythic space’.<sup>63</sup> However, as Winfried Vogel has pointed out, in texts of the HB the divine throne is often explicitly located in heaven, which is where it was imagined in other ancient Near Eastern traditions, and so it seems likely that the throne in Daniel should be imagined in heaven.<sup>64</sup> The heavenly throne, along with reference to judgment according to books in heaven, creates the image of heaven as a divine palace.<sup>65</sup> A dimension of the cosmos that does not feature in Daniel is the underworld, which may be related to the book’s lack of interest in personal eschatology.<sup>66</sup>

A major theme in the book of Daniel is the relationship between heaven and earth.<sup>67</sup> Heaven is characterised as the place of knowledge and wisdom, for example, in Dan 4.13 it is

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<sup>61</sup> Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 2002) 178, comments that the mention of the four winds recalls that Mesopotamian kings often claimed to rule ‘the four corners of the earth’.

<sup>62</sup> Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 290 n. 44, comments that of the biblical literature, the heavenly realm is of greatest importance in Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation.

<sup>63</sup> John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Michigan: Fortress, 1993) 303.

<sup>64</sup> Winfried Vogel, *The Cultic Motif in the Book of Daniel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010) 81. For example, Ps 11.4; 103.19.

<sup>65</sup> Regarding Daniel, Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse*, 37, observes that the ideas of temple and palace are closely related when it comes to the dwelling place of God.

<sup>66</sup> With the possible of exception of Dan 12.3, which may imply astral immortality or transformation into an angelic state after death.

<sup>67</sup> Beale, *Use of Daniel*, 274; and Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 290 n. 44.

the realm from which Daniel receives visions through an angelic intermediary. It is also the place of authentic and enduring power, for example, in Dan 4.26–37, Nebuchadnezzar only regains his sanity once he acknowledges that ‘heaven rules’. In Daniel, heaven is pure and does not need to be cleansed as it did in 1 Enoch, and it stands in contrast to earth from which beastly empires arise in short-lived opposition to God’s kingdom.<sup>68</sup> There is conflict between the heavenly Son of Man and the earthly beasts which represent the Babylonian, Median, Persian, and Seleucid empires.<sup>69</sup> The supreme arrogance of the earthly rulers is manifest when one described as the ‘little horn’, representing Antiochus IV, transgresses the boundary between the realms and even succeeds in casting some of the stars of heaven to the ground (Dan 8.10–12).<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, it is the armies of heaven led by the archangel Michael that are victorious together with the saints.

Compared to 1 Enoch, Daniel’s cosmology places greater emphasis on the vertical dimension and the above–below framework. In fact, Collins considers this a significant development in Jewish eschatology.<sup>71</sup> In the context of Daniel, this framework formulates a critique of imperial power by affirming the existence of ultimate power in the heavenly realm.<sup>72</sup> The book of Daniel illustrates how in apocalyptic literature, cosmology could be used to critique earthly political power.

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<sup>68</sup> This characterisation of heaven is reinforced by the use of terms which associate God with heaven, including: ‘God of Heaven’ (אלה שמיא) (Dan 2.18–19, 37, 44); ‘King of Heaven’ (מלך שמיא) (Dan 4.37); and ‘Lord of Heaven’ (בראש שמיא) (Dan 5.23).

<sup>69</sup> Lucas, *Daniel*, 188; and John H. Walton, ‘The Four Kingdoms of Daniel’, *JETS* 29 (1986) 25–36, who also provides a brief overview of ancient and modern interpretations of the four kingdoms including the view that the fourth kingdom is Rome.

<sup>70</sup> See also John J. Collins, ‘The Son of Man and the Saints of the Most High in the Book of Daniel’, *JBL* 93 (1974) 56.

<sup>71</sup> Collins, *Apocalyptic Vision*, 176.

<sup>72</sup> Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, 8, a strategy the author also observes in 1 Enoch and 1 Maccabees.

### 5.2.3) 4 Ezra

The book referred to as 4 Ezra consists of chapters 3–14 of the later Christian apocryphal work 2 Esdras. It is widely held to be a Jewish text written following, and partly in response to, the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE and is to be dated to the end of the first century, or possibly early in the second.<sup>73</sup> While J. E. Wright has claimed that ‘The only statement pertinent to cosmography [in 4 Ezra] comes at 3:18-19 where it is said that God’s glory went “through the four gates of fire and earthquake and wind and ice”’, there are in fact a number of cosmological references in the text.<sup>74</sup> To begin with the verses referred to by Wright, in addition to speaking of four gates which are presumably in the firmament, a tripartite cosmos is suggested. They report that at Mount Sinai God ‘bent down the heavens and shook the earth, and moved the world, and made the depths to tremble’ (4 Ezra 3.18–19 [Metzger]). The idea of a world surrounded by waters above and below appears in 4 Ezra 4.7, where in a manner reminiscent of God’s questioning of Job, the angel Uriel tests Ezra’s knowledge of the mysteries of the cosmos.<sup>75</sup> Uriel asks him about the number of streams at the source of the deep and the number of streams in the firmament above. In the same verse Uriel asks Ezra about the dwellings in the heart of the sea and the passageways to Hades and to paradise.<sup>76</sup> Like 1 Enoch, knowledge of the places of the dead is an important

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<sup>73</sup> Ulrich Luck, ‘Das Weltverständnis in der jüdischen Apokalyptik: Dargestellt am äthiopischen Henoch und am 4 Esra’, *ZTK* 73 (1976) 286; Bruce M. Metzger, ‘The Fourth Book of Ezra’, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1983) 520; and George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 270. Second Baruch was written around the same time and was probably influenced by 4 Ezra. It has a similar cosmology to 4 Ezra, though there is a greater emphasis on the heavenly realm; for example, the true Jerusalem is in heaven not on a restored earth (2 Bar. 4.2–6) and the righteous dead have an angelic afterlife in heaven (2 Bar. 51.7–12). See discussion in John G. Gammie, ‘Spatial and Ethical Dualism in Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic Literature’, *JBL* 93 (1974) 371.

<sup>74</sup> Wright, ‘Cosmography’, 162.

<sup>75</sup> See also 4 Ezra 5.36–40.

<sup>76</sup> In 1 Enoch, no dwelling place in the heart of the sea is described, though Rev 20.13 refers to the sea giving up its dead which may reflect the idea in 4 Ezra 4.7 that there were dwellings, presumably for souls of the

component of cosmological wisdom. Unlike 1 Enoch, in 4 Ezra these places are not revealed to the seer; instead, it is emphasised that Ezra does *not* possess such knowledge. The creation of the world is recalled in 4 Ezra 6.1–6 and again various key features of the cosmos are listed, including: the gates of the world, the winds, the foundation of paradise, the assembly of angels, the firmament, and the footstool of Zion.<sup>77</sup> It is also significant that these verses are bracketed by Ezra asking God questions of eschatological significance, such as through whom he will visit the earth (4 Ezra 5.56) and about the division of the times (4 Ezra 6.7). There is an association between cosmological knowledge and eschatological knowledge with possession of the former suggesting access to the latter. A difference between 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra is that Enoch's knowledge of the eschaton is assured by his demonstration of knowledge of the cosmos whereas in 4 Ezra only God has such knowledge. In 4 Ezra, cosmological dualism corresponds to an anthropological dualism which is an element of Ezra's theodicy; that is, God's ways are ultimately inscrutable to those who belong to the earth.<sup>78</sup>

The contrast between heaven and earth is starker in 4 Ezra than 1 Enoch, partly because in 4 Ezra heaven is not associated with evil or rebellious beings as it is in 1 Enoch but also because the earth is personified and characterised as a place of loss. In 4 Ezra 10.5–18, Ezra rebukes a grieving woman because her grief is insignificant compared to the loss of the earth.<sup>79</sup> Earth itself is not wicked or corrupt but has been ruined by human disobedience and rejection of God and the Law. However, a key part of the narrative of 4 Ezra is the restoration of the cosmos, and the earthly realm in particular, which comes after

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deceased, in the sea. The chambers of Hades in which the souls of the righteous are kept for judgment are mentioned in 4 Ezra 4.35, 42.

<sup>77</sup> These features all appear in 1 Enoch. A rare instance in which 4 Ezra provides more detail than 1 Enoch is 4 Ezra 6.42, 47, which reports that the waters of the sea occupy a seventh of the world and land six sevenths.

<sup>78</sup> Metzger, 'Fourth Book of Ezra', 521, which seems to be the point of the parable of the forest and the sea (4 Ezra 4.13–21).

<sup>79</sup> Another example of the earth being personified is 4 Ezra 6.15–16, which in speaking of the end of the world states, 'the foundation of the earth will understand that the speech concerns them'.

judgment manifest in cosmic catastrophe.<sup>80</sup> In 4 Ezra 7.26–44, cosmic transformation occurs with the messianic age and final judgment, and involves: the appearance of a hidden city and hidden land; the land then returns to primeval silence for seven days; after which a new world arises and the dead are raised to face judgment; finally, gehenna and paradise appear side by side, revealing the alternative destinies of humanity after death. The restored Jerusalem is a key element of the renewed cosmos. It is mentioned in several places that the city will be revealed at the eschaton (4 Ezra 7.26; 8.52) and in 4 Ezra 10.25–59, Ezra is shown the heavenly Jerusalem and the vision is interpreted by an angel. Bietenhard comments that 4 Ezra contains rare testimony to the idea of the heavenly Jerusalem descending to earth at the eschaton.<sup>81</sup> Though Nickelsburg points out that it is not clear if the restored Jerusalem will be in heaven or on earth.<sup>82</sup> What is clear is that these visions served to console the audience regarding the destruction of the historical Jerusalem.<sup>83</sup>

Like the book of Daniel, 4 Ezra has a strong political dimension and the restoration of Jerusalem follows the destruction of the Roman Empire, which in 4 Ezra is understood to be the fourth beast of Dan 7.7–28. In 4 Ezra 11.1–46, Rome is an eagle rising from the sea which rules everything under heaven until a lion, representing the messiah (4 Ezra 12.32), comes out of a forest and announces the eagle’s demise, which brings relief and renewal to the oppressed earth.<sup>84</sup> The great political reversal and assurance of the coming judgment are important elements of 4 Ezra’s rhetorical strategy, which is communicated in the combination of cosmology and eschatology. As DeSilva puts it, ‘The disclosure of activity in

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<sup>80</sup> For a description of the cosmic catastrophe, see 4 Ezra 5.1–13.

<sup>81</sup> Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt*, 194.

<sup>82</sup> Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 274.

<sup>83</sup> David E. Aune with Eric Stewart, ‘From the Idealized Past to the Imaginary Future: Eschatological Restoration in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature’, *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives* (ed. J. Scott; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 166.

<sup>84</sup> It should be noted that in 4 Ezra 13.1–4, a ‘Son of Man’-like figure arises from the heart of the sea, suggesting that in contrast to the book of Revelation the sea was not characterised in entirely negative terms.

other realms as well as the revelation of primordial and future history provides the context that lends meaning to present experience, making a threatened world-construction viable once more.<sup>85</sup>

#### 5.2.4) *Ascension of Isaiah*

Apocalypses have been categorised according to whether they contain an ascent narrative or a periodisation of history.<sup>86</sup> The *Ascension of Isaiah* is included as a representative of an apocalypse with ascent through multiple heavens. In this apocalypse there are seven heavens, which Wright asserts was the most common cosmological structure of apocalypses in the early centuries of the common era, though there was a range of other structures as well.<sup>87</sup> The commentary on the *Ascension of Isaiah* by R. H. Charles was influential in establishing the commonly accepted view that there are two or three sources in the extant version of the book and that only the final section, representing chapters 6–11, should properly be called the *Ascension of Isaiah*.<sup>88</sup> However, following a body of Italian

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<sup>85</sup> David A. deSilva, 'Fourth Ezra: Reaffirming Jewish Cultural Values through Apocalyptic Rhetoric', *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. Greg Carey and L. Gregory Bloomquist; Missouri: Chalice, 1999) 124.

<sup>86</sup> The categorisation of apocalypses as historical or ascent apocalypses was established in Collins, 'Introduction', 1–20. Significant recent studies on ascent apocalypses include: Mary Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984); and Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*.

<sup>87</sup> Wright, 'Cosmography', 235–6, who attributes the development of the seven-heaven cosmos to Jewish/Christian engagement with the Greco-Roman world. Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 21–54, discusses the origins of the concept of seven heavens in Jewish and Christian apocalypses and concludes that Babylon was the primary influence. However, both Collins and Wright observe that there is no connection between the seven heavens and the seven planets in early Jewish and Christian apocalypses. Other apocalypses with multiple heavens include 3 Baruch (five), 2 Enoch (ten or seven), *Apocalypse of Abraham* (seven), *Life of Adam and Eve* (seven), and *Apocalypse of Paul* (seven).

<sup>88</sup> R. H. Charles, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (London: A. & C. Black, 1900). Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 366, points out that the title 'Ascension of Isaiah' is the only one used in ancient sources where it applies to the whole work and not only

scholarship on the book in the 1970s, recent scholarship has come to consider it a unity.<sup>89</sup>

The discussion here will focus on chapters 6–11 which narrate the heavenly ascent and visions of the heavens because there is little cosmological material in the other sections of the book.<sup>90</sup> Most scholars date the Ascension of Isaiah to early in the second century CE, though Bauckham dates it to 70–80 CE.<sup>91</sup> In its final form it is a Christian work though it has been suggested there may have been a Jewish source.<sup>92</sup> Given its likely composition in the early second century, a sharp distinction should not be drawn between its Jewish and Christian

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chapters 6–11. Furthermore, Charles's title for the first major section of the work, 'Martyrdom of Isaiah', is a modern creation.

<sup>89</sup> Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, 363–75, provides a helpful overview of the major contributions in Italian scholarship during the period. See also Bauckham, 'Visions of Hell', 379, n. 84, and Robert G. Hall, 'Disjunction of Heavenly and Earthly Times in the Ascension of Isaiah', *JSJ* 35 (2004) 18, who rejects the idea of pre-existent sources. Hall, 'Isaiah's Ascent', 463–84, argues there is no need to suggest a Jewish source behind the Christian text.

<sup>90</sup> Wright, 'Cosmography', 178, comments that of the traditionally acknowledged sources in the work, the 'Martyrdom of Isaiah' (Ascen. Isa. 1.1–3.12; 5.1–16) has no cosmological references and in the 'Testament of Hezekiah' (Ascen. Isa. 3.13–4.22) there is only the mention of multiple heavens through which Christ descended and ascended.

<sup>91</sup> Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, 381–90. Robert G. Hall, 'The Ascension of Isaiah: Community Situation, Date, and Place in Early Christianity', *JBL* 109 (1990) 300–6, reviews dates for the work ranging from the end of the first and into the second century, with Ascen. Isa. 6–11 thought later than Ascen. Isa. 1–5. Hall uses the social setting to date the work to the beginning of the second century. Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 267, dates it to 100 CE and M. A. Knibb, 'Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah: A New Translation and Introduction', *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Massachusetts: Hendrikson, 1983) 149–50, dates the sources identified by Charles to the late first and second centuries but suggests the compilation of the sources into a single work may not have occurred until the third or fourth centuries. Jonathan Knight, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995) 9, considers it a Jewish-Christian apocalypse written between 112 and 138 CE in Syria.

<sup>92</sup> A Jewish source was contested in Hall, 'Isaiah's Ascent', 463–84. Regarding the cosmology of the Ascension of Isaiah, Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 263, 386, states that it is not derived from the NT and is essentially Jewish. However, distinguishing Jewish and Christian cosmology at the turn of the first century is problematic as it suggests a divergence in worldview that is unlikely to have existed at the time.

character.<sup>93</sup> A range of rhetorical settings for the work have been postulated, including rivalry between competing Christian prophets (Robert G. Hall), opposition to the Roman Empire (Jonathan Knight), and anti-Jewish Christian polemic (Greg Carey).<sup>94</sup>

The section of the Ascension of Isaiah to be discussed narrates the ascent of Isaiah from earth to the seventh heaven. Before reaching the first heaven, Isaiah arrives at the firmament where he sees ‘Sammael’, that is Satan, and his host (Ascen. Isa. 7.9–11). There is conflict and envy among the host and Isaiah’s angelic guide comments that as it is in heaven so it is on earth. Later in the text it is said that the prince of this world dwells in the firmament, indicating that Satan exercises authority from the base of heaven (Ascen. Isa. 10.29). In Ascen. Isa. 10.12 [Knibb], the world is the place where Satan’s host reigns, who are described as ‘princes and the angels and the gods of that world’. This characterises the earth as the realm under the power of evil and establishes a contrast to heaven. The choice of the firmament for Satan’s abode may be because it can be considered part of heaven, which is appropriate for a spirit, while it is also the barrier between heaven and earth and so is to some

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<sup>93</sup> Bauckham, ‘Visions’, 379. Also note the conclusion in Hall, ‘Isaiah’s Ascent’, 484, ‘In the meantime, the Vision of Isaiah is sufficiently Jewish to illustrate the history of Judaism, sufficiently Christian to illustrate the history of Christianity, and sufficiently gnostic to illustrate the history of gnosticism.’

<sup>94</sup> Hall, ‘Ascension of Isaiah’, 294–8, 301–5, who notes similarities between the school of prophets of Ascension of Isaiah and those of John of Patmos, John the gospel writer and the so-called Johannine school, the Odes of Solomon, and the letters of Ignatius. David Frankfurter, ‘The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories’, *Jewish Traditions in Early Christian Literature, Volume 4: Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (ed. William Adler and James VanderKam; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996) 134; and David Frankfurter, ‘Early Christian Apocalypticism: Literature and Social World’, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism; Volume 1: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. John J. Collins; New York: Continuum, 2000) 428, also links Ascension of Isaiah and Revelation in the setting of prophetic rivalry. Jonathan Knight, *Disciples of the Beloved One: The Christology, Social Setting and Theological Context of the Ascension of Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996) 205; and Knight, *Ascension of Isaiah*, 11–21, who sees internal leadership disputes and anti-Jewish polemic in the text; Greg Carey, ‘The “Ascension of Isaiah”: An Example of Early Christian Narrative Polemic’, *JSP* 17 (1998) 65–78, and Carey, ‘Characterization and Conflict’, 163, suggests the imperial cult may have stimulated Jewish-Christian tension as Jews were exempt from participating in the cult and Christians were not. He thinks Rev 2.9–10; 3.9 reflects a similar scenario.



extent distinct from heaven, which keeps heaven free of corruption.<sup>95</sup> In *Ascen. Isa.* 7.13–17, Isaiah is then taken to the first heaven where he sees a throne with groups of angels to the left and the right, those to the right being superior in glory. The angels are praising the one who is in the seventh heaven. He then ascends to the second heaven, which we later learn involved passing through guarded gates which separate each level of heaven (*Ascen. Isa.* 10.24–7). The scene in the second heaven is much the same as the first, he sees a throne with angels to the right and left, though this time also one on the throne, perhaps an angel, who has greater glory than all the rest. However, the angels in the second level are more glorious than those in the first. The scene is repeated as Isaiah ascends and the pattern of increasing degrees of glory continues until the pattern is broken in the sixth heaven where there is no longer a throne in the middle or angels to the left and right. It is explained that the reason for the difference is that from the sixth heaven it is possible to directly worship God and his chosen one who are in the seventh. Another distinction is that in the sixth heaven all angels are equal in glory. The sixth heaven is a divine cloakroom and in *Ascen. Isa.* 8.1–28 Isaiah is told that when he returns there after death he will receive robes that will make him like the angels of the seventh heaven.<sup>96</sup> The righteous dead will also receive a throne and a crown but these are only available after Christ's ascension (*Ascen. Isa.* 9.24–6).

Upon entering the seventh heaven in *Ascen. Isa.* 9.1–42, Isaiah encounters great light and innumerable angels. He also sees the righteous dead since the time of Adam, including Abel and Enoch, wearing the heavenly robes. Isaiah is then shown the Christ event from a heavenly perspective, focusing on the Son's descent from heaven and staggered incarnation followed by his ascension in glory after his crucifixion and resurrection (*Ascen. Isa.* 9.13–

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<sup>95</sup> Bauckham, 'Visions of Hell', 382–3, notes that the idea of Satan dwelling or ruling in the place of the dead or hell is not found in Jewish or Christian texts of the first three centuries, with few exceptions, such as the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*.

<sup>96</sup> Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 95, notes that being given robes symbolises transformation into angelic glory and is a characteristic feature of ascent apocalypses.

10.15). As he descends, the Son's glory is concealed as he adopts the likeness of those at each level, just as he later takes on the form of a human and consequently was not recognised by those on earth. The Son descended even to the underworld, though in Ascen. Isa. 10.7–15 he was instructed by the Father to descend as far as Sheol, but not all the way to Abaddon. It is not clear in the text how Sheol and Abaddon are arranged in the cosmos, though based on the structuring of the narrative around the vertical cosmic axis Bauckham is probably correct in thinking Sheol is under the earth and Abaddon beneath Sheol.<sup>97</sup> Bauckham goes on to suggest that Sheol holds the souls of the righteous dead whereas Abaddon is to be equated with gehenna, which Ascen. Isa. 4.14 reports is the place into which Satan and his host will be thrown when Christ returns in judgment.<sup>98</sup>

Like 1 Enoch, the cosmic journey in the Ascension of Isaiah produces a map of the cosmos.<sup>99</sup> However, while 1 Enoch includes journeys along both the vertical and horizontal axes, in the Ascension of Isaiah it is only the vertical. As a result, we have no way of knowing how the ends of the earth were conceived. Also lacking is detail of astral and meteorological features of the heavenly realm and regarding the earthly realm there are no details of the sea, general topographic features such as rivers and mountains, and there is no interest in a cosmic centre on earth, such as the temple or a city.<sup>100</sup> The underworld is also not described in detail, for example, there is no mention of the abyss or subterranean waters. The Ascension of Isaiah does represent a tripartite cosmos but the prime importance of heaven means that the lower realms are not described in detail.

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<sup>97</sup> Bauckham, 'Visions of Hell', 382.

<sup>98</sup> Bauckham, 'Visions of Hell', 382.

<sup>99</sup> Whittaker, *Rome and Its Frontiers*, 63–9, 75, studied the way 'mental maps' were created in ancient Rome and observed that the Romans used itineraries to perceive and represent space. They were created by linear movement between points with views from fixed viewpoints. In a similar way, Isaiah undertakes a journey and pauses to establish a view and the result is a mental map of the cosmos.

<sup>100</sup> Though in the 'Testament of Hezekiah' the description of the earth includes mountains, hills, cities, the desert, trees, the sun, and the moon (Ascen. Isa. 4.18).

The stratification of the heavenly realm emphasises the transcendence and glory of God and the Son. They are not located on a throne resting on the firmament but are a vast distance above it and can only be reached by passing through multiple gated and guarded levels. This affirmation of the glory of Christ may have served an apologetic function, defending the divinity of Christ despite his inglorious earthly existence. The emphasis on transcendent glory also explicated the lack of glory experienced by those on earth; Christians on earth should not expect glory until they ascend to heaven themselves and receive their robes, crown, and throne.<sup>101</sup> While there is a strong contrast between heaven and earth in the Ascension of Isaiah, the motif of symmetry between heaven and earth is also utilised. Strife on earth, such as rivalry and envy between groups or leaders, corresponds to the envy of the host occupying the firmament (Ascen. Isa. 7.9–11). The differentiation of angelic beings in the first five heavens may also be intended to correspond to, and thus justify, a differentiation of roles in the Christian community on earth. In the lower heavens, the angels to the left are of lesser glory than those on the right and the angel on the throne seems to have a role of authority in directing worship to God in the highest heaven. This may suggest that on earth too there will be those in the Christian community of greater and lesser glory and that those in authority are necessary, at least until the saints reach the highest heaven. The stratification of heaven allows for the heaven and earth motif to both compare (firmament and earth) and contrast (upper heavens and earth) the realms.

Himmelfarb has argued that the function of ascent apocalypses was to establish status for the righteous by locating them in an exalted position in the cosmos.<sup>102</sup> This had the effect of exhorting the audience to form their identity based on their future glory and not on their

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<sup>101</sup> Hall, 'Disjunction', 24, gives an account of the rhetorical strategy of the text in terms of the heaven and earth motif, 'The faithful experience dissonance between heaven and earth because there is dissonance between heaven and earth: earth does not synchronize with heaven. God never intended the descent and ascent of the Beloved to eradicate earthly trouble, but to join all who wish to the light of the divine glory.'

<sup>102</sup> Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 114.

present troubled experience. Such a function is evident in the Ascension of Isaiah, which like most apocalypses is concerned with revealing the fate of the dead and their place in the cosmos.<sup>103</sup> The righteous saints in fact occupy the most privileged position in the cosmos, becoming greater than the angels in glory once they pass through the sixth into the seventh heaven. The hortatory dimension of this aspect of the text is clear in Ascen. Isa. 11.40, ‘but as for you, be in the Holy Spirit that you may receive your robes and the thrones and crowns of glory, which are placed in the seventh heaven’. The fate of the wicked is not explicitly addressed in the Ascension of Isaiah though there is a focus on the Son’s judgment of the Satanic host. It may be that wicked humanity is left in Sheol, or is transferred to Abaddon. Of relevance to the present thesis is the rhetorical deployment of cosmology in Ascen. Isa. 6–11 to provide a perspective on the social setting established in the opening chapters, which involves three elements in common with Revelation: opposition from Rome; conflict with Jews; and internal tension about leadership. The cosmology of the Ascension of Isaiah showed Christ presently exalted in the seventh heaven far above Satan in the firmament revealing the superiority of Christ over the evil power with which both Rome and the rival leaders were aligned.<sup>104</sup> Bauckham captures the rhetorical effect of the cosmological dimension of the text, ‘From this heavenly perspective they [the audience] can see that the powers of evil in their superterrestrial stronghold have already admitted defeat, the dead have already ascended with Christ from Sheol to heavenly glory, and Christ has already established his divine sovereignty over the whole cosmos.’<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Collins, ‘Introduction’, 9, states that there is reference to the afterlife in all Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, and Greco-Roman apocalypses.

<sup>104</sup> Knight, *Ascension of Isaiah*, 19, 32, 45.

<sup>105</sup> Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, 380.

### 5.2.5) Conclusions: Cosmology in Apocalyptic Literature

The following observations are made in conclusion on cosmology in apocalyptic literature. Firstly, cosmology is closely connected to eschatology. In apocalypses, the seer is often shown the places of the dead, both their temporary and eternal destinies, and sometimes the experience of the dead in those places. In some apocalypses, though not all, cosmic transformation with the eschaton is a key aspect of the narrative. Therefore, both personal and cosmic eschatologies are connected to cosmology. Regarding cosmic eschatology, it should be noted that cosmic renewal often takes place after the defeat of an empire (or empires) that rules the earth.<sup>106</sup> The earthly empire is involved in a cosmic conflict with divine heavenly forces. Cosmology, then, has political significance in apocalyptic literature. The association of cosmology and eschatology can be a significant aspect of the text's rhetorical strategy, urging the audience to live a life of righteousness to attain paradise and avoid punishment and also to align itself with the heavenly realm and/or the coming restored earth rather than the world as it now stands.

It has been noted by several scholars that there are aspects of continuity between wisdom literature and apocalyptic literature.<sup>107</sup> One continuity is the topos of locating wisdom in knowledge of the world. In apocalypses, this knowledge is received through revelation and often during an ascent to heaven or tour of the cosmos. In apocalypses like 1 Enoch, the seer's knowledge of the cosmos establishes their authority as one able to speak on behalf of God. In the case of 4 Ezra, God's knowledge of the mysteries of the cosmos is an element of its theodicy. Finally, it is observed that the motif of heaven and earth is important

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<sup>106</sup> Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 141.

<sup>107</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 2.301–8; Luck, 'Das Weltverständnis', 288–94; Gammie, 'Spatial and Ethical Dualism', 362–84; Collins, 'Cosmos and Salvation', 121–42; Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 69–81; William Adler, 'Introduction', *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996) 12–15; and Venter, 'Spatiality', 229. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 95, states that one of the key themes of ascent apocalypses is nature as a source of knowledge about God.

in apocalypses. The motif is used to contrast the two realms, for example, to explain a crisis or hardship on earth by removing God's authority and the place of blessing to heaven. In addition, the heavenly order may be used to expose the corruption of the earthly order. The motif is also used to establish a symmetry between the realms, for example, earthly conflict corresponds to heavenly conflict, or the worship of the saints corresponds to angelic worship in heaven. It will be seen in the present thesis that in Revelation the seer receives heavenly knowledge from Christ which reveals the true nature of the presently earthly order and its destiny.

### 5.3) Early Christian Cosmology

Early Christian cosmology developed out of Hebrew and early Jewish cosmology and under the influence of Greco-Roman cosmology, which will be discussed in a section to follow. Distinctive features of early Christian cosmology will be established here by considering texts from the first and early second centuries. From the NT, the writings attributed to Paul will be the primary focus followed by brief discussion of other cosmological concepts in the NT. Following that, the cosmology of 1 Clement will be considered as an early Christian text which develops certain elements of Pauline Christianity and provides a contrast to the book of Revelation.

#### *5.3.1) Cosmology in the Pauline Writings*

In the Pauline writings there are a few references that suggest a tripartite structure for the cosmos, the clearest example being Phil 2.10, 'so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven (ἐπουρανίων) and on earth (ἐπιγείων) and under the earth

(καταχθονίων).<sup>108</sup> However, of those verses which suggest a structure for the cosmos, eight suggest a bipartite cosmology compared to three for the tripartite. M. Jeff Brannon argues that Paul held to the bipartite concept of the cosmos, explaining Phil 2.10 and Rom 10.6–7 as the incorporation of material that does not reflect his own ideas – the former being an early Christian hymn and the latter a reference to Deut 30.11–14. Though as Paul incorporates the material unproblematically it is better to suggest that he acknowledged the tripartite conception while primarily utilising the bipartite structure in his theology.<sup>109</sup> Other components of the cosmos, such as the sea or the ends of the earth, also occur infrequently in Paul, which need not imply that he was not cognizant of the concepts, only that they were not crucial to his thought.

In terms of the heavenly realm, in addition to οὐρανός the cognate ἐπουράνιος is frequently used especially in Ephesians where it always occurs in plural form.<sup>110</sup> In a monograph on the use of the term in Ephesians, Brannon surveys Greek literature as well as the NT and finds no significant distinction between οὐρανός and ἐπουράνιος and concludes that both terms refer to the place spatially distinct from and above the earth.<sup>111</sup> The word for earth is typically γῆ, though οἰκουμένη occurs in Rom 10.18 where reference is made to the

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<sup>108</sup> Other verses suggesting a tripartite cosmology are Rom 10.6–7; 1 Cor 8.5; 15.40–9; 2 Cor 5.1–2; Eph 1.10; 3.15; 4.9–10; Phil 3.19–20; Col 1.16, 20; 3.1–2; and see discussion in M. Jeff Brannon, *The Heavenlies in Ephesians: A Lexical, Exegetical, and Conceptual Analysis* (London: T&T Clark, 2011) 200.

<sup>109</sup> Ralph P. Martin, ‘Carmen Christi Revisited’, *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (ed. Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd; Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1998) 2, considers Phil 2.5–11 pre-Pauline but states that Paul’s use of the material indicates his approval of its content. The view that Phil 2.5–11 is a pre-Pauline early Christian hymn was established in Ernst Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2, 5–11* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1928); see also Günther Bornkamm, ‘On Understanding the Christ-hymn’, *Early Christian Experience* (Trans. Paul L. Hammer; London: SCM, 1969) 112–13.

<sup>110</sup> Brannon, *The Heavenlies*, 1.

<sup>111</sup> Brannon, *The Heavenlies*, 70–1, 100. The same conclusion is reached by Andrew T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul’s Thought with Special Reference to His Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 140.

message about Christ going to the ends of the world (οἰκουμένη). The common use of the word to refer to the inhabited world is evident here. In relation to the underworld, the word ἄβυσσος is used in Rom 10.7 and the expression τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς in Eph 4.9.<sup>112</sup> While οὐρανός and γῆ are sometimes used in a merism to denote the whole cosmos, the term κόσμος is used more often for the purpose.<sup>113</sup> Adams focused exclusively on the use of κόσμος in his study of Paul's cosmological language.<sup>114</sup> He found the word had differing connotations depending on the rhetorical setting of the text. For example, in 1 Corinthians, the κόσμος is dominated by evil and is oppressed by spiritual forces opposed to God.<sup>115</sup> In Galatians, the use is similar and Adams comments that this concept of the world has an apocalyptic dimension.<sup>116</sup> However, in Romans κόσμος is used more positively and in line with Greek philosophy, suggesting order and involving a moral imperative to live in harmony with that order.<sup>117</sup> Political powers are an aspect of the good order of the world with the implication that authorities, such as those of the Roman Empire, are part of the good creation of God. Adams writes, 'Rom 13:1-7 resists all attempts to set it within an apocalyptic, dualistic framework. The political order is located incontrovertibly in the creative and providential purposes of God. Paul legitimates the imperial government by incorporating it within the reign of God.'<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Both the inclusion and omission of μέρη has strong textual support; the word appears in **Σ**, A, B, C, D<sup>2</sup>, I, Ψ, but not **Θ**<sup>46</sup>, D\*, F, G. The meaning is not significantly affected by the inclusion or omission of the word.

<sup>113</sup> Occurring forty-seven times in NT texts attributed to Paul.

<sup>114</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*.

<sup>115</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 143; for example, regarding 1 Cor 1.21 he writes, 'The semi-personification of κόσμος in this verse, and perhaps also in the previous verse, might suggest that the κόσμος is being cast here in the role of an apocalyptic, anti-godly power, incognizant of and inimical to God's purposes.'

<sup>116</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 231.

<sup>117</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 156–66.

<sup>118</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 205. James Kallas, 'Romans xiii. 1–7: An Interpolation', *NTS* 11 (1965) 365–74, argued that Rom 13.1–7 is an interpolation, partly because he thought it impossible for Paul to express such strong support for Roman authority when he maintained the present world order was both passing and evil



Heaven and earth are sometimes set in contrast to each other in the Pauline writings with the earthly realm depicted in a way similar to the κόσμος in 1 Corinthians and Galatians. Herman Sasse provides the Pauline epistles as examples of texts with a cosmic dualism in which earth is characterised in opposition to heaven and as the realm of imperfection, transience, and sin.<sup>119</sup> However, Lincoln observes that this dualism is ethical in nature rather than metaphysical as it is in Hellenistic thought.<sup>120</sup> For example, Col 3.2 exhorts the audience to think on heavenly things and not earthly things (τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε, μὴ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς), with the latter including ‘fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)’ (Col 3.5).<sup>121</sup> One contrast between heaven and earth which may be considered metaphysical in nature is the association of heaven with immortality and the earth with mortality, such as appears in the discussion of the resurrection body in 1 Cor 15 and 2 Cor 5.

Given the ethical dualism associated with heaven and earth, it is somewhat surprising that evil spiritual beings, often referred to as the ‘principalities and powers’, probably belonged to the heavenly realm (Rom 8.38; 1 Cor 2.6; 15.24; Gal 4.3, 9).<sup>122</sup> These texts do not locate the beings in the cosmos, though Dale Martin states that the common view of both Jews and Greeks in the first century was that δαιμόνια, a category of beings to which they may have belonged, occupied the earth and lower atmosphere.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, Emma Wasserman has recently argued that these beings are properly considered gentile gods rather than generic evil spirits and are to be interpreted in the Jewish tradition which gave these

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(citing 2 Cor 4.4; Gal 1.4; Eph 6.12). For an argument that Paul’s cosmology and politics were compatible, see section 8.3.3. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 790–1, argues that Paul included Rom 13.1–7 as a corrective to a possible radical interpretation of his eschatology.

<sup>119</sup> Herman Sasse, ‘γῆ’, *TDNT* 1:679–81. For example, in Col 3.2, 5, earthly things are evil or corrupt and are to be shunned.

<sup>120</sup> Lincoln, *Paradise Now*, 125–6, 192.

<sup>121</sup> See also, Phil 3.14.

<sup>122</sup> On the presence of evil in heaven, see Lincoln, *Paradise Now*, 171–3, 187.

<sup>123</sup> Dale B. Martin, ‘When Did Angels Become Demons?’, *JBL* 129 (2010) 674.

gods a place in heaven subordinate to YHWH.<sup>124</sup> The location of these beings in the lower heavenly realm is explicit in later writings; for example, Eph 6.12, ‘For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.’<sup>125</sup> As has been shown already, a similar idea occurs in early Jewish and Christian apocalypses such as 1 Enoch and the Ascension of Isaiah.<sup>126</sup> While it is incorrect to infer from this, as Robert Foster does, that the heavenly realm was considered a contested space, it does show that in the present age heaven and earth alike were in need of renewal.<sup>127</sup>

A contentious issue regarding Paul’s cosmology is the number of heavens he imagined. The discussion rests upon the interpretation of 2 Cor 12.1–4 in which Paul speaks of a man, presumably himself, who had ascended to the third heaven and paradise. Rowland challenged the conventional view, represented by Bietenhard, that had three heavens with paradise located in the third and highest.<sup>128</sup> Rowland argued that Paul described an ascent to the third heaven (2 Cor 12.2) followed by another ascent to paradise (2 Cor 12.4), which would allow for the more common seven-tiered heaven.<sup>129</sup> Rowland’s attempt to arrive at the seven-tiered heaven requires a strained exegesis of the text. Furthermore, as Wright has pointed out, there were in fact a number of co-existing cosmologies in early Judaism and

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<sup>124</sup> Emma Wasserman, ‘Gentile Gods at the Eschaton: A Reconsideration of Paul’s “Principalities and Powers” in 1 Corinthians 15’, *JBL* 136 (2017) 727–46.

<sup>125</sup> See also Eph 2.2.

<sup>126</sup> See also 2 En. 7.1–5; 18.1–9; 3 Bar. 2–4.

<sup>127</sup> Robert L. Foster, ‘Reoriented to the Cosmos: Cosmology and Theology in Ephesians through Philemon’, *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough; London: T&T Clark, 2008) 108–9. In fact, a key point made is that Christ has defeated the principalities and powers on the cross (Col 2.15).

<sup>128</sup> Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt*, 165; and Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 81, 381–3.

<sup>129</sup> Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 381–3.

Christianity and the number of heavens varied between one and ten and so there is no solid basis for rejecting the idea that Paul referenced a three-tiered heaven.<sup>130</sup>

As in the apocalyptic literature, in the Pauline writings cosmology is closely associated with eschatology. Christ's presence is a key feature of the heavenly realm, as Lincoln puts it, the eschatological centre of gravity shifted to heaven with Christ's ascension.<sup>131</sup> In Gal 4, cosmology and eschatology feature in the comparison of the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem. The earthly Jerusalem symbolises the first covenant, which was also associated with the division between Jew and Gentile and a formulation of identity around the concept of *ethnos*. Following Christ's ascension to heaven, the heavenly realm is of prime importance to the identity of the church, which now incorporates both Jew and Gentile.<sup>132</sup> The presence of Christ in heaven establishes the realm as the focal point for believers; it is the place in which their blessing is stored (Eph 1.3), it is where their hope is placed (Col 1.5), and where, according to Eph 2.6, they already dwell with Christ.<sup>133</sup> Unlike the apocalypses, the location of the dead is not a major concern in the Pauline writings, though the nature of the resurrection body is discussed at length in 1 Cor 15 and 2 Cor 5. It seems that Paul thought the dead were immediately with Christ who is in heaven (Phil 1.23) yet the resurrection of the dead takes place on earth at the return of Christ (1 Thess 4.14–17). The concept of personal eschatology that seems to best fit the evidence would involve a disembodied temporary existence in heaven, the 'intermediate state', followed by life in the

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<sup>130</sup> Wright, 'Cosmography', 84–241. The shorter version of T. Levi 2–3, has three heavens. Paradise is in the third heaven in 2 En. 8.1; 3 Bar. 4.8; and Apoc. Mos. 37.5. It can also be in the seventh heaven (Ascen. Isa. 9.6–9) and at the ends of the earth (1 En. 23–5; 77.3).

<sup>131</sup> Lincoln, *Paradise Now*, 172; and White, 'Paul's Cosmology', 90–106, like Lincoln, considers the Christ event central to Paul's cosmological thought.

<sup>132</sup> Lincoln, *Paradise Now*, 29–32.

<sup>133</sup> Brannon, *The Heavenlies*, 156, notes a similar concept of the present heavenly dwelling of the saints in Ephesians and the Dead Sea Scrolls. For example, in 1QS XI, 8, the elect on earth join with the holy ones/angels in heaven.

resurrected body on a restored earth. The hope for a transformed cosmos rather than a resurrected existence in heaven is suggested by Rom 8.19–23, which speaks of creation (κτίσις) being freed from corruption when the ‘sons of God’ are revealed.<sup>134</sup>

To conclude, in the Pauline writings there is far less detailed description of the cosmos than there generally is in apocalyptic literature. The key issue is the relationship between heaven and earth with respect to the Christ event. Christ is the most significant feature of heaven and his presence there contributes to the identity of those in the church and it defines their moral orientation. There is an element of ambivalence towards the present world and earthly realm. It both manifests the good order established in God’s creation and yet it is also the realm associated with moral corruption and is the place subject to the influence of evil spiritual forces.

### 5.3.2) *Cosmology in Other NT Texts*

Several of the observations made about cosmology in the Pauline writings are true of other texts of the NT; for example, the person of Christ is explored in cosmological terms in several places. He is often represented as a figure who unifies heaven and earth. In the gospel accounts at the baptism of Jesus, heaven opens and God’s spirit descends to earth upon him (Matt 3.16–17; Mark 1.10–11; Luke 3.21–2; John 1.32). At the transfiguration, Jesus is on a high mountain where he meets with Moses and Elijah and they are enveloped in a cloud representing the presence of God (Matt 17.1–9). The mountain has become a sacred mountain where heaven and earth meet due to the presence of Jesus. The cosmic significance of the death of Jesus is indicated by the darkness that comes over the land at noon before his death and then at his death Matthew reports, ‘At that moment the curtain of the temple was

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<sup>134</sup> Robert Jewett, ‘The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Reading Rom 8:18–23 within the Imperial Context’, *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; New York: Trinity, 2004) 38–46, sees in the future-oriented hope for nature a critique of the present political order centred on Rome.

torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised' (Matt 27.51–2). Josephus reported that the curtain of the Temple was decorated with stars, which suggests it symbolised the heavens (Josephus, *B.J.* 5.212–214; *Ant.* 3.180–182).<sup>135</sup> The tearing of the curtain represented not the provision of free access to God, as is sometimes suggested, but the rending of the heavens prefiguring God's judgment.<sup>136</sup> It therefore naturally accompanies the earthquake, which was also a sign of the eschatological judgment.<sup>137</sup> While the underworld is not explicitly mentioned, the splitting of the earth and the raising of the dead from the tombs suggest the death of Christ had implications for that realm too so there are cosmological ramifications for heaven, earth, and the underworld. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus declares that all authority on heaven and earth has been given to him and on that basis he commissions the disciples to evangelise all nations (Matt 28.18–20). The book of Acts gives an account of that mission, which it states will commence in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria before extending to the end of the earth (Acts 1.8). In fact, the narrative concludes with Paul preaching in Rome to a gentile audience who are suggested to be more receptive of his message than were his fellow Jews (Acts 28.18–31). It seems then that the cosmological centre-periphery construction of Acts 1.8 comes to symbolise an ethnic contrast between Jew and gentile. In addition, in Acts the theme of Christ connecting heaven and earth occurs in several key points of the narrative: first, in the ascension of Jesus to heaven; next at Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit descends on the disciples as tongues of fire from heaven; then when Stephen is martyred he sees heaven open and Christ at the right hand of God; Jesus appears to Paul on the Damascus Road as a bright

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<sup>135</sup> See also Aune, *Revelation*, 318–19.

<sup>136</sup> Michael F. Bird, 'Tearing the Heavens and Shaking the Heavenlies: Mark's Cosmology in its Apocalyptic Context', *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean McDonough; London: T&T Clark, 2008) 53–5.

<sup>137</sup> Richard Bauckham, 'The Eschatological Earthquake in the Apocalypse of John', *NovT* 19 (1977) 224–33.

light from heaven; and finally, in a vision Peter sees heaven opened and a sheet carrying unclean animals appears and the Lord instructs him to kill and eat. Michael Bird's conclusion on the cosmology of Mark, that Jesus brought about a cataclysmic transformation of the relationship between heaven and earth, could just as well be applied to the other synoptics and Acts.<sup>138</sup>

In the book of Hebrews, the salvific work of Christ is explained with reference to heaven. It is affirmed that Christ is a superior being to the angels of heaven. His work is superior to the priests because he is a high priest who has passed through the heavens (Heb 4.14) and entered the sanctuary of heaven rather than its copy, the Jerusalem temple (Heb 9.24). Hebrews 12.22–3 also suggests that believers participate in the heavenly realm in their fellowship, 'But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect'. Like Qumran, the emphasis is on the participation of the community in the heavenly realm and not the individual's position in heaven through union with Christ. Another difference to the Pauline writings is that in Hebrews the heaven and earth dualism is ontological and not primarily ethical in nature. Heaven is the realm of true substance whereas the earthly copies are mere shadows (Heb 8.5; 10.1). Elsewhere in the NT there is an ethical dualism, for example, the 'Lord's prayer' of Matt 6.10 contains the petition for God's will to be done on earth as in heaven. In Matt 6.19–21 and Luke 12.33–4, Jesus exhorts his followers to seek treasure in heaven not on earth. In John's Gospel, the world (κόσμος) is referred to frequently and the relationship of God, and believers, to the world is a significant theme of the work.<sup>139</sup> Bill Salier finds that of four major uses of the term κόσμος in the NT, of

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<sup>138</sup> Bird, 'Tearing the Heavens', 58.

<sup>139</sup> Bill Salier, 'What's in a World? Kosmos in the Prologue of John's Gospel', *RTR* 56 (1997) 106, notes that of 185 occurrences of κόσμος in the NT, 78 are in John.

which three are positive and one negative, the negative meaning (people in rebellion) is by far the more common in John.<sup>140</sup> This negative portrayal of the world corresponds to Paul's deployment of κόσμος in some of his epistles (1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians).

There are two aspects of cosmology that occur primarily outside the Pauline writing in the NT; namely, the underworld and gehenna (γέεννα) in particular, and the concept of cosmic catastrophe at the eschaton.<sup>141</sup> In the synoptics, Jesus makes reference to gehenna as the place of eternal punishment on numerous occasions (Matt 5.22, 29; 10.28; 18.9; 23.15, 33; Mark 9.43, 45, 47; Luke 12.5).<sup>142</sup> In one of only two references to the abyss in the NT outside of Revelation, in Luke 8.31 demons plead with Jesus not to be cast into the abyss. And in 2 Pet 2.4, the place where rebellious angels were imprisoned is referred to as Tartarus.<sup>143</sup> This is probably the same realm intended when 1 Pet 3.19 speaks of the prison in which spirits were held and, unique in the NT, the place where Jesus preached between his death and resurrection. The concept of cosmic catastrophe appears primarily in the Petrine epistles. For example, 2 Pet 3.10 says, 'But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.'<sup>144</sup> Apart from 2 Peter, the so-called apocalypses of the synoptics describe elements of cosmic collapse as signs of the end (Matt 24.27–31; Mark 13.24–7).<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Salier, 'What's in a World?', 106, states that the four common meanings of κόσμος in the NT are 'the universe, the earth, people in general, and people in rebellion'.

<sup>141</sup> Though Adams, *Constructing the World*, 132–3, thinks that when 1 Cor 7.31 speaks of the world passing away, Paul has in mind the destruction and replacement of the world, as does the author of 2 Peter.

<sup>142</sup> See also Jas 3.6.

<sup>143</sup> The participle of the verb ταρταρώ is used, meaning to throw into Tartarus.

<sup>144</sup> Edward Adams, 'Retrieving the Earth from the Conflagration: 2 Peter 3.5–13 and the Environment', *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (ed. Cherryl Hunt, David G. Horrell, Christopher Southgate, and Francesca Stavrakopoulou; London: T&T Clark, 2010) 108–20, suggests the concept of cosmic catastrophe in 2 Peter was influenced by the Stoic notion of *ekpyrosis*.

<sup>145</sup> Hebrews 1.10–12 also refers to heaven and earth wearing out and being replaced like a robe.

### 5.3.3) 1 Clement

The book of 1 Clement was written not long after the book of Revelation, late in the reign of Domitian or early under Nerva (94–97 CE).<sup>146</sup> Unlike Revelation, which was produced in a province of the Empire, 1 Clement was written in Rome and sent to Corinth. It is discussed here because it serves as an example of an early Christian text outside the NT which demonstrates how elements of the cosmology of the Pauline writings could be developed in a way that strongly contrasted with Revelation. The rhetorical aim of 1 Clement is suggested in the closing chapter of the epistle; 1 Clem. 65.1 says, ‘But send back to us quickly our envoys Claudius Ephebus and Valerius Bito, along with Fortunatus, in peace and with joy, that they may inform us without delay about the peace and harmony that we have prayed and desired for you. Then we will rejoice more quickly in your stability.’ Clement desires that there be peace and harmony (εἰρήνην καὶ ὁμόνοιαν) and good order or stability (εὐστάθεια) among the churches of Corinth. There were possibly several concerns regarding disorder that the epistle sought to address, though 1 Clem. 44.3–4 suggests the core issue was the dismissal of church leaders from their appointed positions.

The act of creation is a key feature in the rhetorical strategy of the epistle and is used as the basis for various moral admonitions. First Clement 20 is worth quoting at length because it illustrates the emphasis on cosmic order in the epistle and at the same time contains many of the features of the cosmology that developed from the ancient Near East in the Hebrew and early Jewish tradition.

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<sup>146</sup> Leslie W. Barnard, ‘Clement of Rome and the Persecution of Domitian’, *NTS* 10 (1964) 258; and Laurence L. Welborn, ‘The Preface to 1 Clement: The Rhetorical Situation and the Traditional Date’, *Encounters with Hellenism: Studies on the First Letter of Clement* (ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and Laurence L. Welborn; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 198–202, who also provides reasons for not relying on 1 Clem. 1.1 to restrict its date to the reign of Domitian, as did Rudolph Knopf and J. B. Lightfoot.



The heavens, which move about under his management, are peacefully subject to him. Day and night complete the racecourse laid out by him, without impeding one another in the least. Sun and moon and the chorus of stars roll along the tracks that have been appointed to them, in harmony, never crossing their lines, in accordance with the arrangement he has made. By his will and in the proper seasons, the fertile earth brings forth its rich abundance of nourishment for humans, beasts, and all living things that dwell on it, without dissenting or altering any of the decrees he has set forth. Both the inscrutable regions of the abysses and the indescribable realms of the depths are constrained by the same commands. The basin of the boundless sea, established by his workmanship to hold the waters collected, does not cross its restraining barriers, but acts just as he ordered. For he said, “You shall come this far, and your waves shall crash down within you.” The ocean, boundless to humans, and the worlds beyond it are governed by the same decrees of the Master. The seasons—spring, summer, fall, and winter—succeed one another in peace. The forces of the winds complete their service in their own proper season, without faltering. And the eternal fountains, created for enjoyment and health, provide their life-giving breasts to humans without ceasing. The most insignificant living creatures associate with one another in harmony and peace. The great Creator and Master of all appointed all these things to be in peace and harmony, bringing great benefits to all things, but most especially to us, who flee to his compassion through our Lord Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the majesty forever and ever. Amen. (1 Clem. 20.1–12)

The doxology presents a complete picture of the tripartite cosmos and includes the seas, the winds at the ends of the earth, and the springs of the deep. Peace, harmony, and the good order of creation is repeatedly emphasised. Even the abyss and underworld, which in the HB were associated with chaos, is restrained by divine command in 1 Clement. In the following chapter, a range of moral exhortations occurs which primarily focus on rightly ordered social relationships. In 1 Clem. 21.6–9, the Corinthians are urged to revere Christ, to esteem political rulers, to respect the aged and train youth in godly ways, and finally to encourage proper behaviour among women and children.

Appeal to the order of creation as the basis of moral exhortation also occurs in 1 Clem. 33, and in 1 Clem. 34.5–8 the order of angelic worship of God in heaven is the basis of an appeal for harmony in worship within the church. First Clement 60 begins with praise of the orderly creation and concludes with a prayer for peace and concord for all who dwell on earth. In 1 Clem. 61, the moral admonition is entirely related to submission to ‘those who rule and lead us here on earth’ (ἄρχουσιν καὶ ἡγουμένοις ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) (1 Clem. 60.4). First Clement 60.1 speaks of them being established by God and even receiving glory and honour from him. Clement continues to say that the will of the rulers should be in no way resisted and prays for their health, peace, concord, and stability (ὕγειαν εἰρήνην ὁμόνοιαν εὐστάθειαν). In the next verse, God is called the heavenly lord, king of eternity (δέσποτα ἐπουράνιε βασιλεῦ τῶν αἰώνων) who gives glory to human beings (υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων), who are presumably those in authority.<sup>147</sup>

The teaching in 1 Clement on submission to authorities is clearly influenced by Paul’s teaching in Rom 13, though it goes beyond what Paul says in its strong affirmation of the value of the earthly rulers by describing their God-given glory and by disallowing any kind of resistance. Such observations may be seen to support the view of Klaus Wengst that Clement was a theological apologist for the *Pax Romana* whose cosmology of world order served to reinforce Roman power.<sup>148</sup> Wengst goes on to highlight the contrast between Clement and John of Patmos, stating that the prayer, ‘How Long? O, Lord’, was entirely

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<sup>147</sup> Welborn, ‘Preface to 1 Clement’, 199, suggests this verse expresses the notion that the rulers of the Empire were established as the earthly counterpart of the heavenly kingdom.

<sup>148</sup> Klaus Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1987) 108–11; see also Laurence L. Welborn, ‘Roman Political Ideology and the Authority of First Clement’, *Into All the World: Emergent Christianity in Its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context* (ed. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017) 391. Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 113–15, also related Clement’s apparent adoption of Roman ideology to his rhetorical strategy, suggesting that for Clement the Corinthian dissidents were threatening the equivalent of the *Pax Romana* in the church.

alien to Clement.<sup>149</sup> While there is certainly a contrast in the thought of the two figures, it should be noted that Clement does not simply adopt Roman imperial ideology regarding peace and cosmic order and relay it to his audience. In 1 Clem. 61.2, he makes it clear that the Roman rulers were established by the God the Christians worshipped, and not Jupiter as in the *Aeneid*. The same verse also makes clear that God alone is Lord in heaven and there is no suggestion of Roman gods or the deified emperors occupying that realm. Furthermore, the earthly rulers may have been given glory by God but they remain human – υἱοὶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, and are not sons of god as was claimed for Roman emperors since Augustus. It is possible to imagine that the Roman authorities would have been pleased by the way Clement accommodated their ideology into his theology of creation, just as Vespasian was willing to receive Josephus's prophecy that it was the God of the Jews who had given Vespasian authority to rule and even to destroy the Temple in judgment.

Cilliers Breytenbach supports the idea that the relationship between cosmology and ethics in 1 Clement has been influenced by Stoic philosophy, which involved a relationship between civic concord and cosmic harmony.<sup>150</sup> The line of argument in the two certainly seems similar. It may also be observed that the representation of the world in 1 Clement accords with Paul's deployment of κόσμος in Romans, which, as Adams contends, involved an adaptation of Greek, Hellenistic, and Jewish ideas, though especially concepts involved with Stoic philosophy.<sup>151</sup> In conclusion, 1 Clement is an example of an early Christian text that followed elements of Paul's approach to cosmology to develop a rhetoric affirming the

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<sup>149</sup> Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 110.

<sup>150</sup> Cilliers Breytenbach, 'Civic Concord and Cosmic Harmony: Sources of Metaphoric Mapping in 1 Clement 20:3', *Encounters with Hellenism: Studies on the First Letter of Clement* (ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and Laurence L. Welborn; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 182–96. Welborn, 'Roman Political Ideology', 380–2, notes that the concepts of peace (εἰρήνη) and concord (ὁμόνοια) occurred in society beyond Stoic philosophy, including inscriptions, coins, and in Greek and Latin historians.

<sup>151</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 156–63.

maintenance of the established social order.<sup>152</sup> It stands in stark contrast to the apocalyptic view of the cosmos which often held that earthly power was in opposition to heaven and that it would ultimately be overthrown by the superior power and authority of heaven.

#### 5.4) Greco-Roman Cosmologies

The discussion of Greco-Roman cosmologies will include: firstly, a tripartite ‘mythological’ cosmology developed by Hesiod and Homer; secondly, the Platonic-Aristotelian multi-spheric cosmos; and thirdly, a range of other cosmologies that developed from these including Epicurean and Stoic cosmologies.<sup>153</sup> It should be noted that these cosmologies were not necessarily distinct in the thought of Greco-Roman writers. For example, in the *Aeneid* Virgil integrated both Epicurean and Stoic concepts of the cosmos while primarily adopting a mythological conception of the world.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, these cosmologies were not restricted to persons who identified as being Greek or Roman. For example, the author of 2 Peter was influenced by Stoic cosmology and Philo by Platonic philosophy.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Welborn, ‘Roman Political Ideology’, 382–3.

<sup>153</sup> Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 38, categorises Greco-Roman cosmologies by the first two categories stated and then adds a modified three-tier/multiple heavens cosmology as the third type.

<sup>154</sup> Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity*, 69, the ancient cosmological conception of the cosmos as a kind of living organism containing a life force is evident in Virgil; see for example, *Aen.* 6.724–732; *Georg.* 4.221–225. Lapidge, ‘Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature’, 1390, states that Virgil was not thoroughly Stoic and often represented Epicurean positions. See also, Susanna Morton Braund, ‘Virgil and the Cosmos: Religious and Philosophical Ideas’, *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (ed. Charles Martindale; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 205–6, 210, 220.

<sup>155</sup> Adams, ‘Greco-Roman’, 26, comments that Philo had a Platonic view of the cosmos with the earth at its centre (*Mos.* 1 212) and spheres surrounding it (*Cher.* 23). He also called the cosmos a living creature and said that it was indestructible. In *De opificio mundi*, he attempted to synthesise the *Timaeus* and Genesis.

#### 5.4.1) The 'Mythological' Cosmos

According to Jenny Strauss Clay, Hesiod was the first in the Greco-Roman tradition to provide a systematic cosmology encompassing both the human and divine.<sup>156</sup> Regarding his *Theogony*, she states that Hesiod synthesised a range of traditions and local theogonies to create the epic, which was to become a major influence in Greece and the Hellenistic world.<sup>157</sup> The narrative of the *Theogony* is an account of the foundation of a stable cosmos out of an initial state of chaos. A process of genealogical evolutions results in the creation of components of the cosmos: first there is chaos followed by *Gaia* (earth); from chaos, darkness (*Erebus*) and night; from these, brightness and day; from earth comes *Uranos* (heaven); heaven and earth then mate to produce the waters of *Okeanos* but also the Titans; then, when *Uranos* prevents *Gaia* giving birth to more offspring, *Gaia* seeks vengeance through *Chronos* who castrates *Uranos*. The *Theogony* also narrates the genesis of various gods and describes their location in the cosmos. Combat narratives between the gods are significant in the narrative. Zeus and the Olympians wage war against the Titans and then Typhoeus, who are defeated and imprisoned in Tartarus. Strauss Clay comments on the cosmological significance of these stories, saying, 'Both these conflicts are cosmic in their scope and touch all parts of the cosmos; one could even say that they are battles *for* the control of the cosmos itself, and their outcome determines its fate.'<sup>158</sup> Strauss Clay's comment leads to an important observation about Hesiod's *Theogony*, that it is primarily concerned with providing an account of the arrangement of divine powers in the world. It is a theogony first and a cosmogony second, though the two are intertwined as the gods and their relationships are defined by their location in the cosmos.

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<sup>156</sup> Strauss Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, 2.

<sup>157</sup> Strauss Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, 4.

<sup>158</sup> Strauss Clay, *Hesiod's Cosmos*, 25.

Many of the features of Hesiod's cosmos are like those of ancient Near Eastern cosmologies. It is fundamentally tripartite, consisting of heaven, the earth, and the underworld, though in the *Theogony* the importance of the sea or ocean is emphasised by the common occurrence of the cosmological formula, 'heaven, earth, and sea', and sometimes with Tartarus to give the comprehensive cosmological formula.<sup>159</sup> The sacred mountain and the idea of the divine assembly are represented in the concept of Mount Olympus. There are springs of water under the earth which feed the ocean, for example, the river Styx flows in the underworld and is associated with the primeval waters. In Hesiod's *Works and Days*, at the ends of the earth are the Islands of the Blessed, which were also known as the Elysian Fields in Homer (Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 167–174; Homer, *Od.* 4.561–568).<sup>160</sup> This is where people favoured by the gods may dwell after death as immortals.

The cosmos represented in the works of Homer is like that of Hesiod, though more detail is provided by Homer. For example, the earth is a flat circular disc surrounded by *Okeanos* and the sky is a brazen bowl-like hemisphere which rests on pillars at the ends of the earth (Homer, *Il.* 5.504; 17.425; 18.607–608; 21.194–196; *Od.* 10.510–512; 11.13; 15.329; 24.11–12). As in Hesiod, the god Atlas supports the dome of heaven. Herodotus later challenged Homer's cosmology regarding the existence of *Okeanos* as well as the perfect roundness of the earth, suggesting such beliefs were naïve (Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.23; 4.8, 36).<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> The underworld was also referred to as *Erebus*, meaning darkness. Hesiod, *Theog.* 721–725, says that it is the same distance from heaven to earth as from the earth to Tartarus. Ernst Günther Schmidt, 'Himmel-Meer-Erde im frühgriechischen Epos und im alten Orient', *Phil* 125 (1981) 8, notes that in the narrative of the war with the Titans, the three-part cosmology is expanded to a five-part version including heaven, earth, sea, Olympus, and Tartarus.

<sup>160</sup> Eve Adler, 'The Invocation to the Georgics', *Int* 11 (1983) 31–2, notes that while Virgil, *Georg.* 1.38–39, suggests the Greeks believed the Elysian Fields were under the earth, the Greeks rarely associated them with Tartarus. See also S. R. F. Price and Emily Kearns, eds., 'Elysian Fields', *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 187.

<sup>161</sup> Herodotus thought that at the ends of the earth was a desert region. Philip S. Alexander, 'Notes on the Imago Mundi of the Book of Jubilees', *JJS* 33 (1982) 198, he was also contesting the Ionian mapping tradition.

Nonetheless, the idea persisted and in the opening to his geography Strabo included an excursus stating that Homer's circular earth surrounded by ocean had been proven correct (Strabo, *Geogr.* 1.1–10).<sup>162</sup> Homer more precisely locates Tartarus by describing it as a bottomless pit underneath Hades.<sup>163</sup> Also like Hesiod, the structure of the cosmos is related to the organisation of divine power. In the *Iliad*, Poseidon explains,

For three brothers are we, begotten by Cronos, and born of Rhea—Zeus, and myself, and the third is Hades, who is lord of the dead below. And in three ways have all things been divided, and to each has been apportioned his own domain. I indeed, when the lots were shaken, won the gray sea to be my home for ever, and Hades won the murky darkness, while Zeus won the broad heaven in the air and the clouds; but the earth and high Olympus still remain common to us all. (Homer, *Il.* 15.187–193 [Murray])

The ancient Greek mythological cosmos was ordered by a spatial demarcation of divine authority and power. The existing order was arrived at through cosmic conflict and so the idea was established that the cosmos was space which could be contested. Ultimately, it was the strength of Zeus's power that enabled him to rule from heaven and thus maintain cosmic order.

The cosmology of Plato will be outlined in the next section representing a different kind of Greco-Roman cosmology; however, in several places in his philosophic treatises Plato utilised aspects of the mythological cosmology that has been outlined. The most well-known example is the Myth of Er, which concludes the *Republic* (Plato, *Rep.* 10.614B–621B). In the narrative, the central character, named Er, dies and passes to the afterlife where he has a vision of the cosmos. He then returns to the world and reports what he saw. Er describes two chasms leading up to heaven and two down into the earth, the just are rewarded in heaven and the unjust are sent to the underworld. He then saw souls

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<sup>162</sup> See discussion in Romm, *Edges of the Earth*, 43.

<sup>163</sup> Homer, *Il.* 8.13–16.

descending from heaven and rising from the earth to meet in a meadow in the sky, possibly the Elysian Fields.<sup>164</sup> Those who were extremely wicked, however, were not allowed out of the earth but were sent to Tartarus instead.<sup>165</sup> Plato goes on with an account of the transmigration of the soul. Time spent in either heaven or the underworld is followed by a new life with the soul taking on a body of another form after it drinks from the river of forgetfulness so it does not recall its earlier life. As in apocalyptic literature, places of reward and punishment in the afterlife are revealed to exhort the audience to ethical living.<sup>166</sup> In closing book 10, and hence the *Republic*, Plato gives the value of Er's tale as one which may help people to keep their foot on the upward way and to pursue justice and wisdom (Plato, *Rep.* 10.621C–D).

Plato's *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus* also feature accounts of the afterlife which describe the cosmos primarily in terms of heaven, earth, and the underworld. *Phaedo* 109E–111C first describes an imaginary ascent to heaven from which true knowledge of the cosmos is possible. It describes the upper earth as an ideal realm where gods lived in their temples among humanity in peace. *Phaedo* 111D–113B then describes the underworld as the place where souls go after death. The interior of the earth contains shafts and rivers and streams through which water as well as fire, mud, and lava flows. There are also subterranean lakes

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<sup>164</sup> Matthias Vorwerk, 'Mythos und Kosmos: Zur Topographie des Jenseits im Er-Mythos des Platonischen „Staates“ (614B2–616B1)', *Phil* 146 (2002) 53, comments that for Plato punishment occurred under the earth and blessing in the heavens under the sphere of the fixed stars; for example, Plato, *Tim.* 42B; *Phaed.* 249A–B; *Phaed.* 111C–114C. Bauckham, *Fate of the Dead*, 29, notes that the location of the blessed in heaven was not typical of Greco-Roman cosmology.

<sup>165</sup> There appears to be a distinction made between the underworld as the place where the dead in general reside and Tartarus where the wicked are punished.

<sup>166</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, 'The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre in Greek and Hellenistic Literature: The Case of the Oracle of Trophonius', *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the near East Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism Uppsala, August 12–17, 1979* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983) 577–97; and Wright, 'Cosmography', 279–80. In addition, Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 71, states the Myth of Er grounded a conception of human life in the order of the universe.



and a sea and Tartarus is described as a deep chasm. Plato describes cosmic rivers which are connected to the underworld in various ways. The greatest of the rivers is *Okeanos*, which encircles the earth. The river Acheron passes under the earth through desert places and into the Acherusian Lake, which is a place in the underworld where souls await transmigration. A third river flows between the two and empties into a region of fire where it forms a lake of boiling water and mud which then plunges into Tartarus. *Phaedrus* 247A–C tells of how gods and immortals, led by Zeus, travel upwards to the highest point of heaven and then move to stand on the outer surface of heaven from which they glimpse what lies beyond. The souls of lesser beings, after death, aspire to this experience but weighed down by evil cannot ascend so high and fall back to earth where they are allocated a new body which is greater or lesser in nature depending on the height attained in ascent. While the *Phaedrus* focuses on the ascent and descent between heaven and earth, in *Phaedrus* 249B there is also a mention of a place of punishment under the earth. As in the Myth of Er, the cosmic visions of the afterlife are intended to inspire people to lead a virtuous life and pursue wisdom.<sup>167</sup>

Before moving on, two points must be made about Plato's use of a mythological cosmology. First, it appears alongside the representation of the geocentric multi-spheric cosmos that may be found in his other writings. For example, in *Rep.* 10.616B–617C, the Myth of Er provides a description of the structure of the cosmos, which is represented as a spindle with the earth at the centre surrounded by eight rimmed whorls, each of which represents a sphere of the heavens on which the stars and the seven planets (including the sun and moon) are affixed. There is no detailed description of the structure of the cosmos in the *Phaedo* or *Phaedrus*, however, *Phaed.* 109A states that the earth is round and at the centre of

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<sup>167</sup> See, for example, Plato, *Phaed.* 114C. Another example of a cosmological text with this function is Cicero's Dream of Scipio (*Rep.* 6.9–26). Romm, *Edges of the Earth*, 134–5, comments that Scipio's vision of the earth reveals its smallness, which Cicero intends to encourage humility and the pursuit of wisdom over the glory of empire-building.

the heavens. It may be that Plato conceived of a spherical earth at the centre of the cosmos with the underworld located below its surface. Alternatively, it may be that Plato himself maintained, or at least utilised, various cosmologies, one representing the cosmos as it truly was (that is, geocentric surrounded by the layered celestial heavens) and another that he used to express his ideas about the ethical implications of the immortality of the soul; that is, heaven and the underworld as places of reward and punishment.<sup>168</sup>

The latter suggestion leads to a second observation, which is that Plato maintained that his tales of the afterlife set in the mythological cosmos were true but in a different way to other truths in his philosophy. Plato states,

Now it isn't fitting for a man of intelligence to affirm with confidence that these things are just as I've related them; however, that either these things are so, or something like them, concerning our souls and their dwelling places, given that the soul is evidently something immortal—that's what seems fitting to me, when I think about it, and worth the risk for one believing it to be so—for the risk is a noble one—one should repeat such things to oneself as a charm, which is why I've been dwelling on this story for so long. (Plato, *Phaed.* 114D [Emlyn-Jones and Preddy])

Matthias Vorwerk understands that Plato means by this that the essence of the story is true but not the mythological form because, as Plato states in *Tim.* 29C–D, matters such as the gods and the origin of the cosmos are beyond precise knowledge for humans and so myth proceeds where logical reasoning and scientific knowledge ends.<sup>169</sup> Vorwerk's interpretation needs to be supplemented by Francis Cornford's discussion of the issue, which is focused on similar phrasing in the *Timaeus*.<sup>170</sup> Cornford seeks to redress a reading of Plato shaped by

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<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, it should be noted that Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary* (Great Britain: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1937) 32, observes that Plato is not entirely self-consistent in his cosmology.

<sup>169</sup> Vorwerk, 'Mythos und Kosmos', 50.

<sup>170</sup> Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 28–31.

modern epistemology in which science is thought to potentially deliver accurate yet necessarily partial and incomplete knowledge of an objective reality. In contrast to this view, for Plato the physical world was a mere reflection of true reality which existed in the realm of the ideas/forms and therefore it possessed a lesser degree of reality; as Cornford puts it, for Plato ‘the truth is not at the further end of your microscope’.<sup>171</sup> Consequently, even perfect knowledge of the world could only deliver something resembling the truth. That said, Plato seemed to consider that his accounts of the afterlife were something like poetry which could be of value to the philosopher in promoting a virtuous life through contemplation of the transcendent.<sup>172</sup> While it may be beyond them, the philosopher should desire to stand with the gods on the outer edge of the uppermost heaven and see what lies beyond the physical cosmos.<sup>173</sup> So too, they may speculate about what lies below on the other side of death despite the fact that they may never arrive at anything better than something resembling the truth.

#### 5.4.2) *Platonic-Aristotelean Cosmology*

What follows builds on the discussion of early Greek cosmology in chapter 4 of the present thesis, which provides some context for the development of Platonic and Aristotelian

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<sup>171</sup> Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 31.

<sup>172</sup> Hubert Cancik, ‘The End of the World, of History, and of the Individual in Greek and Roman Antiquity’, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism; Volume 1: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. John J. Collins; New York: Continuum, 2000) 93–4, observes that some writers, such as Polybius, 6.56.6–15, thought that myths about the afterlife should be propagated for the sake of the masses to provoke fear of punishment in the afterlife and hence moral conduct in the present. He also notes that Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.5, and Juvenal, *Sat.* 3.145–146, commented that in their day traditional ideas of the underworld and divine punishments were not taken realistically.

<sup>173</sup> For example, Plato, *Phaed.* 109E–110A, ‘for if anyone should come to the top of the air or should get wings and fly up, he could lift his head above it and see, as fishes lift their heads out of the water and see the things in our world, so he would see things in that upper world; and, if his nature were strong enough to bear the sight, he would recognize that that is the real heaven and the real light and the real earth’.

cosmology, though certain aspects of Platonic-Aristotelean cosmology, such as the spherical earth, go back even further to Pythagoras, Parmenides, and Empedocles. While the Platonic-Aristotelian cosmology developed in Greece in the fourth century BCE, it was later revived in the first century CE with a movement known as middle Platonism, with philosophers such as Plutarch and Philo, and it continued to be influential until the time of Copernicus.<sup>174</sup> The cosmology of Plato involved a fixed earth at the centre of the cosmos.<sup>175</sup> *Phaedo* 109A explains that it is equidistant from all points in the heaven and so does not fall in any direction. The whole cosmos rotates on an axis around the earth (Plato, *Tim.* 40B–C). Surrounding the earth are seven planetary spheres representing the moon, sun, and five planets – Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.<sup>176</sup> These spheres did not consist of any material substance but represented domains in which the world-soul carried the planets in their particular motions.<sup>177</sup> Outside the seventh is another sphere to which the stars are affixed, moving in the opposite direction to the lower spheres (Plato, *Rep.* 10.616B–617D). The Platonic cosmos is sometimes considered a ‘scientific’ cosmology in contrast to the ‘mythological’ three-tier cosmos.<sup>178</sup> However, as with all pre-modern scientific endeavours, it involved an integration of observed phenomena with philosophic reasoning and traditional

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<sup>174</sup> Wright, *Ancient Cosmology*, 50; and Adams, ‘Greco-Roman’, 13–14. For Plato’s influence on Philo’s cosmology, see Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 52–4.

<sup>175</sup> Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology*, 124–5, a cosmos with earth at the centre was a common belief among the Greek philosophers. Aristotle, *Cael.* 2.13, said that all who consider the universe finite held that the earth was central apart from the Pythagoreans who thought the element of fire was at the centre of the cosmos, though as Hilda Richardson ‘The Myth of Er (Plato, Republic, 616B)’, *CQ* 20 (1926) 118–19, points out, early Pythagoreans thought that the fire at the centre of the cosmos was within the centre of the earth. Richardson, ‘Myth of Er’, 113–33, also argues that in the Myth of Er (Plato, *Rep.* 10.616B), where Plato describes a column of light which encircled the cosmos and passed through the centre of the earth, he is adapting the Pythagorean concept of the cosmos which had fire at its centre as well as around the periphery.

<sup>176</sup> Wright, *Early History*, 100, this order of the planets was established by Anaxagoras in the fifth century BCE.

<sup>177</sup> Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology*, 78.

<sup>178</sup> For example, Wright, *Early History*, 99, 103, who also observes that other ancient Near Eastern cosmologies were modified to incorporate observed astronomical phenomena.

religious beliefs.<sup>179</sup> So for example, according to Plato, *Tim.* 30C–D, 34B, the cosmos is a living creature which possesses body and soul. The belief in an animated cosmos was used to explain its motion by the world soul and two motions called ‘Same’ and ‘Difference’.<sup>180</sup>

Aristotle developed Plato’s cosmology, both refining and redefining its key concepts including providing an account of motion of the planetary spheres through physical processes.<sup>181</sup> A significant aspect of his cosmology was that the cosmic spheres became physical in nature in order to account for the motion of the heavenly bodies.<sup>182</sup> To further explain the movement of the planets, Aristotle added intervening spheres between the seven spheres of Plato, ultimately arriving at fifty-five in total.<sup>183</sup> Cosmic motion was explained by an external ‘final cause’ located outside the circumference of the cosmos. He called this entity the ‘First Mover’ or the ‘Unmoved mover’, and he reasoned that as the object of ‘love’, it caused the motion of the highest heaven which then transferred its motion to the rest of the cosmos through contact.<sup>184</sup> To account for motion in the astral sphere of the heavens, that is, space above the moon, Aristotle posited the existence of a fifth element called aether. The ethereal realm was characterised by perfection while the realm beneath the moon, and especially the earth, was subject to chaos and disorder.

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<sup>179</sup> Leo Elders, *Aristotle’s Cosmology: A Commentary on the De Caelo* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1965) 34–6, suggests that Plato set forth a ‘religiously tinged cosmology’; for example, Plato says in *Tim.* 90A that the soul roots a person in heaven. He also claimed regarding Aristotle that ‘the *De caelo* is the first scientific treatise in cosmology’ and that it was the first treatise developed in a strictly rational way compared to earlier works which involved a mix of physics, metaphysics, and common-sense wisdom. Despite this he acknowledges that in several places it reflects religious thinking.

<sup>180</sup> Plato, *Tim.* 35B–37C; see also, Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology*, 75–136.

<sup>181</sup> For a discussion of Aristotle’s cosmology, see Elders, *Aristotle’s Cosmology*.

<sup>182</sup> Elders, *Aristotle’s Cosmology*, 8.

<sup>183</sup> Wright, *Early History*, 102. Before Aristotle, Eudoxus had twenty-six spheres and Callippus thirty-three.

<sup>184</sup> For an explanation of the concept of the First Mover, see Aristotle, *Metaph.* 12.5–8 and *Phys.* 8.5.

#### 5.4.3) Other Greco-Roman Cosmologies

The survey of Greco-Roman cosmologies will conclude by looking at how Epicurean and Stoic philosophy developed Platonic-Aristotelian cosmology. Of interest to the present study is the way that some Stoic philosophers made use of cosmology to either support or challenge aspects of Roman imperialism. The section will conclude by mentioning a few distinctive cosmological dimensions of traditional Roman religion.

The Epicureans were an influential group of philosophers in the first century. The founder, Epicurus, largely followed the atomist conception of the cosmos and so denied that the cosmos was divine and eternal.<sup>185</sup> The Roman philosopher, Lucretius, provides a thorough account of Epicurean cosmology in *De rerum natura*. In this work, there are elements of the mythological cosmos; for example, the cosmos is denoted using the bipartite formula ‘heaven and earth’ (*caelo terraeque*, also *terrīs caeloque*) (*De rer.* 5.98; 6.50, 665). While a tripartite cosmos is suggested by reference to the ‘threefold nature’ of the cosmos, the parts of the cosmos include the earth, sea, and sky but not the underworld (Lucretius, *De rer.* 5.91–93; 6.678 [Rouse]).<sup>186</sup> In *De rer.* 1.230–231; 2.589–591; 5.261, there are deep springs under the earth which are the source of the ocean, though notably absent is the underworld.<sup>187</sup> This is probably related to an instruction issued in *De rer.* 5.146–155 that the thrones of the gods should not be thought to exist in the zones of the world because the nature of the gods was to be immaterial. So when Lucretius does describe what lies beneath the surface of the earth the features are entirely physical in nature. For example, in accounting

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<sup>185</sup> Adams, ‘Greco-Roman’, 12, atomists, such as Leucippus and Democritus, argued the cosmos did not come from an original primal element but consisted of tiny indestructible atoms. There are multiple worlds which may one day collide and be destroyed.

<sup>186</sup> In Lucretius, *De rer.* 5.67–70, the cosmos is comprised of the skies, earth, sea, constellations, sun, and moon.

<sup>187</sup> Where Lucretius does mention Hades (*De rer.* 6.251) and a bottomless pit beneath the earth (*De rer.* 6.605) he is merely referring to popular conceptions of the underworld. Eve Adler, *Vergil’s Empire: Political Thought in the Aeneid* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) 91, sees Virgil in dialogue with Lucretius in the *Aeneid* on the significance of the underworld.

for the phenomenon of earthquakes in *De rer.* 6.535–600, he explains that they are caused by winds passing through the underground region which consists of caverns and streams.<sup>188</sup>

There are many aspects of Lucretius's cosmology which are like the cosmology of Plato and Aristotle; the earth lies at rest at the centre of the cosmos, the sun and moon move at the meeting point of air and aether, and the stars are fixed to rotating firmaments. Celestial movement is not accounted for by Aristotle's complex system of adjacent spheres; rather, Lucretius thinks it is caused either by the movement of winds or by the flow of aether (Lucretius, *De rer.* 5.509–533). The key difference between Lucretius and Plato/Aristotle is that *De rerum natura* presents a demythologised cosmos. That is not to say Lucretius, and the Epicureans more generally, denied the existence of the divine, only that he sought to describe an entirely material cosmos which did not consist of soul, accommodate the divine, or require the divine to account for its movement.

David E. Hahm has suggested that Stoic cosmology was the most influential cosmology among philosophers in the Mediterranean region between the third century BCE and the second century CE.<sup>189</sup> It has already been observed that there is evidence of some influence of Stoic thought on early Christian cosmology. Stoicism also had a significant influence on Roman philosophers and poets from the republican and early imperial periods, including Cicero, Virgil, Manilius, Seneca, Lucan, and Pliny the Elder.<sup>190</sup> Lapidge has observed that cosmology was a principal concern of Stoic philosophy from its inception with the philosophers Zeno and Chrysippus; however, it was not an area of interest to the

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<sup>188</sup> Lucretius makes a point of explaining other cosmic phenomena, which were traditionally attributed to the intervention of gods, in terms of physical phenomena.

<sup>189</sup> David E. Hahm, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1977) xiii.

<sup>190</sup> While, as Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature', 1379–429, points out, none of these Roman writers were thoroughly Stoic in their philosophy and often engaged with other philosophies such as Epicureanism, they disseminated Stoic ideas in Roman society. On Manilius, see Habinek, 'Manilius' Conflicted Stoicism', 32–3.

practically-inclined Romans who focused instead on the ethical dimension of the philosophy.<sup>191</sup> That said, Stoic cosmology was not entirely a ‘dead letter’, as Lapidge himself acknowledges.<sup>192</sup> Seneca is an example of one who lamented the lack of cosmological instruction (Seneca, *Ep.* 117.19–20) and who addressed the concern by producing his own cosmological treatise, *Naturales quaestiones*.<sup>193</sup>

In many ways, Stoic cosmology developed out of the pre-Socratic tradition and was influenced by Platonic-Aristotelian cosmology.<sup>194</sup> For example, it maintained that the cosmos was formed out of an original element, in this case fire, and ultimately consisted of the four elements of fire, water, earth, and air which existed in a tensional relationship to each other. It also adopted the model of planetary spheres surrounding a stationary central earth (Cicero, *Rep.* 6.15; Pliny, *Nat.* 2.63, 176). The cosmos was thought of as a living body with soul, a substance called *pneuma*. However, a distinctive feature of Stoic cosmology was that the cosmos was also identified with the divine such that the philosophy can be considered monist.<sup>195</sup> Stoicism also differed from Plato and Aristotle in supporting the existence of the void, which the Stoics thought to exist outside the cosmos.<sup>196</sup> This belief was important to the Stoic idea of *ekpyrosis*, in which it was maintained that the cosmos would periodically expand into the void and all the elements would return to the primal element of fire resulting in the dissolution of the world. According to some Stoics, following its dissolution the

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<sup>191</sup> Lapidge, ‘Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature’, 1380–1; Michael Lapidge, ‘Stoic Cosmology’, *The Stoics* (ed. J. M. Rist; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) 161–2, 184; and Todd, ‘The Stoics’, 1366.

<sup>192</sup> Lapidge, ‘Stoic Cosmology’, 184; and Lapidge, ‘Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature’, 1381.

<sup>193</sup> Todd, ‘The Stoics’, 1365, provides Posidonius and Cleomedes as two other examples of philosophers of the first two centuries who contributed to Stoic physical theory. Todd, ‘The Stoics’, 1374–5, also notes that Seneca connected his ethics to his cosmological framework.

<sup>194</sup> Hahn, *Origins*, 91.

<sup>195</sup> Stoics could use κόσμος to refer to either God, the order of the world, or both (Diog. Laert. 7.137).

<sup>196</sup> Hahn, *Origins*, 103; and Lapidge, ‘The Stoics’, 175, who notes that there could be no void within the universe itself or else the tension between elements would be broken.



cosmos would be reconstituted in the exact form as it was prior to the conflagration.<sup>197</sup>

Another important Stoic cosmological concept was *sympatheia*, ‘being affected together’.<sup>198</sup>

As a living body, *pneuma* connected the various parts of the cosmos. This belief rationalised astrology by providing a mechanism that connected the movement of astral bodies to earthly events including tides, seasons, and weather but also the events of an individual’s life. It was also the basis of the ethical ideal that an individual should live in harmony with the cosmic order. In fact, the individual, the household, and the city could all be considered microcosms of the cosmic order.<sup>199</sup>

Adams comments on the Stoic association of cosmic and civic order saying, ‘In Stoicism, the ideological ramifications of this linkage were made explicit. Thus, we see the politicizing of cosmology and its use to legitimate the social order and the power structures of the day.’<sup>200</sup> So for example, Seneca in *Clem.* 1.4.1 calls Nero the binding force of the commonwealth, establishing an analogy between the influence of the Roman emperor and *pneuma*. A more elaborate example of Stoic cosmology used to legitimate the social order is the *Astronomica* of Marcus Manilius. In the *Astronomica*, the divinised emperor Augustus is assigned a place in heaven alongside Jupiter in governing the zodiac, which in turn govern the earth (Manilius, *Ast.* 1.799–800).

Despite the observation that Stoic philosophy could be used to legitimate imperial power, the Stoic philosophers were at times distrusted and even construed as threats to the order of the Empire. Ramsay MacMullen states that the philosophers, who were predominantly Stoic, were often opposed to the Roman emperors and that many were exiled

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<sup>197</sup> Collins, ‘Cosmology’, 69, Stoics debated whether *ekpyrosis* would be followed by rebirth or the repetition of all things (*palingenesia*).

<sup>198</sup> Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity*, 121.

<sup>199</sup> Adams, ‘Greco-Roman’, 16–17.

<sup>200</sup> Adams, ‘Greco-Roman’, 18.

or killed under Nero and later Domitian.<sup>201</sup> Criticism of empire-building may be detected in Cicero's Dream of Scipio (*Rep.* 6.9–26). The Dream of Scipio resembles Plato's Myth of Er; Scipio ascends through the planetary spheres and eventually sees the place where the virtuous, who have well-served their state and fellow citizens, exist in the Milky Way, which is an astral equivalent of the Elysian Fields.<sup>202</sup> And on the other hand, the souls of those who indulged in lust and violated the laws of gods and human rulers after death must fly around close to the earth enduring hardship for many ages (Cicero, *Rep.* 6.26). Just as Plato suggested the true perspective of earth could be gained from heaven (*Phaed.* 109E–110A), from heaven Scipio gains perspective on the earth, noting how small it is (Cicero, *Rep.* 6.16–20). The impact of the vision is that he comes to feel ashamed of the Empire and by this Cicero exhorts his audience to esteem the humble pursuit of wisdom above the glory of empire-building.<sup>203</sup> However, Cicero is certainly not opposed to Rome and is not suggesting that it should cease to rule. He only wishes to exalt the pursuit of wisdom and to establish the ideal of a ruler who seeks wisdom above glory in conquest, in other words, a philosopher King. P. A. Brunt offers a balanced position on the relationship of the Stoics to the Empire, suggesting they could be both upholders and opponents of the principate.<sup>204</sup> He adds that there is no evidence that the Stoics condemned any political system, what they disapproved of was the tyrant who abused power.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966) 48–57; see also Boyle, 'Introduction', 45, who cites Cass. Dio 66.13.2; 67.13.3.

<sup>202</sup> Cicero, *Rep.* 6.17–19, counts nine spheres in total which includes the earth itself, seven planetary spheres, and then the firmament in which the stars were affixed. Collins, 'Cosmos and Salvation', 133, explains that Stoicism incorporated the idea of astral immortality wherein the souls of good people returned to the ethereal regions of the cosmos where they contemplate divine reason.

<sup>203</sup> Romm, *Edges of the Earth*, 134–5; and Stewart, 'Space/Spatiality', 143, who suggests that the grandeur of Rome's empire was relativised by seeing the regions of the earth beyond its control.

<sup>204</sup> P. A. Brunt, 'Stoicism and the Principate', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 43 (1975) 7.

<sup>205</sup> Brunt, 'Stoicism', 17.

Marcus Wilson has challenged the view of Brunt, suggesting that the fundamentals of Stoic philosophy set it in opposition to Roman imperialism.<sup>206</sup> He goes on to say that Stoics such as Seneca and Epictetus thought Rome needed to be reformed by Stoic philosophy.<sup>207</sup> Seneca is an important case in point, he could support Nero early in his reign when the emperor promised to be a ruler guided by the wisdom of philosophy.<sup>208</sup> But when Nero's potential for tyranny became apparent, Seneca became a critic of aspects of imperialism. Seneca illustrates the fact that Stoicism involved an ethical framework that created the potential for opposition to political power, though this opposition was at times latent. The ethical opposition of Stoicism was related to, or at least could be expressed in terms of, cosmology. The Dream of Scipio is an example of how contemplation of the cosmos and especially the heavenly realm could be used to elicit a sense of spatial transcendence which relativised values associated with the earthly realm. The same use of cosmology is found in Seneca's *Naturales quaestiones*. In *Nat.* 1.Pref.6–11, Seneca explains that true virtue releases the mind and prepares it for knowledge of the celestial realm and partnership with god.<sup>209</sup> The mind must soar to the heavens after touring the earth and then it is able to rightly view the earth. The heavenly perspective reveals that wealth is of limited value, that the boundaries of the nations are insignificant, and that empire building is like the scurrying of ants.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Marcus Wilson, 'After the Silence: Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal', *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik; Boston: Brill, 2003) 535–7, criticises Brunt for not recognising the counter-ideological nature of Stoicism's ethics which involved indifference to wealth and power.

<sup>207</sup> Wilson, 'After the Silence', 535.

<sup>208</sup> For example, in Seneca, *Clem.* 2.1.4, it is said that the age of Nero was purer and happier than that of Augustus, and in *Clem.* 1.4.1, Nero is described as the binding force of the commonwealth.

<sup>209</sup> On the relationship between Seneca's cosmology and his ethical instruction, see Gareth D. Williams, 'Interactions: Physics, Morality, and Narrative in Seneca Natural Questions I', *CP* 100 (2005) 142–65; and Gareth D. Williams, *The Cosmic Viewpoint: A Study of Seneca's 'Natural Questions'* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>210</sup> See Hine, 'Rome, the Cosmos', 43–5, for discussion of Seneca's use of cosmology to marginalise Rome in the cosmos.

Another aspect of Stoic cosmology that could be used to critique Roman imperialism was the doctrine of *ekpyrosis*. If ultimately the Empire, along with the rest of the cosmos, would be dissolved and reformed, then the importance of the current political order was again relativised. An example of this is Seneca, *Nat.* 3.29.6–9, where a great flood will wipe out the whole world including Rome.<sup>211</sup> In *Bellum civile*, Lucan establishes a parallel between *ekpyrosis* and Roman civil war (Lucan, *B.C.* 1.68–97; 2.289–305; 7.135–138).<sup>212</sup> Lucan's poetry contains extravagant praise of Nero and yet some scholars suggest Lucan is using irony and is in fact criticising the emperor, or at least, that there is intended ambiguity in his poetry.<sup>213</sup> Lapidge observes that the Roman emperor is likened to a destructive cosmic force.<sup>214</sup> And R. Sklenář suggests that Lucan uses the concept of *ekpyrosis* to create a fearful image of ultimate and permanent chaos as a result of the war caused by the emperor's tyranny; however, even in the use of the imagery of cosmic dissolution there is an inherent ambiguity.<sup>215</sup> Likening civil war to *ekpyrosis* portrays it as natural and inevitable, rather than perverse fratricide at a national level. It nonetheless sets a limit to the glory of Rome and denies it the right to claim that it is anything more than one of the empires of the earth that rise only to later fall and be replaced by another.

The teaching of *ekpyrosis* could be construed in opposition to tenets of Roman imperial ideology, for example, the idea of rule without limit on earth – *imperium sine fine* (Virgil, *Aen.* 1.279). Furthermore, as will be set out in the following chapter, Rome's ongoing

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<sup>211</sup> The use of the flood metaphor is unusual since the Stoic idea of *ekpyrosis* involved fire not water. In the preface to the third book of *Quaestiones naturales*, Seneca stated that god builds up some kingdoms and hurls down others so that nothing is left. Hine, 'Rome, the Cosmos', 43–4, notes this is uncharacteristic of Roman writers, who generally supported Virgil's idea of empire without end.

<sup>212</sup> See also the discussion in Lapidge, 'Lucan's Imagery', 359.

<sup>213</sup> For a review and assessment of this dimension of Lucan's poetry, see Michael Dewar, 'Laying It on With a Trowel: The Proem to Lucan and Related Texts', *CQ* 44 (1994) 199–211.

<sup>214</sup> Lapidge, 'Lucan's Imagery', 369, states that Lucan, *B.C.* 7.168–171, suggests that Caesar, like *Erichtho*, is a force that can overturn the natural order by his furore and produce chaos.

<sup>215</sup> R. Sklenář, 'Nihilistic Cosmology and Catonian Ethics in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*', *AJP* 120 (1999) 283–6.

rule on earth was assured by the favour of the gods in heaven as well as the heavenly dwelling of the Roman emperors following apotheosis. If even heaven was to be dissolved in fire then another element of Roman imperial ideology was potentially compromised by the Stoic teaching of *ekpyrosis*. Such an observation has led Habinek to suggest that this potential conflict between Stoic philosophy and Roman imperial ideology lies behind the curious absence of the teaching in the *Astronomica*, which instead concludes with an image of cosmic stability.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Habinek, 'Manilius' Conflicted Stoicism', 42–4; and Lapidge, 'Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature', 1396.

## 6) The Cosmological Dimension of Roman Imperial Ideology

The survey of ancient cosmologies in the previous chapter has provided context for the discussion of cosmology in this and the following chapters. In the present chapter, the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology will be established. In chapter 7, the cosmology of the book of Revelation will be detailed and in chapter 8, the cosmology of Revelation will be explored further in terms of its engagement with Roman imperial ideology, the province of Asia, and rival Christian leaders. The discussion of the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology will be organised thematically and key texts and material artefacts will be used to illustrate each theme. The three themes that emerge when Roman imperial ideology is analysed in terms of cosmology are:

1. Heaven and earth in harmony under Roman *imperium* (section 6.1)
2. Roman rule to the ends of the earth (section 6.2)
3. Roman rule in heaven (section 6.3).

The final section (6.4) provides a perspective on Roman imperial ideology from the province of Asia and shows how cosmology was deployed in the region in the formation of civic identity, focused on the polis, within the context of the Roman cosmos.

### 6.1) Heaven and Earth in Harmony under Roman *Imperium*

In the ancient world, politics and religion were intertwined and so a commonplace legitimisation of political rule was the claim that the political order was the expression of the manifest will of God or the gods. This form of legitimisation may have a cosmological dimension when the locus of the divine will is in the heavenly realm and the foundation of rule on earth brings the realms above and below into alignment. The effect of this form of legitimisation is to suggest that the power and authority of the earthly ruler is insuperable and beneficial to the order of society and the world in general; conversely, opposition to that rule

is characterised as both futile and, because it attempts to upset cosmic harmony, morally base. As Rome emerged as the empire which would supplant the Hellenistic kingdoms and Carthaginian republic in the Mediterranean basin, it acquired the need to formulate an identity that accounted for its new position in the world. One aspect of this identity was its assertion that Roman rule brought about harmony between heaven and earth.

The concept of cosmic alignment between heaven and earth was conveyed in Virgil's epic on the foundation of Rome and its empire – the *Aeneid*.<sup>1</sup> The *Aeneid*, which was written between 29 and 19 BCE, is considered one of the greatest poetic works of the Augustan age.<sup>2</sup> It was not simply a response to the realisation of Roman rule of the *orbis terrarum* but rather played a crucial role in formulating the ideological claim to that rule.<sup>3</sup> The proem to the *Aeneid* sets out the direction and major themes of the work. *Aeneid* 1.1–11 establishes the main plot which involves the circuitous journey of Aeneas from Troy to Latium where he lays a foundation for the city of Rome. It is emphasised that the foundation of Rome occurred only with much hardship, as *Aen.* 1.33 [Rushton Fairclough] says, 'So vast was the effort to found the Roman race.' The hardship came about because while Aeneas was favoured by Jupiter, Juno was opposed to him and brought upon him multifarious obstacles including storms at sea and battles on land in an attempt to keep him from his Jove-appointed destiny.<sup>4</sup> The proem also establishes what Galinsky considers a major theme of the poem, the

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion on cosmology in the *Aeneid*, see Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Galinsky, 'Vergil's Aeneid and Ovid's Metamorphoses as World Literature', *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (ed. Karl Galinsky; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 340.

<sup>3</sup> Galinsky, 'Vergil's Aeneid', 340. Nonetheless, Karl Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 239, contends that the *Aeneid* should not be considered mere political propaganda but an epic poem which ultimately explores human nature and experience. The point is to be acknowledged but it does not follow that the *Aeneid* is therefore devoid of ideological content.

<sup>4</sup> R. Alden Smith, *Virgil* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 108, explains that Juno's opposition to Aeneas was due to offences of the Trojans; she was jealous of Jupiter's affection for the Trojan youth Ganymede and the Trojan Prince Paris had said that Aphrodite was more beautiful than she was.

transition from disorder to order.<sup>5</sup> Both the disorder and chaos that are manifest as Aeneas undertakes his journey and the final order that is achieved in the founding of Rome are truly cosmic in scope. In her vindictive efforts to thwart Jupiter's plan for Aeneas, Juno enlists the support of Aeolus, the king of the winds, to bring a storm on Aeneas and the Trojans at sea. As Hardie observes, the storm is described in cosmological terms to convey its vast scale and to create an image of the entire cosmos in tumult. Neptune is stirred from his realm under the sea by the storm and surfaces to rebuke the winds, which have encroached upon his domain. In *Aen.* 1.133–134, he says, 'Do you now dare, winds, without command of mine, to mingle earth and sky (*caelum*), and raise confusion thus?' Neptune's comment describes the cosmic disorder resulting from Juno's actions, gods are transgressing boundaries resulting in divine conflict and the cosmos itself is put in confusion by the mingling of heaven (*caelum*) and earth. Jupiter speaks of Juno in a similar way in his address to Venus in *Aen.* 1.280, 'Spiteful Juno, who now in her fear troubles sea and earth and sky'. Juno later resorts to unleashing forces of the underworld when she calls forth Allecto to inflict harm upon Aeneas. In *Aen.* 7.310–313, she says, 'But if my powers are not strong enough, surely I need not be slow to seek help wherever it may be; if Heaven (*superos*) I cannot bend, then Hell (*Acheronta*) I will arouse!'<sup>6</sup> In the *Aeneid*, the entire cosmos is affected as Aeneas progresses towards his fate opposed by divine and human forces and even elements of the cosmos itself.

Aeneas's experience of strife on earth is explained by a cosmos in turmoil. It is not simply that there is tension between the gods in heaven and humanity on earth but instead both realms are in conflict within.<sup>7</sup> Conflict on earth is mirrored by the contest of wills in

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<sup>5</sup> Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 246.

<sup>6</sup> Adler, *Virgil's Empire*, 91, notes that the underworld features at several points in the narrative and that in general the realm is represented as a place in which destructive forces are contained but ready to be released upon the earth.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Virgil*, 117, notes that on many occasions in the *Aeneid* human events are explained by the gods' actions.



heaven between Jupiter and Juno, a tension that is not resolved until the will of Jupiter, that Rome become a universal and eternal empire, is realised in precursory form on earth. The peace established when Aeneas finally settled in Latium was not to endure for long, as was foretold first in Jupiter's speech to Venus (*Aen.* 1.254–296), then when Aeneas encounters his dead father Anchises (*Aen.* 6.781–886), and once more with the *ekphrasis* of a shield designed by Vulcan with images representing the future of Rome (*Aen.* 8.626–731). The struggle Aeneas endured to reestablish the Trojan nation in Italy was to be experienced again in the wars of the Republic and the civil wars that followed. Though ultimately, Rome would be established as an empire without limit in space or time and then there would be peace in heaven too with even Juno supporting the Romans (*Aen.* 1.279–282).<sup>8</sup> In the *Aeneid*, Virgil created a foundation myth for imperial Rome which established a typology of peace achieved through struggle and conflict. It was also a foundation myth that expanded the scope of the significance of the Roman Empire by presenting it as the political order that brought cosmic harmony in heaven and on earth.

The concept of cosmic harmony in Roman imperial ideology was also expressed through the periodisation of history with the Augustan age representing the return of the Golden Age (*aurea aetas*). In the Greek tradition, the historical schema goes back to Hesiod's *Works and Days* and involves a narrative of cosmic decline through four stages each of which was identified with a metal; gold, silver, bronze, and iron. The first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* also recounts the decline from the age of gold to iron. Each age was characterised by certain qualities related to human experience of the cosmos, such as the fertility of the earth and its climate and moral behaviour, with humans becoming increasingly

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<sup>8</sup> The peace between Jupiter and Juno is not finally made until *Aen.* 12.791–842, where Juno agrees to cease her opposition to the Trojans and Jupiter concedes that the Latins would not lose their name or language.

bellicose, greedy, and impious as the cosmos progressed through the ages.<sup>9</sup> The Golden Age was the ideal age that had existed in the mythical past when Saturn resided and ruled in Latium. Virgil suggested the Golden Age would arrive with the *Pax Augusta*. In the *Aeneid*, Aeneas and his dead father Anchises are in the underworld and Anchises foretells the future of Rome,

And this in truth is he whom you so often hear promised you, Augustus Caesar, son of a god, who will again establish a golden age in Latium amid fields once ruled by Saturn; he will advance his empire beyond the Garamants and Indians to a land which lies beyond our stars, beyond the path of year and sun, where sky-bearing Atlas wheels on his shoulders the blazing star-studded sphere. (Virgil, *Aen.* 6.791–797)<sup>10</sup>

The depiction of cosmic harmony in the *Aeneid* also appears in other literary works including Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*, which Virgil composed before his epic in about 40 BCE. The *Eclogue* proclaimed the imminent arrival of the Golden Age in which justice would return to earth and a soon-to-be-born leader would emerge from heaven and rule on a renewed, fruitful, and peaceful earth. The language of the fourth *Eclogue* is reminiscent of Jewish and Christian eschatological thought, and the possibility of a relationship between this literature has been extensively discussed.<sup>11</sup> What influenced Virgil is not crucial to the discussion here,

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<sup>9</sup> According to Ovid, *Metam.* 1.89–150, in the Golden Age people were so righteous they had no need of law, there was no war, and the earth produced grain, milk, and honey without labour. In the Silver Age, the weather was less hospitable such that people needed to build shelter. By the Bronze Age people had developed a sterner disposition and were readier to go to war but were not yet impious. Finally, in the Iron Age people were greedy and mined the earth for its resources and there was societal chaos with disloyalty even within families.

<sup>10</sup> Adler, *Vergil's Empire*, 149, maintains that the return of the Golden Age is the most significant prophecy of the first half of the poem.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Golden Age and Sin in Augustan Ideology', *Past and Present* 95 (1982) 21, says that it should be accepted that Virgil encountered Jewish ideas about messianism through Hellenistic texts such as the Sibylline Oracles. Similarly, David Castriota, *The Ara Pacis Augustae and the Imagery of Abundance in Later Greek and Early Roman Imperial Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 130, argues that the concept of the return of the Golden Age, as it appears in Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*, was a Roman adaptation of Hellenistic traditions developed in Alexandria. See also Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 91–2.

what matters is the appearance of the concept of cosmic renewal in association with the Roman Empire. Verses 48–52 of the fourth *Eclogue* are illustrative, ‘O enter upon your high honours—the hour will soon be here—dear offspring of the gods, mighty seed of a Jupiter to be! See how the world bows with its massive dome—earth and expanse of sea and heaven’s depth! See how all things rejoice in the age that is at hand!’ In Virgil’s bucolic, the *Georgics* (29 BCE), a similar hope that Augustus would restore the world is expressed, ‘Gods of my country, Heroes of the land, you, Romulus, and you, mother Vesta, who guard Tuscan Tiber and the Palatine of Rome, at least do not prevent this young prince from succouring a world in ruins!’ (*Georg.* 1.498–501 [Rushton Fairclough]). In the *Georgics*, the ideal of a restored cosmos is expressed in terms of a rural existence in the Italian countryside.<sup>12</sup> In particular, it is the ‘honest hard work’ that agriculture required which Virgil drew attention to as a key component of his version of the Golden Age ideal; that is, not the lazy indulgence of luxury but labour in harmony with nature. Virgil identified a concern with the application of the Golden Age concept that later Latin authors, including Seneca and Juvenal, would develop further; namely, that there could be an inherent tension between the associations of the age with both prosperity and piety because the former compromised the latter.

Horace’s hymn to a new age, the *Carmen saeculare*, was composed to coincide with the Secular Games held by Octavian in 17 BCE and may have been recited at the event. The games formally celebrated the arrival of a new era, something which notionally took place every 103 years. They immediately followed Agrippa’s victory in Spain in 19 BCE and the Parthian settlement, which together suggested that peace had been secured at Rome’s western and eastern periphery.<sup>13</sup> They also followed the introduction of the Augustan legislation on

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<sup>12</sup> Sean M. McDonough, ‘Of Beasts and Bees: The View of the Natural World in Virgil’s *Georgics* and John’s *Apocalypse*’, *NTS* 46 (2000) 237, suggests that the *Georgics* lacks an interest in cosmic renewal though in fact the poem idealises rural existence as a depiction of cosmic renewal.

<sup>13</sup> Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 101.

morality and marriage. Themes of peace and morality appear in the hymn, which takes the form of a petition to the gods Apollo and Diana, calling on them to bring peace, prosperity, moral conduct, and fruitfulness to Rome. It ends with the statement, ‘We carry home the good and certain hope that such is the will of Jupiter and the other gods’ (Horace, *Saec.* 73–74 [Rudd]).

The closing lines of the *Carmen saeculare* draws attention to an important dimension of Golden Age ideology in the Augustan age; that it was thought to be ‘at hand’ or imminent rather than fully manifest. Horace prayed for its arrival in the *Carmen*, Virgil prayed the gods would not prevent Augustus from establishing it in *Georg.* 1.498–501, and in the fourth *Eclogue* its coming through Augustus is foretold. Galinsky has commented on the utopian character of the fourth *Eclogue* and suggested it would have been apparent to its audience that the utopian ideal of nature in harmony was *not* manifest during the Augustan age.<sup>14</sup> In the *Aeneid*, Virgil set in the past a prophecy of the arrival of the Golden Age under Augustus which established the anticipation of its coming but did not amount to the announcement of its arrival. The argument that Roman imperial ideology included the claim to have restored cosmic order needs to be slightly qualified.<sup>15</sup> A nuanced form of the argument recognises that the experience of relative peace and prosperity following Actium as well as the claimed restoration of morality and religious piety under the reforms of Augustus, were taken as signs of cosmic renewal which betokened the arrival of a cosmos in harmony. Such developments were thought to indicate that the Roman Empire, and especially its emperor, were favoured by the gods and the consequent alignment of heaven and earth legitimated Rome’s identity as the ruler of nations and was the foundation of Rome’s ‘certain hope’ that through it the cosmos would be blessed.

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<sup>14</sup> Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 91.

<sup>15</sup> For an example of an unnuanced argument, see Jewett, ‘Corruption and Redemption’, 26–30.

The fact that during the lifetime of Augustus the Golden Age was anticipated rather than believed manifest allowed for the claim that while it may not have eventuated under Augustus a subsequent emperor would bring in the hoped-for age. The concept of the return of the Golden Age was a recurring theme in literature and iconography developed under emperors who were cast as a new Augustus, or even as one who surpassed him.<sup>16</sup> Philo reports a widespread popular sentiment in the early months of Caligula's reign that the Golden Age had now truly arrived. In *Legat.* 13 [Colson] he writes, 'Indeed, the life under Saturn, pictured by the poets, no longer appeared to be a fabled story, so great was the prosperity and well-being, the freedom from grief and fear, the joy which pervaded households and people, night and day, and lasted continuously without a break through the first seven months.' Philo has no doubt exaggerated the extent of the feeling for rhetorical purposes; however, he provides evidence that at the time he wrote the *Legatio*, under Claudius, the Golden Age concept could be used to describe an emperor's achievements. It also provides further evidence of the flexibility of the concept of the Golden Age under Augustus.

In the early years of Nero's reign, several writers claimed that the emperor had, or would, establish the Golden Age. In his treatise *De Clementia*, after recalling an instance of Nero's mercy in a judicial matter, Seneca declared that the Golden Age had been renewed bringing 'happiness and purity' (Seneca, *Clem.* 2.1.4 [Basore]). In Seneca's satire the *Apocolocyntosis*, in which he ridicules the deification of the recently deceased emperor Claudius, he relates Nero's reign to the Golden Age. In *Apoc.* 4, the Fates weave with wool that turns to gold and Phoebus announces that Nero will bring an age of prosperity to the world. The *Einsiedeln eclogues*, from the early years of Nero's reign, stated that even

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<sup>16</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 'Golden Age', 22. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 100, notes that Corippus in the sixth century made such a claim for the ruling emperor.

blockish cattle recognised the Golden Age had returned, which is described as such, ‘Now doth earth untilld yield fresh produce from the rich soil, now are the wild waves no longer angry with the unmenaced ship: tigers gnaw their curbs, lions endure the cruel yoke: be gracious, chaste Lucina: thine own Apollo now is King’ (*Ein.* 2.35–38 [Duff and Duff]). The eclogue describes a cosmos at peace under Nero, who is likened to Apollo. During the same period, Calpurnius Siculus wrote in *Ecl.* 1.42 [Duff and Duff], ‘Amid untroubled peace, the Golden Age springs to a second birth’. Moving forward to the Flavian period and the time of Revelation’s composition, the poet Statius lauded the emperor Domitian in his panegyric (89–96 CE) declaring that Domitian had not only renewed the Golden Age, he had surpassed it, ‘Antiquity, compare now if you will the ages of ancient Jove and the golden time: not so freely did wine flow then, not thus would harvest forestall the tardy year’ (Statius, *Silv.* 1.6.39–42 [Mozley]).<sup>17</sup> By the time of Domitian, the image of a restored cosmos under Roman rule had become a common topos in panegyric of the emperor.

The concepts of alignment between heaven and earth and cosmic harmony were also expressed in a range of material artefacts including sculpture, monumental reliefs, gems, and coins. The best illustration of such iconography is found on the cuirass of the Prima Porta statue of Augustus (Fig. 1). The statue has commonly been interpreted as a celebration of the return of the Roman standards through a successful act of diplomacy in 20 BCE, with a representation at the centre of the cuirass of the Parthians submitting to the Roman legions.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See also Statius, *Silv.* 4.3.147–152, for the claim that Domitian had accomplished empire on a scale foretold in the *Aeneid*.

<sup>18</sup> Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 24; Diana E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 67; Price, *Rituals and Power*, 186; Jane C. Reeder, ‘The Statue of Augustus from Prima Porta, the Underground Complex, and the Omen of the Gallina Alba’, *AJP* 118 (1997) 109; and Zanker, *Power of Images*, 189. More recently, this has been challenged by Bridget A. Buxton, ‘A New Reading of the Prima Porta Augustus: The Return of the Eagle of Legio V Alaudae’, *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XVI* (ed. Carl Deroux; Brussels: Éditions Latomus, 2012) 277–306, who argues that the event that best accords with the iconography is the return from Germany of the eagle of the fifth Alaudae legion.

Either side of the central figures are two weeping women representing subjugated peoples, possibly Gaul and Spain. Above, the sky/heaven god, Caelus, holds up the canopy of the heavens and this figure is balanced by Tellus below. Tellus holds the cornucopia, a symbol of earthly abundance and fruitfulness. The cornucopia appeared on numerous material artefacts in the Roman imperial period including statues and gems as well as coins issued by both Roman imperial and provincial mints.<sup>19</sup> On the Prima Porta cuirass, Roman rule is represented as a manifestation of perfect cosmic order encompassing heaven and earth.

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<sup>19</sup> J. Rufus Fears, 'The Theology of Victory at Rome: Approaches and Problems', *ANRW* 17:109–10, the cornucopia was a sign of the Golden Age, and Jewett, 'Corruption and Redemption', 30, says it was a symbol of cosmic renewal. Examples of artefacts featuring the cornucopia include the statue of Augustus or Gaius from Cherchel, the *Gemma Augustea*, and the reliefs of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. Cornucopia appeared on coins issued under Augustus but also other Julio-Claudians. Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, 61–3, notes that cornucopia with Pax occurred frequently on coins issued by Vespasian in the years following the Judean War. See also, Harold Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum – Volume 2: Vespasian to Domitian* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1923) xlv. Examples of coins with the cornucopia issued in Asia are discussed in Kreitzer, *Striking New Images*, 106–7, for example, on a coin issued in Ephesus under Claudius, the reverse shows the temple of Roma and Augustus and standing in front is Claudius crowned by a female figure, possibly a personification of Asia, holding the cornucopia (RIC I 131 #120). And Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: Brill, 1993) 7–14, describes a silver cistophoric tetradrachma from Asia (BMCRE I 196 #228) which depicts the temple of Roma and Augustus at Pergamum and shows Roma holding the cornucopia.



Figure 1. Prima Porta statue of Augustus and cuirass detail. Photo: Till Niermann / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 3.0

The Prima Porta statue was hugely influential and while most did not imitate the cosmological depictions of the cuirass there are such examples, including a statue of either Gaius Caesar or Augustus from Iol Caesarea in Mauretania.<sup>20</sup> The cuirass shows Mars Ultor above with the cosmic mantle of the heavens, Amor to the left, Venus and Divus Iulius holding Victory in the centre, and Victory with wreath (*corona civica*) to the right. Below, tritons of Land and Sea hold cornucopia and *akrostolion*.<sup>21</sup> Later still is a statue of Vespasian

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<sup>20</sup> Klaus Fittschen, 'Zur Panzerstatue in Cherchel', *JDAI* 91 (1976) 176, 202, 208, notes identifications of the figure represented by the statue include: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Hadrian. He concludes it is of Augustus and that it was produced approximately 20–30 years after the Prima Porta. Klaus Stemmer, *Untersuchungen zur Typologie, Chronologie, und Ikonographie der Panzerstatuen* (Berlin: Mann, 1978) 11–12, thinks it is a Claudian copy of an Augustan statue. Zanker, *Power of Images*, 224, thinks it is a posthumous statue of Gaius Caesar. Cornelius C. Vermeule, *Roman Imperial Art in Greece and Asia Minor* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968) 173, states most portraits of Augustus east of Italy were the Prima Porta type.

<sup>21</sup> Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 29–30, suggests the sculpture praises the victory of Augustus in the battle of Actium which secured peace on land and sea. Fittschen, 'Zur Panzerstatue', 203, comments that the symbolism of the statue involves a combination of mythological and militaristic justification of rule that was characteristic of Augustan ideology.



or Titus Caesar from the theatre of Salamis in Cyprus.<sup>22</sup> The cuirass has Caelus above Virtue with female figures to each side which may be priestesses or possibly astral deities representing the evening and morning star.<sup>23</sup> Underneath, Tellus and Okeanos recline. The statue probably honours the emperor as a victorious general following the capture of Jerusalem.<sup>24</sup> Klaus Stemmer comments on the meaning of the cuirass more generally, suggesting it expresses the idea that the Roman Empire encompasses the *orbis terrarum* through the virtue of the emperor.<sup>25</sup> These statues show that in various regions of the Roman Empire in the first century the emperor's military achievements and personal piety were portrayed in terms of cosmic order and alignment between heaven and earth.

The development of the monumental architecture of the Campus Martius under Augustus was a statement on a grand scale of the ideology that heaven and earth were in harmony under Roman rule.<sup>26</sup> Edmund Buchner published a pair of influential articles on the Campus Martius in which he proposed a symbolic significance for the arrangement of the three key structures of the northern Campus Martius; the *Horologium Augusti*, the mausoleum of Augustus, and the *Ara Pacis*.<sup>27</sup> According to Buchner, the obelisk of the sundial was coordinated to the mausoleum by its base which faced the building. He also

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<sup>22</sup> Stemmer, *Untersuchungen*, 34–5, 158, Tafel 19, III 7.

<sup>23</sup> Vassos Karageorghis, 'Chronique des fouilles et découvertes archéologiques à Chypre en 1961', *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 86 (1962) 402; and Vermeule, *Roman Imperial Art*, 230, identify the female figures as priestesses. Stemmer, *Untersuchungen*, 158, argues against the view that they are Pax and Concordia in favour of astral deities representing the evening and morning star.

<sup>24</sup> Karageorghis, 'Chronique des fouilles', 400–2.

<sup>25</sup> Stemmer, *Untersuchungen*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> The Campus Martius can be considered an example of 'arguments in stone', a borrowed expression used in Laura Nasrallah, 'Empire and Apocalypse in Thessaloniki: Interpreting the Early Christian Rotunda', *JECS* 13 (2005) 470 n. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Edmund Buchner, 'Solarium Augusti und Ara Pacis', *MDAI* 83 (1976), 319–65; Edmund Buchner, 'Horologium Solarium Augusti: Vorbericht über die Ausgrabungen 1979/80', *MDAI* 87 (1980) 355–73; which were published together in Edmund Buchner, *Die Sonnenuhr des Augustus: Nachdruck aus RM 1976 und 1980 und Nachtrag über die Ausgrabung 1980/1981* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1982).

contended that it was coordinated to the *Ara Pacis* and claimed that on the birthday of Augustus the shadow cast by the obelisk fell upon the entrance to the altar.<sup>28</sup> It was suggested that the symbolic significance of this alignment of the monuments was the association of Augustus's life and death with the foundation of the *Pax Romana*.<sup>29</sup> Buchner's hypothesis and methodology were convincingly critiqued by physicist Michael Schütz.<sup>30</sup> Schütz demonstrated that Buchner's calculations of the position and height of the obelisk were incorrect by several metres, though more significantly, he explained that shadows become more diffuse as they extend away from their originating point, the implication being that the shadow could not clearly point towards the *Ara Pacis* due to the distance between the obelisk and the altar. Schütz proposed that the *Horologium Augusti* was not a sundial that measured the progress of the sun through the day but a solar meridian that measured the passage of the sun through the signs of the zodiac throughout the year.

Peter Heslin was entirely persuaded by Schütz's argument and dismissed later attempts to adjust Buchner's hypothesis to account for Schütz's objections.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, he maintained that the three monuments of the Campus Martius were coordinated in a symbolically significant manner. Heslin noted that the base of the obelisk was not aligned with the meridian line, as might be expected, but instead with the Via Flaminia, which ran parallel to the line between the obelisk and the mausoleum.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, a perpendicular line from the Via Flaminia would pass directly through the *Ara Pacis* and the obelisk.<sup>33</sup> This spatial arrangement, together with the construction of the horologium and *Ara Pacis* in close

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<sup>28</sup> Buchner, *Sonnenuhr*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos*, 83, states that if Buchner's hypothesis is correct then the point of the arrangement of the monuments was that Augustus had been born to establish the new age of peace.

<sup>30</sup> M. Schütz, 'Zur Sonnenuhr des Augustus auf dem Marsfeld', *Gymnasium* 97 (1990) 432–57. Some scholars continue to relay Buchner's theory, for example, Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 99.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Heslin, 'Augustus, Domitian and the So-Called Horologium Augusti', *JRS* 97 (2007) 1–20.

<sup>32</sup> Heslin, 'Augustus, Domitian', 14.

<sup>33</sup> Heslin, 'Augustus, Domitian', 15.

temporal proximity, meant that it was natural to associate the monuments and consider their significance as a united complex. Heslin related the symbolic significance of the monuments of the Campus Martius to elements of Augustan ideology. He noted that the function of the horologium was to align the civic calendar and the solar year.<sup>34</sup> From the point at which Augustus was made Pontifex Maximus in 12 BCE, he was responsible for the Roman calendar and the horologium was a massive testimony to the emperor's piety in that role.<sup>35</sup> The horologium also symbolised that Roman society, in both its civic and religious dimensions, was properly aligned with the heavenly realm. The association of the *Horologium Augusti*, *Ara Pacis*, and Mausoleum of Augustus symbolically connected the ideas of cosmic harmony with the *Pax Augusta*.<sup>36</sup> Rehak adopted a sociology of religion approach in his study of the Campus Martius complex and proposed that the monumental architecture also contributed to the concept of Rome as a cosmological centre.<sup>37</sup> The horologium in particular may contribute to such a conception as it symbolised the point on earth at which the alignment of heaven and earth was determined.

Another significant aspect of Heslin's article is his discussion of an archaeological discovery related to the horologium that dates to the time of Domitian. In excavations aimed to uncover the meridian of the horologium, a meridian was found at a level one and half metres higher than expected for the time of Augustus, which was subsequently dated to the Domitianic period. In Pliny the Elder's description of the horologium, he commented that at the time of writing, around 77–78 CE, there was a misalignment of the horologium for which

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<sup>34</sup> Heslin, 'Augustus, Domitian', 5.

<sup>35</sup> Heslin, 'Augustus, Domitian', 5–6, 78–80, notes that the obelisk was erected in 10 BCE, and in 9 BCE the calendar of Julius Caesar was declared in error and adjustments made. This suggested Augustus's superiority to his predecessor. Rehak also argued that by reforming the calendar Augustus associated himself with the founder of Rome, Romulus, and the second King Numa.

<sup>36</sup> Heslin, 'Augustus, Domitian', 6. Similarly, Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos*, 95, states that the *Horologium Augusti* symbolised the restoration of cosmic order under Augustus.

<sup>37</sup> Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos*, 90, 143–5.

Pliny offers a range of possible explanations.<sup>38</sup> It seems that Domitian corrected the horologium by establishing a new meridian line.<sup>39</sup> This meridian line was the one excavated and it was found to involve markings of the twelve signs of the zodiac at intervals, as well as 360 smaller markings of the number of degrees of the zodiac. Heslin suggests that Domitian's reconstruction of the meridian supported the ideology that the Flavian house had restored what was valuable in the Julio-Claudian house but also that under Domitian the cosmos was again in harmony.<sup>40</sup>

The reliefs of the *Ara Pacis* are a prime example of the representation of the cosmological elements of Roman imperial ideology in the Augustan age.<sup>41</sup> The reliefs were highly influential and derivative forms have been identified in various locations of the Roman Empire, including an altar at Carthage and the *Ara Pietatis*, which was located in Rome and was completed under Claudius in 43 CE.<sup>42</sup> The extensive and wide ranging

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<sup>38</sup> Pliny, *Nat.* 36.72–73, the reasons included a change in the movement of the sun, a change in the alignment of the earth, and the local displacement of the obelisk due to earth tremors or subsidence.

<sup>39</sup> Heslin, 'Augustus, Domitian', 8.

<sup>40</sup> Heslin, 'Augustus, Domitian', 20.

<sup>41</sup> Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid*, 379. Castriota, *Ara Pacis*, 3, states that the *Ara Pacis* embodied the ideology of the Roman state and Diana E. E. Kleiner and Bridget Buxton, 'Pledges of Empire: The Ara Pacis and the Donations of Rome', *AJA* 112 (2008) 57, that 'The *Ara Pacis* is the most important programmatic statement of the middle years of the Augustan principate'.

<sup>42</sup> Beard *et al.*, *Religions of Rome: Volume I*, 331–5; and Diana E. E. Kleiner, 'The Great Friezes of the Ara Pacis Augustae: Greek Sources, Roman Derivatives, and Augustan Social Policy', *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Antiquité T.* 90 (1978) 767–72, the *Ara Pietatis* was commissioned by Tiberius in 22 CE and completed by Claudius in 43 CE. Kleiner notes that the reliefs of the *Ara Pacis* influenced not only the art of the aristocracy but also the middle-class Romans who imitated its designs on tombs in Rome. On the influence of the *Ara Pacis*, see also Vermeule, *Roman Imperial Art*, 32–3; Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 142–4; Barbette Stanley Spaeth, 'The Goddess Ceres on the Ara Pacis Augustae and the Carthage Relief', *AJA* 98 (1994) 95; and Orietta Rossini, *Ara Pacis* (Milano: Electa, 2007) 100–2. Inez Scott Ryberg, 'Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 22 (1955) 89–90, the *Ara Pacis* was also influential on an altar at Carthage, which has been dated from the Augustan to the Hadrianic age. Kreitzer, *Striking New Images*, 120–1, comments on the occurrence of the *Ara Pacis* on Roman coinage including sesteria and asses

influence of the *Ara Pacis* means that it potentially impacted individuals outside of Augustan Rome, albeit indirectly.<sup>43</sup> The altar was dedicated in 9 BCE and consisted of an altar surrounded by an enclosing wall. Both sides of the wall are decorated by friezes as is the altar itself. The Tellus relief (Fig. 2), on which the discussion will focus, is especially important to the examination of the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology, though it will also be considered in the context of the iconography of the *Ara Pacis* as a whole.

A viewer approaching the *Ara Pacis* from the east travelling along the Via Flaminia would encounter two reliefs facing them, to their left, a relief of Roma, to their right, the Tellus relief. To name the latter as such is traditional and potentially misleading as there have been various identifications of the key figure in the relief. Apart from Tellus, identifications include Italia, Cybele, Venus Genetrix, Pax Augusta, and Ceres.<sup>44</sup> Paul Zanker suggested that the imagery is eclectic, incorporating characteristics of various mythological figures and several scholars adopt this position and consider the central figure of the relief to be polysemantic.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, even those scholars who consider the referent to be primarily a figure other than Tellus still recognise that the earth is evoked in some way. For example, Barbetta Stanley Spaeth identifies the woman as Ceres but notes that the deity was associated with the earth, only less directly than is the case with Tellus.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the imagery surrounding the central figure creates a scene of earthly peace and fecundity. The Tellus

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under Nero from the mint at Rome which have the *Ara Pacis* on the reverse (RIC I 176 #418) and under Domitian an as from 86 CE (RIC II 196 #336).

<sup>43</sup> Contra Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 16.

<sup>44</sup> Stanley Spaeth, 'Goddess Ceres', 66–8, surveys the various interpretations of the 'Tellus' figure and notes that the identification of Tellus goes back to Cardinal Giovanni Ricci da Montepulciano in 1569, and recently Moretti, Momigliano, Ryberg, Hölsche; Italia – van Buren, Toynbee, Simon, Pollini, Hannestad; Venus – Benndorf, Kalkmann, Booth, Galinsky, Thornton; and Pax – Gardthausen, and Zanker.

<sup>45</sup> Zanker, *Power of Images*, 176–81. Karl Galinsky, 'Venus, Polysemy, and the Ara Pacis Augustae', *AJA* 96 (1992) 457–75, has argued the imagery is polysemous but primarily evokes Venus. Rossini, *Ara Pacis*, 36, also considers it polysemous and suggests that features of Augustus's wife Livia and daughter Julia are also present.

<sup>46</sup> Stanley Spaeth, 'Goddess Ceres', 71.

figure nurses two infants, and livestock and crops are beneath her. To the left and right are figures usually identified as winds due to the billowing drapes overhead, these represent the beneficial winds of land and sea.<sup>47</sup> The combined effect of the imagery of the Tellus relief is a depiction of the earthly realm in a state of harmony leading to fruitfulness. It has often been observed that the scene evokes the concept of the Golden Age, which was also a theme of the Augustan poets as has been discussed.<sup>48</sup>



Figure 2. The Tellus relief of the *Ara Pacis Augustae*. Source: Photo by Chris Nas / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 1.0

<sup>47</sup> Rossini, *Ara Pacis*, 36, 46. An alternative view is that of Stanley Spaeth, 'Goddess Ceres', 82, to the left and right are a *Naiad* and a *Nereid*, which symbolise the control of Ceres over both fresh and salt water.

<sup>48</sup> Zanker, *Power of Images*, 172–4, states that the Tellus relief is the earliest and most elaborate example of Golden Age iconography. See also, Arnaldo Momigliano, 'The Peace of the Ara Pacis', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942) 229; and Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 92. Stanley Spaeth, 'Goddess Ceres', 87, notes that Ceres was associated with the Golden Age. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 154, comments that Virgil and Horace read like a commentary on the *Ara Pacis*. It has been suggested that the design of the relief was directly influenced by poetic works such as Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* and Horace's *Carmen saeculare*, though not all scholars are convinced, for example, Momigliano, 'Ara Pacis', 228–31.

The Tellus relief is properly interpreted in the context of the imagery of the *Ara Pacis* as a whole, and especially the relief showing Roma adjacent to it. The Roma relief has the goddess seated upon a pile of armour, the spoils of war. The Tellus and Roma reliefs presented the viewer with images side by side of the Golden Age and Roman victory, suggesting the former had been established with the latter, that is, the *Pax Augusta* required victory in war.<sup>49</sup> Also contributing to the theme of the Golden Age were the vegetal friezes which were found throughout the structure, along with various other symbolic plants found on the *Ara Pacis*.<sup>50</sup> This imagery was not simply for decoration but symbolised the restoration of the earth in the Golden Age. Rossini describes the effect of these friezes as a hymn to the cosmic necessity of Augustus with nature rejoicing in his presence.<sup>51</sup> Along the southern side of the outer enclosure is a relief showing a procession, which was possibly a representation of a rite associated with the inauguration of the altar itself or of a ceremony associated with the return of Augustus from Gaul and Spain.<sup>52</sup> Standing in the procession is Augustus represented as the *princeps*, the first among equals. Also in the procession are two young boys wearing Gallic or Trojan tunics, one on the northern and one on the southern frieze. An earlier view that the boys were Gaius and Lucius Caesar persists, though most scholars now think that they represent barbarians.<sup>53</sup> In an article by Kleiner and Buxton, it was argued that they were not generic barbarians but highly prized pledges (*pignora*) which were part of Augustus's plan for hegemony over the world and represented his dominion over

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<sup>49</sup> Zanker, *Power of Images*, 176–8, says the Tellus relief depicts nature as a paradise blessed by Roman peace. See also Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 149; and Rossini, *Ara Pacis*, 24, 46.

<sup>50</sup> Castriota, *Ara Pacis*, 5–8, 133–4, for example, laurel signified Apollo who in mythology had a role in restoring the Golden Age. See also Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 92.

<sup>51</sup> Rossini, *Ara Pacis*, 88.

<sup>52</sup> Rossini, *Ara Pacis*, 54. On the northern side of the outer enclosure is a procession of senators.

<sup>53</sup> Rossini, *Ara Pacis*, 55, states the boys are Lucius and Gaius. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 92–9, thinks that they are the two princes who have taken part in the Trojan Games, though it seems her position shifted to the view that they were barbarians in, Kleiner and Buxton, 'Pledges of Empire', 57–89. For the case that the boys are barbarians, see Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 101–5.

the *orbis terrarum*.<sup>54</sup> In summary, the imagery of the *Ara Pacis* is an example of the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology. It expressed the idea that the earth had been restored to a state of fertility, prosperity, and harmony under the *Pax Augusta*.

To close this section, the Capricorn coin type will be discussed. Capricorn was identified as Augustus's birth sign and one of its significations, especially when paired with the globe, was harmony between heaven and earth under Roman rule.<sup>55</sup> The coin type demonstrates the continuation of cosmological themes in expressions of Roman imperial ideology through to at least the end of the first century as well as the dispersion of material artefacts expressing such ideas through the provinces of the empire, including Roman Asia. The relationship between images on coins and Roman ideology has been debated in the scholarship. Barbara Levick challenged the notion that the images on coins constituted 'propaganda' issued by the emperor with the intent of persuading the public of the legitimacy of his government.<sup>56</sup> This is because she argues that there was no systematic issuing of coin

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<sup>54</sup> Kleiner and Buxton, 'Pledges of Empire', 59, 83–5, who also propose that the two foreign children represent the East and West. Kleiner and Buxton, 'Pledges of Empire', 61, on the system of adopting *pignora*, state, 'Augustus' hosting of numerous foreign children as guests or hostages in his household reinforced Rome's cosmocratic claims.' Also contributing to this theme on the *Ara Pacis* was the representation of personifications of various *ethne* of the empire on the altar itself. I. M. Ferris, *Enemies of Rome: Barbarians through Roman Eyes* (Great Britain: Sutton, 2000) 30–1, comments that this was a celebration of Roman power and victory rather than diversity.

<sup>55</sup> On the complex relationship between Augustus and the sign of Capricorn, see Konrad Kraft, 'Zum Capricorn auf den Münzen des Augustus', *JNG* 17 (1967) 17–18; and Barton, 'Augustus and Capricorn', 33–51. See also Suetonius, *Aug.* 94.12 and Dio, 56.25.5.

<sup>56</sup> Barbara Levick, 'Propaganda and the Imperial Coinage', *Antichthon* 16 (1982) 104. Similarly, M. H. Crawford, 'Roman Imperial Coin Types and the Formation of Public Opinion', *Studies in Numismatic Method Presented to P. Grierson* (ed. B. H. I. H. Stewart, C. N. L. Brooke, J. G. Pollard, and T. R. Volk; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 47, 53–4, 59, questions why the emperor or his close officials would waste time selecting coin types that almost no-one took any notice of. In addition, Crawford contends that when people did take notice of the images it was the heads or portrait that mattered, citing as examples Matt 22.19–21, Mark 12.16, and Luke 20.24.



types controlled by the emperor to achieve such an outcome.<sup>57</sup> Rather, coin types were usually selected by the moneyers to flatter the emperor by portraying images affirming his self-image.<sup>58</sup> Levick's position has been convincingly refuted by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill who argued that images on coins would be perceived as expressions of the ideology of the emperor emanating from Rome by residents of provincial cities even though they may have been designed locally.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, he pointed out that they had a persuasive effect on the public even if the emperor was the primary intended audience.<sup>60</sup> In conclusion, images on coins are a valuable source of evidence of the conceptions of imperial ideology in Rome and the provinces.

Octavian/Augustus used the Capricorn on coins from as early as 41 BCE and Asian tetradrachmas from 27–20 BCE, showing Capricorn with cornucopia and the globe between its feet provides evidence of early provincial use of the image.<sup>61</sup> The Capricorn type continued to appear for more than a century after Augustus's death on coins issued under subsequent emperors and occurred frequently during the Flavian period.<sup>62</sup> It occurred with the globe positioned either underneath or between its paws. Such images draw on the belief

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<sup>57</sup> Levick, 'Propaganda', 106.

<sup>58</sup> Levick, 'Propaganda', 107–8.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, 'Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus', *JRS* 76 (1986) 68.

<sup>60</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 'Image and Authority', 68. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 41, largely follows Levick and opposes the use of the term 'propaganda' but he nonetheless concedes that coins had 'declarative, topical intent'. Lyn Kidson, 'Minting in Ephesus: Economics and Self-promotion in the Early Imperial Period', *JNAA* 23 (2013) 32, is persuaded by Wallace-Hadrill and concludes that the term 'propaganda' is justified in relation to coinage of the early imperial period.

<sup>61</sup> Eugene J. Dwyer, 'Augustus and the Capricorn', *MDAI* 80 (1973) 62.

<sup>62</sup> For a history of the use of Capricorn, see Dwyer, 'Augustus and the Capricorn', 59–67. The Capricorn also featured on gems including the Actium Victory Cameo and the *Gemma Augustea*, and on a painting from the Flavian period in a room of the planisphere off a portico in Stabiae, see Tamsyn Barton, 'Augustus and Capricorn: Astrological Polyvalency and Imperial Rhetoric', *JRS* 85 (1995) 50.

that events on earth are controlled by the stars and the signs of the zodiac.<sup>63</sup> The Capricorn with globe conveys the idea that this heavenly influence on earth is manifest in the rule of Augustus and Rome.<sup>64</sup>



Figure 3. Augustus with Capricorn holding globe between feet, denarius, Lugdunum mint, 12 BCE, RIC I 53 #174. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum / CC BY-SA-NC 4.0



Figure 4. Laureate head of Titus and Capricorn with globe below, denarius, Rome mint, struck 79 CE, RIC II 118 #19. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum / CC BY-SA-NC 4.0

It has been established that one cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology was the representation of a cosmos in harmony under Roman rule. The alignment between heaven

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<sup>63</sup> For example, Seneca, *Marc.* 18.3, ‘You will see the five planets pursuing their different courses and striving to stem the headlong whirl of heaven; on even the slightest motions of these hang the fortunes of nations, and the greatest and smallest happenings are shaped to accord with the progress of a kindly or unkindly star.’

<sup>64</sup> Richard Oster, ‘Numismatic Windows into the Social World of Early Christianity: A Methodological Inquiry’, *JBL* 101 (1982) 206–8. Bernard Weissner, ‘Der Capricornus des Augustus in Pergamon’, *Proceedings of XIII Congreso Internacional de Numismática, Madrid, 2003* (ed. Carmen Alfaro Asins, Carmen Marcos, and Paloma Otero; Madrid: Ministerio de cultura, Subdirección general de museos estatales, 2005) 969, argued that Augustus used the image of the Capricorn in his active promotion of the ruler cult in the province of Asia. In association with other emperors, Capricorn suggested that the emperor was a new Augustus who would restore the peace of the Augustan age.

and earth was based upon the divine approval of Rome's government on earth. This alignment and harmony led to cosmic renewal as the earth flourished under the *Pax Romana* – a Golden Age had returned through Roman victory. The above–below cosmological framework served to represent a stable and beatific cosmos. Helmut Koester, drawing on a theological term, posited that the ideology of the Augustan era constituted a 'realized eschatology'.<sup>65</sup> Though the exact phrase is not used, Steven Friesen expressed similar ideas in his discussion of the Roman imperial cults, stating that in Roman eschatology there was no end to come because Rome was the new and eternal age, it was utopia realised.<sup>66</sup> However, it may be that a better theological concept to apply to Roman imperial ideology would be inaugurated eschatology because there was a sense of the ideal having been attained 'now, but not yet'. Poets such as Virgil declared that under Augustus the Golden Age *would* return, not that it had. In other words, that reality remained a utopia.<sup>67</sup> Yet at the same time, under Augustus that age had come near and his military victories and social, political, and religious reforms had established the preconditions that would usher in the age. This positive view of the cosmos relied upon the idea of harmony between heaven and earth which provided assurance of the imminent restoration of the cosmos.

The fact that during the Augustan age there remained a sense of expectation regarding the cosmos and history explains how under subsequent emperors, including Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, it could be claimed that the Golden Age had only then arrived. Though late in Nero's reign, Seneca reached the point where he expected the age to arrive only after a great cosmic cataclysm (Seneca, *Oct.* 391–399; *Nat.* 3.28.7–30.8).<sup>68</sup> The anticipation of the arrival

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<sup>65</sup> Helmut Koester, 'The Memory of Jesus' Death and the Worship of the Risen Lord', *HTR* 91 (1998) 341.

<sup>66</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 130–1.

<sup>67</sup> Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 90–3, notes this important distinction.

<sup>68</sup> On the Octavia and the return of the Golden Age, see Joseph A. Smith, 'Flavian Drama: Looking Back with Octavia', *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik; Boston: Brill, 2003) 409–10,

of the ideal also inadvertently provided a basis by which the current order of the cosmos could be questioned. From the Augustan period itself, the Golden Age was employed as a motif not only to praise the accomplishments of Rome, but also to critique it. Ovid frequently referred to the Golden Age but usually sarcastically, for example, it was golden because of people's great love of gold (Ovid, *Ars* 2.277–278).<sup>69</sup> Later under Nero, Seneca's *Naturales quaestiones* ended in the first book on a pessimistic note, describing the loss of the Golden Age in Roman society due to its debased morality (Seneca, *Nat.* 1.17.4–10).<sup>70</sup> Later still under Domitian, Juvenal lamented that the prosperity of the Golden Age had led to the decline of the Roman people and produced a time worse than the age of Iron (Juvenal, *Sat.* 13.28–29).<sup>71</sup> While cosmology was a vehicle for the expression of Roman imperial ideology, it also presented an avenue by which that ideology could be critiqued. The examples just outlined illustrate that such criticism came from within Roman society. The discussion in chapter 8 of the present thesis will show how cosmology was deployed by John of Patmos to contest elements of Roman imperial ideology.

## 6.2) Roman Rule to the Ends of the Earth

In the previous section it was shown that an above–below cosmological framework was used to convey the idea of cosmic harmony under Roman rule. In this section, it will be demonstrated that a centre–periphery framework also operated wherein Rome occupied the centre and ruled to the ends of the earth. Nicolet has observed that claims to Rome's

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who does not consider Seneca the author and dates it to the Flavian period. In that setting, the great cataclysm may symbolise the chaos of the wars following Nero's death and the better age that followed the Flavian period.

<sup>69</sup> See also Wallace-Hadrill, 'Golden Age', 27.

<sup>70</sup> See also Williams, 'Interactions', 163; and in Seneca, *Ep.* 115.1–18, an obsession with wealth is described as a perversion of the concept of the Golden Age.

<sup>71</sup> The book of Revelation criticises Rome for its obsession with wealth (Rev 17–18).

universal rule were made two centuries before Augustus, though to maintain a consistent approach we will again begin in the imperial period with Virgil's *Aeneid* and then consider other literature and material artefacts.<sup>72</sup>

In *Aen.* 6.791–797, it is foretold that Rome's empire would extend 'beyond the Garamants and Indians to a land which lies beyond our stars, beyond the path of year and sun, where sky-bearing Atlas wheels on his shoulders the blazing star-studded sphere'.<sup>73</sup> Romm notes that since Servius, the land beyond the path of the sun and stars has been taken to mean 'below the Tropics', that is, in the south.<sup>74</sup> He adds that the reference to Atlas suggests the far West and the Indians and Garamants the East such that the empire stretches to the far east, south, and west, or in basic terms, 'beyond the known world'.<sup>75</sup> The notion that Rome ruled to the ends of the earth was represented in numerous other texts and images. Statius lauded Domitian as 'sovereign of the lands, great parent of a world subdued' (*regnator terrarum orbisque subacti magne parens*) and suggested that he would be the one to fulfil what was spoken of Augustus in the *Aeneid* (Statius, *Silv.* 4.2.14–15). Statius writes, 'Already the snowy north has sworn you fealty; now the east shall give you great triumphs. You shall go where Hercules and Euhemerus wandered, beyond stars and flaming sun and Nile's fount and Atlas' snows' (Statius, *Silv.* 4.3.153–157).<sup>76</sup> A common expression used to speak of the universal dominion of Rome, or a Roman emperor, was rule over 'land and sea' (*terra*

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<sup>72</sup> Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics*, 30. Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 32, likewise observes that the idea of extending Roman rule to the ends of the earth first developed in the second century BCE but increased during the first century BCE. The claim was also made that Pompey and Caesar had conquered the entire world (Diodorus Siculus 40.4; and Cicero, *Prov. cons.* 13.33).

<sup>73</sup> See also Virgil, *Aen.* 1.234–237, 254–296.

<sup>74</sup> Romm, *Edges of the Earth*, 160–1.

<sup>75</sup> Romm, *Edges of the Earth*, 160–1. Though Castriota, *Ara Pacis*, 103, sees references in these lines to historical events, namely, the Indian embassy of 20 BCE and the campaign of Balbus against Libyan Garamantes. He also suggests that the land of Atlas is Ethiopia.

<sup>76</sup> In *Silv.* 4.1.39–43, Statius describes nations waiting to be conquered by Domitian, including those of Babylon and Arabia.

*marique*). Arnaldo Momigliano provides an overview of the use of the phrase in treaties of the ancient Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman periods.<sup>77</sup> He concludes that the claim to have established peace over land and sea was an element of the Roman legitimization of its rule and was equivalent to the claim to rule the *oikoumene*.<sup>78</sup> Under Augustus, the words *terra marique esset parta victoriis pax* were associated with the closing of the doors of the temple of Janus and an inscription at Halicarnassus dating to 15 BCE declared Augustus the saviour of the whole world who had brought peace on land and sea and prosperity to the earth (*Res gestae* 13; Livy 1.19.3; Suetonius, *Aug.* 22; GIBM IV 894).<sup>79</sup> Another inscription under a statue of Augustus in Myra proclaimed him Θεὸν Σεβαστὸν, Θεοῦ υἱὸν, | Καίσαρα αὐτοκράτορα γῆς | καὶ θαλάσσης, τὸν εὐεργέτην | καὶ σωτῆρα τοῦ σύμπαντος || κόσμου (IGRR III 719). Towards the end of the first century, Statius referred to Domitian in a similar way, as ‘potent over sea and land’ (Statius, *Theb.* 1.31). There were also several graphic depictions of the concept of rule over land and sea including: the *Gemma Augustea*, which has Tellus and Okeanos both facing Augustus; the statue at Cherchel, which has the emperor over tritons of land and sea; and a relief of Augustus at Aphrodisias showing him striding above representations of land and sea. It has also been suggested that the Capricorn symbolised Augustus’s rule over land and sea as the Capricorn was a part land and part sea creature.<sup>80</sup>

The *Gemma Augustea* will be discussed in more detail because it features several relevant symbolic representations (see below Fig. 5). This sardonyx-carved gem was

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<sup>77</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, “‘Terra Marique’”, *JRS* 32 (1942) 53–64.

<sup>78</sup> Momigliano, “‘Terra Marique’”, 64.

<sup>79</sup> See Momigliano “‘Terra Marique’”, 63; and Wengst, *Pax Romana*, 9. When the temple of Janus was again closed under Nero in 66 CE, coin issues declared that peace over land and sea had been secured. Kreitzer, *Striking New Images*, 118–9, cites numerous examples and notes that on all versions the inscription read: PACE P(opuli) R(omani) TERRA MARIQ(ue) PARTA IANUM CLVSIT.

<sup>80</sup> Dwyer, ‘Augustus and the Capricorn’, 66; see also, Manilius, *Ast.* 4.791–796.

produced 9–12 CE and probably belonged to a personal collection.<sup>81</sup> The gem measures nineteen by twenty-three centimetres and is divided into two registers. In the upper register the focus is on Augustus enthroned in the guise of Jupiter holding the *lituus* and sceptre alongside Roma.<sup>82</sup> The gaze of Augustus is fixed on Tiberius who is dismounting a war chariot following a victory which is the subject matter of the lower register where soldiers are erecting a trophy among bound and dejected barbarians. The position, size, and importance of Augustus and Roma make them the prominent figures of the gem and the viewer's eye is naturally drawn to them. However, once the viewer looks to the lower register their attention is directed in a motion which reinforces the central narrative of the gem.<sup>83</sup> In the bottom right of the gem is the pitiful scene of two barbarians being pulled by the hair by soldiers, their contorted bodies direct the viewer to the left and the scene in which the trophy is being lifted up.<sup>84</sup> The imagined upward motion of the trophy along with the slant of the supporting beam directs the viewer to the upper register and the chariot in which Tiberius stands in front of Victory. The chariot, war horse, and scattered armour connect the scene of the upper register to the lower one.<sup>85</sup> Like the trophy, Tiberius is in motion, stepping down from the chariot and moving towards Augustus.<sup>86</sup> The direction of the gaze of figures in the upper register also

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<sup>81</sup> Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 69–71, thinks it was commissioned by Tiberius for private use.

<sup>82</sup> John Pollini, 'The Gemma Augustea: Ideology, Rhetorical Imagery, and the Creation of a Dynastic Narrative', *Narrative and Event in Ancient Art* (ed. Peter Holliday; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 262–4, notes that the *lituus* subordinates Augustus to Jupiter whose will he mediates on earth yet the association leads the viewer to see a parallel between Jupiter in heaven and Augustus on earth.

<sup>83</sup> Pollini, 'Gemma Augustea', 258, also thinks the *Gemma Augustea* possesses a 'dynastic narrative'.

<sup>84</sup> The slanting staff also directs the viewer to the left.

<sup>85</sup> There is a scorpion on the shield hanging from the trophy in the lower register which may symbolise Tiberius's birth sign, Scorpio. If so, there is another connection between the lower and upper registers.

<sup>86</sup> Most scholars think the *Gemma Augustea* represents Tiberius's triumph following victory over the Illyrians in 12 CE; for example, Niels Hannestad, *Roman Art and Imperial Policy* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1988) 78–80. However, Pollini, 'Gemma Augustea', 268, observes that Tiberius is not properly attired as a *triumphator* and so proposes that the scene depicts his return to Rome following the same victory a few years

directs the viewer ultimately to Augustus. Beyond him, the gaze of Tellus, Okeanos, and Oikoumene direct the viewer back to Augustus. These three figures act as punctuation, returning the viewer's attention to Augustus while at the same time portraying him as the one who has saved the world and brought peace over land and sea.<sup>87</sup> The dynamism of the gem ceases with Augustus who is motionless on the throne receiving the gaze of those surrounding him.<sup>88</sup> The impression of stasis created by the figure of Augustus contributes to the concept of a stable cosmic order centred on Augustan Rome. The symbol of Capricorn against the sun confirms the divine fiat of this cosmology as does the *lituus* held by Augustus.<sup>89</sup> The viewer is first taken to this depiction of the cosmos before they follow the narrative of military victory at the periphery of the earth brought to Rome through Tiberius but ultimately under the auspices of Augustus.<sup>90</sup> This visual experience of the gem suggests to the viewer an aspect of Roman ideology; that is, that Rome has brought cosmic renewal and stability through military conquest.

The two-register structure of the gem creates the impression of separation and distance between Augustus and Rome at the centre and the barbarians on the periphery. Hölscher also suggests the effect of the spatial arrangement is to elicit a response of pity, presumably by encouraging the viewer to sustain their focus on the barbarians. The result of the pity is not to develop antipathy towards Augustus but rather to esteem him more greatly

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earlier around 9 CE. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 69–71, concludes that an historical event is represented but it cannot be known which one.

<sup>87</sup> Pollini, 'Gemma Augustea', 262, Tellus and Okeanos together are an imagistic version of the expression *terra marique*. Oikoumene is crowning Augustus with the *corona civica*, an action which implies that Augustus is the saviour of the inhabited world.

<sup>88</sup> Pollini, 'Gemma Augustea', 267–8, thinks that Augustus is looking at Tiberius which contributes to the dynastic narrative but the emphasis in the gem is on Augustus as the one who receives the gaze of the other figures, he is viewed rather than a viewer.

<sup>89</sup> Fears, 'Cult of Jupiter', 58, in the context of the *Gemma Augustea*, the *lituus* represents the auspices by which the will of Jupiter is revealed to his earthly representative. See also, Pollini, 'Gemma Augustea', 262.

<sup>90</sup> Pollini, 'Gemma Augustea', 263.



for his victory.<sup>91</sup> While there is an above–below spatial structure on the gem, the cosmology it suggests better correlates to the centre–periphery framework.<sup>92</sup> Roman victory brought about order and cosmic renewal by subduing the periphery.



Figure 5. The *Gemma Augustea* of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. 9–12 CE. Photo: Dioscurides - Gryffindor (June 2006), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4407684> / CC BY 2.5

A common way to express Roman dominion over the entire world was the image of the globe either under foot or in the hand of a representation of the Roman people or the

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<sup>91</sup> Tonio Hölscher, *The Language of Images in Roman Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 41.

<sup>92</sup> Klauck, 'Die Johannesoffenbarung', 212, also sees a centre–periphery dynamic in the *Gemma Augustea*.

Roman ruler.<sup>93</sup> The use of the globe in iconography increased from the late republic into the imperial period, which Hardie suggests attests a growing interest in cosmology.<sup>94</sup> When Ovid describes Rome's universal rule he draws upon a well-established iconographic motif, he writes, 'A city arose destined to set its victorious foot upon the neck of the whole earth; who at that time could have believed in such a prophecy? Rule the universe, O Rome, and mayest thou ever be subject to great Caesar' (*Fast.* 4.857–859 [Frazer]). Following Pompey's victory in the East, a statue of the general showing him holding a globe in his hand was placed in his theatre in Rome and a bronze statue of Caesar on the Capitoline showed him with his foot resting on a representation of the inhabited world.<sup>95</sup> On the Ravenna relief, dating to the reign of Claudius, Augustus is shown with his left foot on a globe marked with the zodiac.<sup>96</sup> In this case, the iconography probably also suggests the emperor's divine status as power over the world was a characteristic of the gods.<sup>97</sup> In the province of Asia, a relief on the southern portico of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias has Germanicus holding a globe as he stands beside a captive.

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<sup>93</sup> Susan Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999) 169; and Richard Oster, "'Show Me a Denarius': Symbolism of Roman Coinage and Christian Beliefs", *RQ* 28 (1985–1986) 112. Andrew Alföldi, 'The Main Aspects of Political Propaganda on the Coinage of the Roman Republic', *Essays in Roman Coinage Presented to Harold Mattingly* (ed. R. A. G. Carson and C. H. V. Sutherland; Darmstadt: Fotokop Wilhelm Weichert KG., 1979) 83–7, notes that before the imperial period there had been a shift in focus from the state to an individual leader in cosmic symbolism conveying the concept of universal rule.

<sup>94</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 377; Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics*, 36; and Oster, 'Numismatic Windows', 206.

<sup>95</sup> Catharine Edwards and Gregory Woolf, 'Cosmopolis: Rome as World City', *Rome the Cosmopolis* (ed. Catharine Edwards and Gregory Woolf; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 5–6, it is unknown whether the statue of Caesar had his foot upon a globe or a figure such as Oikoumene; see also Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics*, 37–41. Dio 43.14.6 reports the senate's decree that the statue be issued for Caesar.

<sup>96</sup> Ryberg, 'Rites of the State Religion', 90–3, suggests the Ravenna relief is from the time of Caligula.

<sup>97</sup> Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 145–6; and Oster, 'Numismatic Windows', 206.

The combination of a winged Victory over the globe in association with Rome or a Roman ruler was also a common way to symbolise Roman conquest of the world. For example, the Actium Victory Cameo of 31 BCE, which commemorates Octavian's defeat of Mark Antony, has Octavian in a quadriga drawn by tritons holding globes, a Victory with crown is over another globe, and then two Capricorns are over yet another globe.<sup>98</sup> The Boscoreale Cups, dated to the end of the reign of Augustus, are another well-known example.<sup>99</sup> One of the two silver cups shows Augustus holding a globe as he receives a statuette of Victory from Venus.<sup>100</sup> Kuttner discusses the symbolism of the scene as a whole and comments that it shows the patron gods of Rome honouring Augustus as the world ruler with the provinces, including Africa, Asia, Gaul, and Spain, approaching him to pay homage.<sup>101</sup>

The globe occurs on numerous coin types in both the republican and imperial periods. In most cases it was on the reverse in association with other images, such as Capricorn, Victory, Pax, a deity, or a human figure. However, it also appeared on the obverse at the tip of the bust of the portrait, a type that occurred most frequently on the coinage of Nero.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Zanker, *Power of Images*, 96–7; Dwyer, 'Augustus and the Capricorn', 64; and Rehak, *Imperium and Cosmos*, 73. Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 25, also notes that a statue of Victory on a globe was set up inside the Curia Julia by Octavian to celebrate his victory at Actium.

<sup>99</sup> Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 66–9, who on the date follows Erika Simon, *Augustus: Kunst und Leben in Rom um die Zeitenwende* (Munich: Hirmer, 1986) 143.

<sup>100</sup> Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 152–4. Other examples of Victory with globe include a denarius of Octavian which has Victory holding wreath and Roman standards over the globe (BMCRE I 101 #622; see also BMCRE I 99 #602–4). For discussion, see Zanker, *Power of Images*, 81; and Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 272–3, observes that public Augustan images such as those of Victory were adopted in private settings, such as a table support which has Victory on top of a globe holding a trophy. Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire*, 2.xxxv, states Victory on globe was a common coin type under Vespasian, issued in Rome 70–71 CE (BMCRE II 11 #63, 13 #72–3, 15 #81–2, 83 #407–8; RIC II 20 #51).

<sup>101</sup> Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 13–17.

<sup>102</sup> Harold Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum – Volume 1: Augustus to Vitellius* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1923) clxiii. Also discussed in Richard Oster, 'Christianity and Emperor Veneration in Ephesus: Iconography of a Conflict', *RQ* 25 (1982) 147.

Coins marked with the globe were issued throughout the empire and its provinces. For example, coins with a reverse showing Capricorn and the globe between its feet (BMCRE I 56 #305–8, 344–8; RIC I 53 #174). The globe appears on the coinage of Octavian from at least 31 BCE; for example, on a denarius he appears as Neptune with his foot on the globe.<sup>103</sup> While it was common on Augustan coinage, it then largely disappeared under subsequent emperors until it was revived under Nero and was then found frequently from 60 CE including under the emperors Vitellius, Galba, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, and Trajan.<sup>104</sup>

Under Galba, a coin type was issued in 68 CE from the mint of Vindobona (modern day Vienna) showing the *Tres Galliae* – three women representing the regions of Gaul (RIC I 237 #89–90; BMCRE I 346–7 #211–14). Each of the figures has a globe at the point of its bust. Harold Mattingly has suggested that if the coin was issued during the Vindex revolt of March 68 CE, then the iconography could express the idea of Gallic provinces dominating the world.<sup>105</sup> Under the Batavian revolt which occurred in Gaul the following year, Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.59–60, reports that the leaders of the revolt called on the people to swear allegiance to the empire of the Gauls (*imperium Galliarum*).<sup>106</sup> This may be considered an example of a province coopting and re-deploying imperial cosmological imagery in defiance of the empire, the periphery revolting against the centre. Nonetheless, the Gallic revolts should not be thought of as anti-Roman. They were instigated by Roman nobility and part of their justification, at least as put in the speech Dio has Vindex deliver, was to liberate Rome as

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<sup>103</sup> Beard *et al.*, *Religions of Rome: Volume 2*, 225, 9.2b (iv).

<sup>104</sup> Mrs. S. Arthur. Strong, ‘A Bronze Bust of a Julio-Claudian Prince (? Caligula) in the Museum of Colchester: With a Note on the Symbolism of the Globe in Imperial Portraiture’, *JRS* 6 (1916) 33; Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire*, 1.lxxi; and Fears, ‘Cult of Jupiter’, 77. Edward Adam Sydenham, ‘The Coinage of Nero’, *The NumC* 4 (1916) 36, explained the high frequency of occurrence of the globe on Nero’s coinage by the emperor’s lack of reserve about receiving divine honours during his lifetime. Strong, ‘Bronze Bust’, 34, suggests the same.

<sup>105</sup> Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire*, 1.ccx. See Dio 63.22 for a description of the Vindex revolt.

<sup>106</sup> Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined*, 292–3.

well as the world from the rule of Nero (Dio. 63.22).<sup>107</sup> In the present thesis the discussion in chapters 7 and 8 will explore how people living in the cities of the province of Asia, including John of Patmos, responded to the ideological claim that Rome ruled the whole world. It will be seen that some accommodated the notion while John narrated the transfer of world dominion from Satan's Beast (Rome) to God and Christ.

The claim to rule the whole world is explicitly stated and elaborated upon in the *Res gestae divi Augusti*. This document and material artefact is Augustus's own account of his accomplishments which was inscribed on two bronze pillars in front of his Mausoleum in the Campus Martius.<sup>108</sup> It was also copied in other parts of the Empire, the most notable being the copy on the temple of Roma and Augustus in Ancyranum, which was recorded in both Latin and Greek.<sup>109</sup> Until recently, the only extant versions of the *Res gestae* were three found outside of Rome, all of which were in the region of Galatia. However, Peter Thonemann has recently described a fragment of a Greek version at Sardis, one of the cities of Asia addressed in the book of Revelation.<sup>110</sup> The superscription of the *Res gestae* found at Ancyranum reads, 'Below is a copy of the acts of the Deified Augustus by which he placed the whole world under the sovereignty of the Roman people'. *Res gestae* 3 mentions Augustus's victory on land and sea, and other sections of the text describe Augustus's extension of the Empire over surrounding regions. In summary:

- *Res gestae* 25 –Augustus recounts the provinces of Spain, the Gauls, Africa, Sicily, and Sardinia taking an oath of allegiance;

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<sup>107</sup> And see discussion in P. A. Brunt, 'The Revolt of Vindex and the Fall of Nero', *Latomus* 18 (1959) 531–4.

<sup>108</sup> Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 280, suggests that the importance of the text to Augustus is indicated by the fact that he revised and updated it at regular intervals.

<sup>109</sup> In addition to Ancyranum, the *Res gestae* was copied at Apollonia and Pisidian Antioch.

<sup>110</sup> Peter Thonemann, 'A Copy of Augustus' *Res Gestae* at Sardis', *Historia* 61 (2012) 282–8.

- *Res gestae* 27 – the incorporation of Egypt and Armenia into the Empire;
- *Res gestae* 28 – the founding of colonies of soldiers in Africa, Sicily, Macedonia, Spain, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Gallia Narbonensis, and Pisidia;
- *Res gestae* 29 – the recovery of the Parthian standards along with those lost in Spain, Gaul, and Dalmatia;
- *Res gestae* 31–32 – the reception of embassies from India.<sup>111</sup>

Finally, in *Res gestae* 34, Augustus reports that having conquered the world he handed it over to the senate. The *Res gestae* claimed that Rome ruled to the ends of the earth, or at least over the *oikoumene*, and by duplicating the text this aspect of Roman imperial ideology was declared in the provinces, including Asia.<sup>112</sup>

The *Res gestae* demonstrated Augustus's world-wide empire by referring to conquered nations and peoples. This is just one example of the depiction of a universal empire by means of representing conquered lands and peoples.<sup>113</sup> Scholars have suggested that a 'mapping impulse' developed in the Augustan age and continued at least through to the Flavian period.<sup>114</sup> The term is used to describe the keen interest in representing, both to

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<sup>111</sup> Benjamin B. Rubin, '(Re)Presenting Empire: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor, 31 BC–AD 68', (Diss., University of Michigan, 2008) 132, observes that in the *Res gestae* accounts of foreign engagement with Rome are taken to symbolise Roman domination of regions that were in fact independent.

<sup>112</sup> Rubin, '(Re)Presenting Empire', 118, proposes that the *Res gestae* would have impacted even those who were not able to read Greek or Latin because the size of the inscription displayed the resources of Rome. The monumental character of the *Res gestae* was first commented upon by Jaś Elsner, 'Inventing Imperium: Texts and the Propaganda of Monuments in Augustan Rome', *Art and Text in Roman Culture* (ed. Jaś Elsner; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 35, who credits none other than Mussolini with making such a recognition. Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 95, suggests that as a monument, the overall effect of the *Res gestae* was to declare Rome's domination of the *orbis terrarum*. Suna Güven, 'Displaying the Res Gestae of Augustus: A Monument of Imperial Image for All', *JSAH* 57 (1998) 30–4, has a similar view.

<sup>113</sup> Mattern, *Rome and the Enemy*, 164, states that the Romans had a penchant for displaying lists of defeated peoples and regions.

<sup>114</sup> Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics*, 8–9, who says there was an obsession with space in the Augustan age. See also Lindheim, 'Pomona's Pomarium', 163–4; Boyle, 'Introduction', 37; and Evans, 'Containment and Corruption', 255–6.

themselves and others, the space over which Roman *imperium* extended. The effect of such representations was to emphasise the vast size of the Empire and to locate Rome at the centre of the Empire, which in Roman ideology, was coterminous with the world.<sup>115</sup> An example from the Augustan age is the map of Marcus Agrippa, which was finished by Augustus between 7 BCE and 2 BCE and located in the *Porticus Vipsania* of the Campus Martius.<sup>116</sup> We know of the map through the account of Pliny the Elder, who says that the intent of the project was ‘to set before the eyes of Rome a survey of the world’ (Pliny, *Nat.* 3.17 [Rackham]). The map was rectangular and represented the entirety of the known world including the boundaries of the Empire and the length and breadth of areas within and beyond them.<sup>117</sup> The actual form of the map remains uncertain.<sup>118</sup> It may have consisted of a graphic representation accompanied by a commentary, though some scholars, including Kai Brodersen, have suggested it was text alone and was like a travel itinerary.<sup>119</sup> Whittaker suggests that a graphic representation better served the purpose of *showing* the world to the city.<sup>120</sup> The argument is speculative but in the absence of other evidence is somewhat convincing.

The drive to describe the world was not for purely scientific interest and nor was it solely for facilitating administration or the waging of war. It also served an ideological function. Boyle suggests that for the Romans the mapping exercise was a kind of

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<sup>115</sup> Ovid wrote that Rome contained the whole world within its walls (*Pont.* 2.1.21–24; compare *Fast.* 1.85–86; 2.683–684).

<sup>116</sup> Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics*, 103–4. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, ‘Mutatas Formas: The Augustan Transformation of Roman Knowledge’, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (ed. Karl Galinsky; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 80, refers to Agrippa’s map as the first major mapping exercise of the Roman Empire.

<sup>117</sup> J. J. Tierney, ‘The Map of Agrippa’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 63 (1962) 162.

<sup>118</sup> Kai Brodersen, ‘Mapping (in) the Ancient World’, *JRS* 94 (2004) 185, lists various interpretations of what he refers to as the ‘so-called’ map of Agrippa.

<sup>119</sup> Brodersen, ‘Mapping’, 185–8.

<sup>120</sup> Whittaker, *Rome and Its Frontiers*, 66.

‘epistemological invasion’ which demonstrated mastery over the *oikoumene*.<sup>121</sup> Regarding the map of Agrippa in particular, Whittaker suggests it represented Rome in a dominant position in the world by placing it in a centre–periphery relationship to the rest of the world.<sup>122</sup> In addition, Galinsky considers Strabo’s geography to be an example of Augustan literature which illustrated the universal outlook that developed in the Roman Empire.<sup>123</sup> This interest in investigating and representing the world continued under the Julio-Claudians and Flavians; for example, Seneca’s *Naturales quaestiones* presented Nero as a sponsor of the geographical exploration of the Nile.<sup>124</sup>

A means by which Rome displayed its mastery of the *oikoumene* was the display of nations it had conquered. In *Aen.* 8.718–728, Virgil’s *ekphrasis* of the shield of Aeneas lists conquered nations, all of which were located on the periphery of the Empire, in a triple triumph for Caesar.<sup>125</sup> The description of nations in the *Res gestae* is another example of such listing. In the Roman Empire, personifications of nations appeared on monumental reliefs, such as the *Ara Pacis*, on statues and private artwork, including the Prima Porta and Boscoreale Cups, and to adorn major architectural structures. In Rome, an example of such a structure is the *Porticus ad Nationes*, known only to us through the writings of Pliny the Elder and Servius.<sup>126</sup> The *Porticus ad Nationes* may have influenced the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias which included representations of *ethne* in the enclaves of the northern

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<sup>121</sup> Boyle, ‘Introduction’, 37.

<sup>122</sup> Whittaker, *Rome and Its Frontiers*, 67; similarly, Zanker, *Power of Images*, 143, says the map of Agrippa gave the Romans a sense of their rule over the world. This was reinforced by the placing of a golden milestone near the Roman Forum to symbolise Rome’s central position in the world.

<sup>123</sup> Galinsky, ‘Vergil’s Aeneid’, 341.

<sup>124</sup> Evans, ‘Containment and Corruption’, 255–6; and Harry M. Hine, ‘Rome, the Cosmos’, 42.

<sup>125</sup> Smith, ‘Simulacra Gentium’, 72. The triple triumph referred to was that of 29 BCE which celebrated the victories in Dalmatia, at Actium, and Alexandria.

<sup>126</sup> Servius, *Ad Aen.* 8.721, states that the portico was dedicated ‘*ad nationes*’ and contained ‘*simulacra omnium gentium*’. Pliny, *Nat.* 36.39, only mentions the portico.



portico.<sup>127</sup> At the Sebasteion, the figures are often shown in positions of defeat, such as Britannia as a female who is semi-naked and being dragged by the hair by the victorious emperor Claudius. The Sebasteion will be covered in greater detail in section 6.4 to illustrate how Roman cosmological concepts were adapted and applied in the province of Asia.

By listing conquered peoples or depicting *ethne* on reliefs and artwork, the power of Rome over the world was displayed for the people of the Empire. During the Flavian period, a similar effect was achieved by bringing the spoils of war, including human captives and animals, to the centre of Rome to be put on show. In the Flavian amphitheatre, commonly known as the Colosseum, gladiators from distant regions of the Empire and exotic animals were set before the Roman public.<sup>128</sup> And Vespasian's *Templum Pacis*, which was dedicated in 75 CE, contained artefacts taken as plunder from conquered nations, including some from Jerusalem following the Judean War. Like the *Ara Pacis* before it, the *Templum Pacis* conveyed the concept of peace achieved through victory.<sup>129</sup> Likewise, the Arch of Titus, erected by Domitian in 81 CE, included a relief of the triumph of Titus on one side of the arch and the spoils of war, including the menorah of the Jerusalem temple, opposite. Domitian's Pamphili Obelisk was a re-erected obelisk from Heliopolis and the inscription on the base read, 'Egypt having been brought under the dominion of the Roman people'.<sup>130</sup> By representing the periphery to the people of Rome, the vast size and great power of the Empire was impressed upon them. These spectacles also served to reinforce the idea that Rome was at the centre of the world and the obverse of the inferior, exotic peoples and lands which

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<sup>127</sup> R. R. R Smith, 'Myth and Allegory in the Sebasteion', *Aphrodisias Papers: Recent Work on Architecture and Sculpture* (ed. Charlotte Roueché and Kenan T. Erim; Ann Arbor, Mi: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1990) 92.

<sup>128</sup> Edwards and Woolf, 'Cosmopolis', 1.

<sup>129</sup> Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined*, 302, the subjugated nations were the Jews and Gauls.

<sup>130</sup> Edwards and Woolf, 'Cosmopolis', 2. Domitian also had hieroglyphs inscribed on the obelisk which referred to himself as 'eternal Pharaoh' and called Vespasian and Titus gods. For discussion of the monument, see Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, 140–50.

surrounded it. But not all movement from the periphery to the centre was forced; people came freely for trade, and so in the port of Ostia there are mosaics representing the nations that arrived by ship for trade. And in an epigram, Martial asks, ‘What race is so remote, so barbarous, Caesar, that no spectator from it is in your city?’ (Martial, *De spec.* 3.1–5 [Shackleton Bailey]). The poet describes distant peoples drawn by the spectacle of Rome, recalling the label Virgil applied to the city – the ‘mistress of the world’ (Virgil, *Aen.* 7.602–603). This context brings into relief Revelation’s portrayal of Rome as a prostitute to which the nations are drawn in lust and greed. Whether forced or free, the movement of people to Rome reinforced the centre–periphery construction of the world as well as the conception of Rome as an empire extending to the ends of the earth.

The place of emperor worship and imperial cults in the Roman Empire has been extensively researched.<sup>131</sup> Steven Friesen’s study of imperial cults and the book of Revelation is relevant to the present discussion because he includes an analysis of the cosmological implications of the diverse manifestations of the imperial cult in the province of Asia. While the cults may suggest a relationship between heaven and earth, and so support an above–below cosmological construction, Friesen demonstrates how the network of imperial cults connected the provinces to Rome and thus engendered a centre–periphery cosmology in Roman imperial ideology. Friesen recognises that in the East especially imperial cults were not typically established at the instigation of Rome and nor was their administration coordinated directly by Rome. However, provincial imperial cults, such as those at Pergamum and Ephesus, required the emperor’s approval and the iconography and ritual practice associated with both provincial and municipal cults drew attention to the principal importance of Rome in the local cities. The fact that cults of the *sebastoi* and Roma were

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<sup>131</sup> S. R. F. Price, ‘Between Man and God: Sacrifice in the Roman Imperial Cult’, *JRS* 70 (1980) 28, counted 1500 items on the imperial cult in the twenty years preceding his article.

scattered throughout the province of Asia established a common spatial point of reference in relation to political power and authority. That point of reference was imbued with a sense of the sacred through the rites of worship, which together with the association of political power created Rome as a cosmological centre. The imperial cult is an example of how the active and consensual participation of those under Roman authority contributed to ideological formulation, in this case, representing Rome as the universal power.

Ando identified other forms of ‘political ritual’ in addition to imperial cults which facilitated the dissemination of Roman imperial ideology to the provinces while also creating opportunities for the provinces to demonstrate consent to Roman authority.<sup>132</sup> These included the distribution of authorised correspondence from the emperor in the form of letters attached to legal documents, the issuing of official portrait styles from Rome, the performance of victory parades, and the taking of oaths in the name of the emperor.<sup>133</sup> Ando’s study reveals that there were diverse sociopolitical practices which combined to establish Rome as the centre of the world for people living in the provinces. In addition to the social acts addressed by Ando, embassies from the provinces to Rome, such as that referenced in Philo’s *Legatio ad Gaium*, are relevant to the present discussion.<sup>134</sup> Embassies to Rome, and to a lesser degree appeals to local Roman governors, involved a tacit acknowledgment of Rome’s authority in determining local affairs and so they bolstered the conception of Rome as the legitimate centre of the cosmos.

In conclusion, Roman imperial ideology featured a cosmology in which Roman *imperium* extended to the ends of the earth from its position at the centre of the world. On the periphery were the subject *ethne*, who, either in their subjugation or willing consent to

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<sup>132</sup> Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, 145.

<sup>133</sup> Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, 120, 131–44, 229–30, 408.

<sup>134</sup> James B. Rives, ‘Diplomacy and Identity among Jews and Christians’, *Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Roman World* (ed. Claude Eilers; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 102–20.

Roman authority, affirmed the cosmic centrality of Rome. However, it will be shown at a later point that the participation of the provinces in this ideological system did more than affirm Rome's centrality and their own peripheral standing. It was also a means to elevate the status of a single polis within its region. Richard Oster's study of the globe in Roman imperial iconography in relation to early Christianity in Ephesus led him to conclude, 'how profound and inexorable was the conflict between the followers of Christ and the devotees of the State and its King, both of whom claimed to worship the ruler of the earth and master of land and sea'.<sup>135</sup> When we consider the relationship between Revelation's cosmology and that of Rome we will seek to determine how John responded to this potentially profound and inexorable conflict.

### 6.3) A Flavian Heaven: Roman Rule in Heaven

In section 6.1, it was argued that in Roman imperial ideology it was claimed that an alignment of heaven and earth and the inauguration of cosmic harmony had been achieved with the foundation of the Roman Empire. An aspect of that ideology was the claim that the divine powers of heaven supported the foundation and continuation of the Empire on earth. In the present section, it will be demonstrated that Rome went even further to claim a place in heaven for its founders, heroes, and the emperors along with their family. It will be argued that this cosmological construction ultimately functioned to bolster the notion that Rome was an empire without end (*imperium sine fine*), extending even to heaven. It will be shown that the implication of this cosmology was that the Empire was also without temporal end. To make the point the connection between the heavenly dwelling of the emperor and dynastic succession will be highlighted.

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<sup>135</sup> Oster, 'Emperor Veneration', 149.

In the *Aeneid*, Jupiter promised Venus that Rome would be an empire without end (Virgil, *Aen.* 1.279). Jupiter went on to foretell the heavenly destiny of Caesar, ‘From this noble line shall be born the Trojan Caesar, who shall extend his empire to the ocean, his glory to the stars, a Julius, name descended from great Iulus! Him, in days to come, shall you, anxious no more, welcome to heaven, laden with Eastern spoils; he, too, shall be invoked in vows’ (Virgil, *Aen.* 1.286–290). Here Jupiter speaks of Caesar’s apotheosis which brought him into the presence of the gods.<sup>136</sup> In Anchises’s address to Aeneas in the underworld, he states that while Rome will conquer the ends of the earth, her ambitions include the heavenly realm, he says, ‘Lo, under his auspices, my son, shall that glorious Rome extend her empire to earth’s ends, her ambitions to the skies (*Olympo*), and shall embrace seven hills with a single city’s wall’ (Virgil, *Aen.* 6.781–783).<sup>137</sup> Rome’s heavenly ambitions were made manifest in its deification of deceased emperors. A section of the *Astronomica* on the apotheosis of Julius Caesar and Augustus provides an illustration. Manilius says about Augustus, ‘man himself is now creating gods and raising godhead to the stars, and beneath the dominion of Augustus will heaven grow mightier yet’ (Manilius, *Ast.* 4.933–935 [Goold]). Rome was in the business of making gods and in doing so the dominion of its emperors incorporated heaven. Manilius even goes so far as to suggest that heaven, like the earth, would be enriched by the dwelling of the emperor. From various sections of the *Astronomica* we can assemble an image of the heavenly order Manilius envisioned. At the end of the poem there is an image of cosmic order in which the heavenly bodies form a heavenly city arranged in a concentric hierarchy of diminishing illumination but increasing number. It is explained by analogy to Roman society with its ranks from the senatorial and

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<sup>136</sup> Robert F. Dobbin, ‘Julius Caesar in Jupiter’s Prophecy, *Aeneid*, Book 1’, *ClAnt* 14 (1995) 5–40, notes that the identity of the ‘Caesar’ in this passage is debated, with some recent scholars suggesting Virgil was intentionally ambiguous. Dobbin argues for the position from antiquity, that is, that it refers to Julius Caesar, though he acknowledges there are allusions to Augustus.

<sup>137</sup> The reference may be to Caesar’s apotheosis under Augustus.

equestrian orders down to the proletariat and an ‘innominate throng’ (Manilius, *Ast.* 5.735–740). In the heavenly city, the signs of the zodiac are the brightest and thus at the centre. However, earlier in the *Astronomica* Augustus was assigned a place in heaven alongside Jupiter in controlling the movement of the zodiac, ‘Augustus has come down from heaven and heaven one day will occupy, guiding its passage through the zodiac with the Thunderer at his side’ (Manilius, *Ast.* 1.799–800). If we combine these accounts we have an image of the heavenly realm which has Augustus and Jupiter side by side ruling over and surrounded by the zodiac, which are in turn surrounded by lesser constellations and the Milky Way on the periphery. Astrology was based on the idea that heaven and earth are intrinsically connected.<sup>138</sup> The *Astronomica* presents such a cosmos and places the Roman emperor within the ‘control centre’ of the universe.<sup>139</sup>

To complete the cosmology presented in the *Astronomica* we would need to imagine the earth below with the emperor Tiberius acting as the vice-regent of Jupiter–Augustus above. This very idea is conveyed by the *Grand Camée de France* which shows Augustus in heaven over the enthroned Tiberius on earth in the centre of the gem; below are the barbarians (see below Fig. 6).<sup>140</sup> Other figures include Aion, or Eternity, who carries

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<sup>138</sup> Lapidge, ‘Stoic Cosmology and Roman Literature’, 1394, Manilius utilised the Stoic notion of *sympatheia* to explain the interconnectedness. *Pneuma (animae divina)* permeating and binding the cosmos occurs in Manilius, *Ast.* 1.247–254.

<sup>139</sup> Katharina Volk, “‘Heavenly Steps’: Manilius 4.119–121 and its Background”, *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (ed. Ra’anan S. Boustán and Annette Yoshiko; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 35.

<sup>140</sup> A range of dates has been proposed for the gem along with various identifications of the figure on the throne. It is most often assigned to the time of Tiberius, for example, J. Charbonneaux, ‘Le Grand Camée de France’, *Revue Archéologique* 29/30 (1948) 171–2; Wolf-Rüdiger Megow, *Kameen von Augustus bis Alexander Severus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987) 78–81; and Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 149–51, who also discusses an interpretation which has Claudius on the throne. Klaus-Heinrich Meyer, Gero Richter-Rethwisch, and Ingrid Seelig, ‘Abermals zu Komposition und Deutung des Grand Camée de France’, *Schweizer Münzblätter* 85 (1972) 13, arrives at a date under Claudius whereas Elizabeth Marlowe, ‘Repositioning the Grand Camée de France’, Paper

Augustus to heaven while holding the globe as a symbol of world power.<sup>141</sup> Next to Aion and Augustus is a laureate male figure riding Pegasus to heaven who may be Drusus II, Tiberius's deceased son.<sup>142</sup> Livia is seated beside Tiberius with a dejected barbarian seated beneath her. Together with Tiberius, she faces an upright armored soldier who may be Nero Germanicus, alongside Julia, his wife. Kleiner suggests the historical event referred to is the investiture of Nero Germanicus as *quaestor*.<sup>143</sup> Behind Nero Germanicus is Gaius and a woman holding a scroll. At the other end of the middle register is a soldier raising a trophy to heaven and another woman, possibly Agrippina the Elder. Barbarians with wild hair and downcast faces are crammed into the lowest register of the gem.

Like the *Gemma Augustea*, which may have influenced the design of the *Grand Camée*, the gem is typically interpreted in relation to the upper, middle, and lower registers and the connections between them.<sup>144</sup> The trophy held up by the soldier connects the middle to the upper register and the barbarian beside Livia directs the eye down to the lower register. Also, Tiberius's scepter contacts a figure in the upper register. The arrangement of the registers and the figures within them establishes a narrative about authority, power, and

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presented at the 103<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America, Philadelphia, 2002, has it under Constantine.

<sup>141</sup> Mrs. S. Arthur Strong, *Apotheosis and After Life: Three Lectures on Certain Phases of Art and Religion in the Roman Empire* (London: Constable and Company, 1915) 68–70, suggests the figure may be an ancestor of Augustus such as Anchises or Iulus.

<sup>142</sup> Charbonneaux, 'Grand Camée', 179–80; and Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 151.

<sup>143</sup> Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 151.

<sup>144</sup> Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 48. Mary Beard, 'Visual Representations: Greece, Rome and Etruria', *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (ed. Sarah Iles Johnston; Cambridge: Belknap, 2004) 617, considered the gem a visual expression of how emperors became divine and transitioned from one realm of the cosmos to another. Meyer *et al.*, 'Abermals zu Komposition', 1–2, 12, disagrees with interpretations of the gem which see a structure based on three registers and instead proposes that it has a central rectangle consisting of the four figures nearest the throne and an outer ring encircling the core. However, the woman holding the scroll and the boy Gaius are more clearly associated with the centre and hence a middle register due to the direction of their gaze and because of Gaius's connection to the other members of the imperial household.

victory. Tiberius commissions his heir, Nero Germanicus, who will wage war and be victorious against the barbarians and this victory, in time, leads to the deification and heavenly dwelling of those who have won it. The resulting cosmological construct has the emperor on earth exercising his god-like power and authority (note his appearance in the guise of Jupiter), while his legitimacy to rule the world is secured by the occupation of heaven by the apotheosised members of the imperial family. Roman military victory is presented as the dynamic that ensures the stability of the cosmos with the barbarians contained at the periphery and Rome positioned at the centre of the earth but also above it in heaven. Several scholars have noted the dynastic dimension to the narrative of the gem's images. Iain Ferris comments that the symbolism of the *Grand Camée* conveys the security maintained by the perpetuation of power through the Julio-Claudian line.<sup>145</sup> And Ittai Gradel interprets the position of the globe above Tiberius's head as a symbol of the transference of power, which if correct results in a multi-generational dimension with power having transferred from Augustus to Tiberius now being conferred upon the next heir.<sup>146</sup> Military victory and dynastic succession may then be seen as two intertwined processes that served to perpetuate the Roman Empire and to ensure not only peace and security on earth but the stability of the entire cosmos.

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<sup>145</sup> Ferris, *Enemies of Rome*, 49–50. Holding a similar position are Kuttner, *Dynasty and Empire*, 32; and Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 151.

<sup>146</sup> Gradel, *Emperor Worship*, 314.





Figure 6. The *Grand Camée de France*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Photo: © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons

A relief on a panel of the Belvedere Altar from the Augustan period dating to 12–2 BCE also connects apotheosis and dynasty.<sup>147</sup> The four panels of the altar each have a relief and together they illustrate political, social, and religious dimensions of Augustan ideology.<sup>148</sup> The reliefs include: a representation of Victory placing a shield inscribed with ‘*Pontifex maximus*’ on a pillar; a scene with Aeneas; a scene showing Augustus presenting a statuette of the Lares; and another scene which most scholars think depicts the apotheosis of Julius Caesar (Fig. 7).

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<sup>147</sup> Paul Zanker, ‘Der Larenaltar im Belvedere des Vatikans’, *MDAI* 76 (1969) 205, though in Zanker, *Power of Images*, 220–2, a more precise date of 7 BCE is given. Bridget A. Buxton, ‘A New Reading of the Belvedere Altar’, *AJA* 118 (2014) 100, urges caution about the assumption that apotheosis is represented and herself considers it a funerary scene because the person she identifies in the chariot, that is, Nero Claudius Drusus, was not apotheosised.

<sup>148</sup> Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 102–3.



Figure 7. A scene of apotheosis on the Belvedere Altar from Rome, 12–2 BCE, Musei Vaticani, Museo Gregoriano Profano 1115. Photo: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut FA2369, [arachne.dainst.org/entity/6109994](https://arachne.dainst.org/entity/6109994) / CC BY-NC-ND 3.0; background of original photo removed

The relief shows a large semi-nude figure riding a quadriga up to heaven drawn by winged horses, in the upper region is the chariot of the sun representing the coming dawn and Caelus atop a cloud with a billowing mantle. On the ground is a woman waving goodbye to the man in the chariot and two boys stand beside her. The woman is either Livia or Venus Genetrix and the two boys are probably Augustus's sons and heirs Gaius and Lucius.<sup>149</sup> There is also a togate man on the opposite side of the relief who is observing the heavenly ascent, though the face of the figure is missing. A common interpretation identifies the person in the chariot as

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<sup>149</sup> Zanker, 'Der Larenaltar', 208–11; Ryberg, 'Rites of the State Religion', 56–7; Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 102–3; and Buxton, 'Belvedere Altar', 102. Gradel, *Emperor Worship*, 268–9, provides a translation of an inscription on a temple to Gaius and Lucius (CIL X 3757 (Acerrae)) which says, 'for when time shall demand you as a god, Caesar, and you shall return to your seat in heaven, whence you will rule the world, may it be these who in your stead hold sway here on earth and rule us by their Felicitas vows'.

Julius Caesar and Augustus as the man watching on.<sup>150</sup> Bridget Buxton has recently provided a new reading of the altar as a whole and has compellingly argued for the identification of the man in the chariot as Nero Claudius Drusus in a scene which depicts his funeral in 9 BCE.<sup>151</sup> According to Buxton, the togate figure watching on cannot be Augustus, or any other adult, due to his size.<sup>152</sup> However, if the woman is Venus then the size of the togate figure may be appropriately sized having a height between that of the children and the divinities – Venus and Divus Iulius.<sup>153</sup> Regardless of whether the scene depicts the apotheosis of Caesar, or as Buxton suggests, the post-mortem journey of Nero Claudius Drusus to join the heroes of Rome in the Elysian Fields, the relief provides an example of the importance of the heavenly dwelling of the imperial family after death in Roman imperial ideology. It also relates apotheosis (or heavenly ascent) to dynastic succession; the imperial family watches on to see the path that lies before them personally and at the same time there is the assurance of a continuing lineage on earth. The arrival of Helios in the chariot signals the coming of the Golden Age, which is precipitated by cosmic harmony and stability achieved under the Roman Empire and the imperial house which spans heaven and earth.<sup>154</sup>

Lucan's *Bellum civile*, written during the reign of Nero, is evidence of the ongoing importance of the heavenly dwelling of the emperor after death in the Julio-Claudian era.

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<sup>150</sup> Ryberg, 'Rites of the State Religion', 56–7; Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 102–3; Zanker, *Power of Images*, 220–2; and Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 320–1, who along with Zanker identifies the woman as Venus rather than Livia. For an overview of the various identifications of the figures on the apotheosis relief of the altar, see Zanker, 'Der Larenaltar', 208–11; and Buxton, 'Belvedere Altar', 100.

<sup>151</sup> Buxton, 'Belvedere Altar', 91–110.

<sup>152</sup> Buxton, 'Belvedere Altar', 102.

<sup>153</sup> Zanker, *Power of Images*, 220–2; and Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 320–1, explain the size of the figure as a display of humility by Augustus.

<sup>154</sup> Clarke Reeder, 'Statue of Augustus', 103, comments that the image of the chariot of Apollo-Helios and Caelus symbolises the Apollonian sponsorship of Augustus and the arrival of the Golden Age in a way reminiscent of the cuirass of the Prima Porta.

Lucan's proem contains elaborate praise for Nero and makes references to his anticipated apotheosis,

When your watch on earth is over and you seek the stars at last, the celestial palace you prefer will welcome you, and the sky will be glad. Whether you choose to wield Jove's sceptre, or to mount the fiery chariot of Phoebus and circle earth with your moving flame—earth unterrified by the transference of the sun; every god will give place to you, and Nature will leave it to you to determine what deity you wish to be, and where to establish your universal throne. (Lucan, *B.C.* 1.45–52 [Duff])

Lucan was influenced by the poetry of Virgil and Manilius and follows them in imagining a place for Nero in heaven alongside the gods and also in suggesting the emperor will even decide his own position.<sup>155</sup> Lucan continues to describe the effect of Nero's heavenly installment, 'In that day let mankind lay down their arms and seek their own welfare, and let all nations love one another; let Peace fly over the earth and shut fast the iron gates of warlike Janus' (Lucan, *B.C.* 1.60–62). Lucan describes universal peace following Nero's installment as a divinity in heaven and, as in Manilius, the idea is that the deified emperor exerts an influence on earth from heaven. The scholarship is divided regarding the sincerity of Lucan's praise for Nero.<sup>156</sup> Whether or not Lucan's panegyric was also parody, his poetry reveals that an established dimension of Roman imperial ideology under the Julio-Claudians was the concept that the emperor would reside and rule in/from heaven after death and that the heavenly dwelling of the emperor brought peace and prosperity to earth.

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<sup>155</sup> Lynette Thompson, 'Lucan's Apotheosis of Nero', *CP* 59 (1964) 148, also observes that Lucan had drawn on Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus*, especially for the idea that Nero would choose his place in heaven (*Herc. Ot.* 1564–1581). The same idea appears in relation to Augustus in Virgil, *Georg.* 1.24–42.

<sup>156</sup> Frederick M. Ahl, *Lucan: An Introduction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976) 25–35; and Frederick M. Ahl, 'The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome', *AJP* 105 (1984) 174–208, considers Lucan an example of 'safe criticism' and that his exaggerated praise is thinly veiled mockery. Dewar, 'Proem to Lucan', 202, considers Lucan's proem to be typical of panegyric, of which he comments, 'extravagant, unbelievable lies were the standard stuff of the genre'.

Two examples will be presented to illustrate the continuation of the same cosmological motif under the Flavians; those being, the Arch of Titus in Rome and the panegyric of Statius. The Arch of Titus, which now stands at the entrance to the Roman Forum, was a memorial to the victory of Titus in the Judean War which culminated in the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE.<sup>157</sup> The reliefs on the inner side of the arch are relevant to the present study. The triumph of Titus, which took place in Rome in 71 CE, is represented on both sides of the interior of the arch.<sup>158</sup> One panel shows Titus riding in a quadriga with a Victory flying behind him and holding a wreath over his head. Walking beside Titus is a slave whose role, according to tradition, was to whisper in his ear, ‘Remember, you are only a man’.<sup>159</sup> On the opposite side of the arch is a depiction of spoils from the Judean War, most notably, the menorah taken from the Jerusalem temple.<sup>160</sup> The two reliefs immediately reveal who are the victorious and the defeated in the world. A person standing between the two reliefs would look up and see at the highest point of the arch the deceased emperor Titus riding on the back of an eagle into the sky, imagery evoking his apotheosis. The images again connect apotheosis and military victory, and while dynastic succession is not a theme of the reliefs, its dedication under Domitian served to legitimate his rule by associating him with the conquest of his father Vespasian and brother Titus, even

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<sup>157</sup> Kreitzer, *Striking New Images*, 131–2, a second arch of Titus to mark the triumph was erected near the Circus Maximus, it no longer stands but appears on the reverse of a sesterius (RIC II 284 #571).

<sup>158</sup> For a description of the triumph, see Josephus, *B.J.* 7.122–156.

<sup>159</sup> Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2007) 85–92, evaluates the historical evidence for the existence of the slave uttering these words and considers it to be of questionable reliability. The earliest clear testimony to the presence of a slave speaking these words is Tertullian, a Christian apologist of the second century who was writing to contest the notion of the emperor’s divinity.

<sup>160</sup> Mary Beard, ‘The Triumph of Flavius Josephus’, *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik; Boston: Brill, 2003) 551, 556–8, states that the display of treasures and captives conveyed the magnitude of the Empire and that the triumph in Rome heralded the beginning of the Flavian reign. Commenting more generally, Peter J. Holliday, *The Origins of Roman Historical Commemoration in the Visual Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 62, suggests the display of the spoils of war ‘demonstrated the new geographic dimension of empire’.

though he himself played no part in the war.<sup>161</sup> The importance of the war to Domitian is suggested by the fact that he issued *Iudaea Capta* coins fifteen years after the victory in 85 CE.<sup>162</sup> The monument is also significant as it is now the Jewish nation in the role of the subjugated barbarians, even though at the time they may have been considered ‘an enemy within’, whose demotion in the cosmos elevated the status of Rome.<sup>163</sup> Rome ruled and was victorious on earth and so claimed its place in heaven leaving the Jewish people humiliated on earth.<sup>164</sup>

In Statius’s panegyric, Vespasian is described as ruling in heaven with offspring in both heaven (Titus) and on earth (Domitian), ‘He that now governs heaven’s heights with his nod and has divided his illustrious progeny between earth and stars’ (Statius, *Silv.* 3.3.138–139). Domitian is addressed in the opening of the *Thebaid* where Statius urges him to be content with ruling over land and sea even ‘though ... Jupiter yield you an equal portion of the broad sky, may you remain content with the governance of mankind, potent over sea and land, and waive the stars’ (Statius, *Theb.* 1.27–31).<sup>165</sup> Statius elsewhere praises Domitian

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<sup>161</sup> Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture*, 166–72, notes that an inscription on the Arch of Titus states it was erected by the senate and the people of Rome yet it must have been approved by Domitian. On the significance of victory in the Judean War, especially for Domitian, see Martin Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (London: Penguin, 2008) 466–7; and Goodman, ‘Fiscus Iudaicus’, 171.

<sup>162</sup> Martin Goodman, ‘Trajan and the Origins of Roman Hostility to the Jews’, *Past and Present* 182 (2004) 17–18.

<sup>163</sup> Another example is the *Iudaea Capta* coin type which showed a dejected personification of Judea bound beneath a palm tree, see Kreitzer, *Striking New Images*, 137–9. A similar image featured on the cuirass of a statue of Vespasian, see Stemmer, *Untersuchungen*, 62, Tafel 38 V 10.

<sup>164</sup> Beard, ‘Triumph’, 553, notes there were smaller victory parades through the towns of the eastern Empire as Titus moved from Jerusalem to Rome which exposed the residents of those cities to similar images. For discussion of this Roman cosmological construction in relation to Revelation, see Paul Yeates, ‘Blaspheming Heaven: Revelation 13:4-8 and the Competition for Heaven in Roman Imperial Ideology and the Visions of John’, *NovT* 59 (2017) 31–51.

<sup>165</sup> See also Statius, *Silv.* 1.1.105–107. Kenneth Scott, ‘Statius’ Adulation of Domitian’, *AJP* 54 (1933) 256–9, notes the petition for the emperor to remain on earth was common in Augustan poets such as Horace and Virgil and was roughly equivalent to the expression, ‘Long live the king’.

as he ‘who consecrates an everlasting dwelling and a Flavian sky (*Flaviumque caelum*) to his father’s race’ (Statius, *Silv.* 4.3.18–19). An aureus issued under Domitian provides a visual representation of the Flavian sky/heaven. In the first two weeks of his reign, Domitian deified his dead son who was then shown on the reverse of a coin which has the boy as an infant Jupiter in the heavens surrounded by seven stars (Fig. 8).<sup>166</sup> Commenting on *Silv.* 4.3.18–19, Carole Newlands states that not only the earth but also the heavens have become Flavian property, and that ‘Domitian’s expanding conception of the imperial office is expressed here in a vision of the Empire that extends under Flavian control to the heavens themselves.’<sup>167</sup>



Figure 8. Bust of Domitia and boy on globe with seven stars, aureus, struck 82–83 CE in Rome, RIC II 276

#152. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum

As with Lucan, Statius has been read by scholars as either extravagant flattery or subversive satire.<sup>168</sup> Newlands, like Dewar, helpfully avoids the dichotomy and looks for ambiguities in the texts which invite the reader to closely and critically examine what the text presents. Newlands applies the term ‘faultlines’ to these embedded tensions in the text.<sup>169</sup> The exaggerated flattery of both Lucan and Statius can be considered a literary device which invites a critical reading of the text. That is, by taking standard forms of flattery and

<sup>166</sup> See RIC II 179 #209A for a denarius with the same image on the reverse but Domitian on the obverse.

<sup>167</sup> Carole E. Newlands, *Statius’ Silvae and the Poetics of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 289.

<sup>168</sup> Carole E. Newlands, ‘The Emperor’s Saturnalia: Statius, *Silvae* 1.6’, *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik; Boston: Brill, 2003) 500–1.

<sup>169</sup> Newlands, *Statius’ Silvae*, 24–5.

exaggerating them slightly the reader is made to feel unease, leading them to question the appropriateness of such language. All the time the poet has not stepped outside the accepted literary discourse of their genre. To provide an example from Lucan, in praising Nero as one so great that all other gods should make way for him in heaven, and in terms traditionally applied to Augustus, the reader is invited to compare Nero to Augustus, to consider his accomplishments and displays of piety, and to decide whether such praise is fitting.

Newlands also proposes that the *Silvae* should be considered ‘poems of anxiety’ rather than flattery or mockery because of their ‘faultlines’ which reflect an underlying unease with elements of the ideology propagated under Domitian.<sup>170</sup> Similarly, regarding the proem to the *Thebaid*, she considers that it reveals an anxiety about Domitian’s association with Jupiter and the Flavian claim to the heavenly realm.<sup>171</sup> In conclusion, the poetry of Statius highlights the importance of the heavenly realm in Roman imperial ideology under Domitian and at the same time suggests that even in his lifetime there was doubt about the appropriateness of the conception of a Flavian heaven.<sup>172</sup>

It is possible that there was a concern about the application of elements of Roman imperial ideology to Domitian without questioning the fundamentals of the ideological framework itself. Pliny the Younger lauds Trajan for his piety in deifying Nerva in contrast to previous emperors who had taken such action with dubious motives,

Others have done the same, but with different intent; Tiberius deified Augustus, but his purpose was to introduce the charge of high treason; Nero had done the same for Claudius in a spirit of mockery; Titus had similarly honoured Vespasian and Domitian Titus, but only for one to be thought the son and the other the brother of a god. You gave your father his place

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<sup>170</sup> Newlands, *Statius’ Silvae*, 25.

<sup>171</sup> Newlands, *Statius’ Silvae*, 229. Also, in Statius, *Silv.* 1.6.27, Domitian was called *nostri Iovis* (our Jupiter).

<sup>172</sup> After Domitian’s assassination, Roman historians such as Suetonius and Tacitus were at liberty to denounce Domitian outright and the Roman senate not only denied him ‘heavenly honours’ but also issued a *damnatio*.



among the stars with no thought of terrorizing your subjects, of bringing the gods into disrepute, or of gaining reflected glory, but simply because you thought he *was* a god. (Pliny, *Pan.* 11.1–3 [Radice])

Pliny provides examples of the inappropriate bestowal of divine honours by previous emperors. In contrast, Trajan acted honourably because he did not act in self-interest but genuinely believed Nerva a god, so Pliny says.<sup>173</sup> Pliny's remarks are an example of criticism about the utilisation of ideology but not the tenants of the ideology itself.

Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis divi Claudii* (The Pumpkinification of Claudius) is an earlier example of a text which ridicules the apotheosis of Claudius but which does not fundamentally challenge the deification of emperors in general.<sup>174</sup> The *Apocolocyntosis* narrates the arrival of Claudius in heaven on the day of his funeral where, rather than receiving a welcome (let alone being given a choice of place), he is mocked and judged unworthy of heaven due to his inferior physical form, garbled speech, and corrupt moral character. The divine assembly is divided in its opinion as to whether Claudius is worthy of being a god until Augustus speaks in *Apoc.* 10–11 and persuades the assembly that he should be rejected. Mercury then drags Claudius out of heaven, past earth where they witness Claudius's funeral in the Campus Martius, and finally down to the underworld where in a *parousia* he is greeted by the victims of his murders. There are various proposals for the

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<sup>173</sup> Daniel N. Schowalter, *The Emperor and the Gods: Images from the Time of Trajan* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 63–77, who also notes that Pliny's *Panegyricus* as well the *Apocolocyntosis* indicate that apotheosis was thought proper only for moral emperors.

<sup>174</sup> S. R. F. Price, 'From Noble Funerals to Divine Cult: The Consecration of Roman Emperors', *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (ed. David Cannadine and S. R. F. Price; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 87; contra Robyn J. Whitaker, 'Imagery in the Book of Revelation', *Falling Stars and Rising Smoke: Imperial Apotheosis and Idolatry in Revelation* (ed. Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu; Leuven: Peeters, 2011) 217. There is no scholarly consensus on the authorship of the *Apocolocyntosis*. Some scholars ascribe it to an unknown author as well as to a post-Neronian date. P. T. Eden, ed., *Seneca: Apocolocyntosis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 1–12, argues for Senecan authorship and a date of mid-December 54 CE at the time of the *Saturnalia*.

intended function of the text. A common understanding is that it was an attempt by Seneca to undermine Agrippina's influence on Nero early in his reign as it was she who had sponsored Claudius's apotheosis. However, it is also possible that Seneca sought to influence Nero himself, exhorting him to moral conduct by leading him to consider his own future; that is, would he be counted among the gods or scorned in posterity.<sup>175</sup> Such a perspective would suggest the belief in apotheosis was valued, even if only to motivate moral conduct.<sup>176</sup>

It has been demonstrated that Roman imperial ideology involved heavenly ambitions. Pliny the Elder in *Nat.* 3.39, further illustrates the point when he speaks of Italy as the land 'chosen by the providence of the gods to make heaven itself more glorious'. The way that Rome improved heaven was by granting some of its deceased emperors, along with their family members and the founding heroes of Rome, a place in heaven, rendering it more glorious simply by their presence. The contribution of this cosmology to Roman imperial ideology is twofold; firstly, it developed the notion of Rome's *imperium sine fine* by making it truly universal in scope, encompassing both heaven and earth.<sup>177</sup> Secondly, it provided assurance of the perpetuation of Rome's *imperium* over the earth, which is why there was an association of the concepts of apotheosis and dynastic succession. To elaborate further on the second of these points, it may be observed that, in ideological terms, a cosmos may be considered politically stable when the earthly power is supported by the heavenly power(s). When this is not the case the heavenly power(s) may overthrow the earthly power and replace it with one that is favoured. As was discussed in section 6.1, Rome claimed heavenly support

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<sup>175</sup> Eden, *Seneca*, 8–13.

<sup>176</sup> Though it should be noted that Seneca, *Marc.* 25.1–2; 26.1–2, comforts Marcia by assuring her that her dead son is in the heavenly realm alongside the heroes of Rome. While this may be mere platitude, it could just as well reflect genuine beliefs.

<sup>177</sup> It may be observed that no reference to the underworld as a domain ruled by Rome has been made. It may be that, as the place of the dead and punishment, it was a realm of the cosmos Rome did not want to claim. Adler, *Vergil's Empire*, 194, thinks that the suggestion that Rome will rule Furor (Virgil, *Aen.* 1.294–296) includes the underworld in their universal rule, a view maintained in Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 74.

for its empire, however, it was possible that the fickle gods would one day favour another nation. But if Romulus, Caesar, Augustus, and all other emperors deemed worthy of heavenly honours were seated alongside Jupiter in the divine assembly, or amongst the zodiac guiding their movements, then heaven's favour would rest securely on Rome. As Eve Adler puts it, it is because the Roman Empire would have no borders that it would also have no times.<sup>178</sup> There is then a connection between the spatial and temporal in Rome's *imperium sine fine*; the totality of Rome's spatial claims to the cosmos served to guarantee its unending rule temporally. Some of the key concepts of the cosmos in Roman imperial ideology that have emerged to this point are harmony, prosperity, and in the present section – stability.<sup>179</sup> In chapters 7 and 8 it will be seen how the cosmology of the book of Revelation engages with this cosmology, though prior to that, in section 6.4, the adaptation and application of Rome's cosmology in the province of Asia will be explored.

#### 6.4) Roman Cosmology in the *Poleis* of the Province of Asia

In the previous sections of the present chapter, the key elements of the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology have been established through the discussion of texts and material artefacts that were either located in Rome or may be associated with the city as the centre of the Roman Empire. Here it will be considered how Roman imperial ideology featured in cosmological conceptions in the province of Asia where the book of Revelation was first received. Price has criticised NT studies which move simplistically from imperial Rome to the provinces without attention to the local impact of imagery and concepts.<sup>180</sup> In

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<sup>178</sup> Adler, *Vergil's Empire*, 165.

<sup>179</sup> Price, *Rituals of Power*, 161, observes that a desire for continuity and stability was a major feature of Roman imperial ideology. Cults and dedications asserted the everlasting rule of the emperor and the successive erection of statues suggested the perpetuity of imperial rule passing from ruler to heir.

<sup>180</sup> Price, 'Response', 177.

this section, it will be determined not only whether the cosmological imagery and concepts of Roman imperial ideology are evident in the province of Asia but, if so, how they functioned in the local setting. This will provide a context and a point of comparison for a discussion of John's engagement with Roman imperial ideology. It will be argued that provincial elites in Asia adopted, adapted, and utilised Roman imperial cosmological concepts to develop civic identity, thereby establishing a place for the city in the province and the Empire, while at the same time affirming the social order of the city and their privileged position within it.

The subject matter of this section is related to the issue of Romanisation, which has attracted much scholarly attention. A thorough overview of the scholarship is beyond the scope of the present study; however, it may be observed that a new scholarly consensus has emerged which is relevant to the interpretation of the historical data to be presented. This new orthodoxy, which Roman Roth credits to the work of Martin Millett and Gregory Woolf, maintains that in the provinces Roman culture was internalised and adopted by consent rather than coercion.<sup>181</sup> As MacMullen puts it, the spread of Roman culture was more about 'pull' than 'push'.<sup>182</sup> This new consensus admittedly expresses a generalisation and various

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<sup>181</sup> Roman Roth, 'Introduction: Roman Culture between Homogeneity and Integration', *Roman by Integration: Dimensions of Group Identity in Material Culture and Text* (ed. Roman Roth and Johannes Keller; Rhode Island: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2007) 7, referring especially to Martin Millett, *The Romanization of Britain: An Essay in Archaeological Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Gregory Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>182</sup> Ramsay MacMullen, *Romanization in the Time of Augustus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 134–7. The definition of Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, 'The Creation and Expression of Identity: The Roman World', *Classical Archaeology* (ed. Susan E. Alcock and Robin Osborne; Malden, USA: Blackwell, 2007) 372, likewise emphasises the initiative of the provinces, "Romanization" is above all the claim by the provincials themselves to belong, the demand to participate, the release not the extinction of local energies.' Similarly, Jaś Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire AD 100–450* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 118, on Romanisation, 'It involved imparting a series of deeply Roman social structures to willing local communities and in particular to the elites.' See Tacitus, *Agricola* 21, for his account of the apparently voluntary adoption of Roman culture in Britain.

exceptions can be demonstrated including in the province of Asia.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, emphasising the consent and initiative of the provinces is not to deny the existence of a power differential which made the incorporation of Roman culture either appealing or propitious. For example, the request of the *koinon* of Asia to establish a temple to Octavian in 29 BCE may have been motivated by a need to demonstrate loyalty after Ephesus hosted Antony and Cleopatra in 32 BCE when the rivals were in conflict.<sup>184</sup> And James McLaren observes that at the commencement of the Judean War, the Jews asserted their independence by ceasing to offer a sacrifice for the wellbeing of the emperor, revealing that such voluntary actions symbolically communicated a relationship of authority and submission.<sup>185</sup> These qualifications aside, the new consensus on Romanisation explains the data for the spread of cosmological concepts associated with Roman imperial ideology to the province of Asia. It particularly illuminates the spread of imperial cults throughout Asia which predominantly occurred at the initiative of local elites and sometimes in rivalry with neighbouring cities.<sup>186</sup>

Acknowledging the importance of provincial initiative in the incorporation of elements of Roman culture leads to the question of the meaning and function of Roman cosmological images and concepts in the local, civic construction of ideology. Fears proposed that in the Roman Empire, the Greek ideal of civilisation, which was focused on the polis, was reconciled with the concept of the universal rule of a single sovereign and state.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> For example, Guy MacLean Rogers, 'From the Greek Polis to the Greco-Roman Polis: Augustus and the Artemision of Ephesos', *Regionalism in Hellenistic and Roman Asia Minor* (ed. Hugh Elton and Gary Reger; Paris: Diffusion de Bocard, 2007) 143–5, describes the influence of Roman administration on the cult of Artemis in Ephesus which effectively fashioned the cult in accordance with Roman conceptions of proper cultic practice. The new consensus also has its critics, for example, David Mattingly, 'Being Roman: Expressing Identity in a Provincial Setting', *JRA* 17 (2004) 6–22, thinks the concept of Romanisation should be abandoned and replaced by the recognition of 'discrepant experience' ranging from integration to resistance.

<sup>184</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 7.

<sup>185</sup> James S. McLaren, 'Jews and the Imperial Cult: From Augustus to Domitian', *JSNT* 27 (2005) 273.

<sup>186</sup> Convincingly argued in Price, *Rituals of Power*.

<sup>187</sup> Fears, 'Cult of Jupiter', 7.

And Zuiderhoek uses the expression ‘civic ideology’ in his monograph on munificence in the province of Asia to emphasise the importance of the local polis in the ideological constructions of residents in the eastern Roman Empire.<sup>188</sup> For example, he states, ‘The old polis ideal, which defined the city essentially as a community of people, of citizens, had remained central to Greek civic ideology during the Roman imperial period.’<sup>189</sup> In the context of Roman imperial ideology, cosmological imagery and conceptions functioned to assert Rome’s eternal, universal rule; however, in the cities of Asia it will be seen that similar cosmological concepts were utilised to define and express civic identity. Three subjects will be explored in support of the argument: the imperial cult in the province of Asia in general; the cosmological reliefs of the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias; and a brief discussion of architectural development of the city of Ephesus together with the foundation of a civic procession which was closely related to the formulation of civic identity in Ephesus.

#### *6.4.1) The Cosmological Significance of the Imperial Cult in the Province of Asia*

Imperial cults were a vehicle for the dissemination of Roman ideology to the provinces through associated imagery on sculptural reliefs and in the wording of inscriptions.<sup>190</sup> As Frilingos puts it, ‘The cosmic proportions and divine approval of Roman rule may have been most apparent in Vergil’s poetry and the *Ara Pacis* in Rome, but populations in places such as Ephesus, Pergamum, and Aphrodisias also saw this theme

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<sup>188</sup> Zuiderhoek, *Politics of Munificence*.

<sup>189</sup> Zuiderhoek, *Politics of Munificence*, 71–3, to illustrate he refers to Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 44.1, 6, who said his citizenship of Prusa was more important than the combined praise of the Greek and Roman world. Mason Hammond, ‘The City in the Ancient World: A Summary Survey’, *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 85 (1973) 18–20, states that the city as the locus of civilised community was maintained in the early Roman Empire. See also Mogens Herman Hansen, *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 49–50.

<sup>190</sup> Zanker, *Power of Images*, 297.

expressed in the inscriptions and in the images stored in their imperial cult temples.’<sup>191</sup> The discussion to follow on the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias will involve a more detailed examination of reliefs associated with an imperial cult. The imperial cult is also significant for the symbolic value of the ritual practice itself, which functioned to define power relations in the political sphere and so contributed to the construction of a cosmology. There is a vast amount of literature on the Roman imperial cult and a survey of the literature will not be attempted here, instead, the focus will be on Friesen’s proposition that the imperial cult in the province of Asia contributed to a centre–periphery cosmology.

In his highly influential work on imperial cults, Price argued that the rituals associated with imperial cults were a way of conceptualising and structuring the world and thereby defining the world.<sup>192</sup> Hansen related this concept explicitly to cosmology, saying, ‘the imperial cult’s primary function was the building of a cosmology’.<sup>193</sup> Weighing the significance of various functions of imperial cults would be a complex task due to the great variety of perspectives from which the function of the cults may be considered.<sup>194</sup> For example, Momigliano supplements Price’s argument in suggesting that imperial cults re-affirmed local power structures by consolidating the place of the civic elites.<sup>195</sup> So while it may not have been the ‘primary function’ of the imperial cults, the development and propagation of a cosmology was certainly one effect. Friesen followed the approach of Sullivan’s sociological study of religion in which cosmology was a standard category of analysis.<sup>196</sup> His conclusion was that a centre–periphery cosmology was implied by the

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<sup>191</sup> Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 26.

<sup>192</sup> Price, *Rituals and Power*, 7, 29–30, 43, 248. Price’s key argument relates to this supposition. He argues that cities developed ruler cults ultimately to come to terms with a new type of power.

<sup>193</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 51–2.

<sup>194</sup> For example, at the civic level the cults may have functioned to bring prestige as well as economic advantage to a city, and at an individual level to offer opportunities for social advancement.

<sup>195</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, ‘How Roman Emperors Became Gods’, *The American Scholar* 55 (1986) 183.

<sup>196</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 12–13. For an example of Sullivan’s approach, see Sullivan, *Icanchu’s Drum*.

imperial cults which coordinated the cities of the province of Asia in relation to one another at the periphery and each city was then coordinated to Rome at the centre of the cosmos.<sup>197</sup> Rome was affirmed as the centre of the cosmos through the ritual act of worship itself as well as by the plethora of images and activities that permeated life in the Asian cities and that had Rome and the emperors as the prime focus. Regarding Ephesus, Price comments that the emperor's image was given such prominence that it was met at every turn.<sup>198</sup> And on Greek cities of the Roman Empire in general, Fergus Millar states, 'It is not too much to say that the public self-expression of the "Greek-city" in the Empire embodied at every level an explicit recognition of the distant presence of the Emperor.'<sup>199</sup> The cities were also coordinated to each other through their competition for the honour of hosting a provincial imperial cult.<sup>200</sup> Tacitus records an example of such competition in *Ann.* 4.55–56, describing the cases made by eleven cities of Asia for the privilege of establishing a temple to Tiberius. A range of evidence was submitted by the cities to demonstrate their superior worthiness, including: the traditions and divine founding of the city; demonstrated support for Rome through treaties or other cults to Rome (though in the case of Pergamum this disqualified them); the wealth and resources of the city; and even geotectonic stability.<sup>201</sup> Following the deliberation of the senate, Smyrna was awarded the honour. There were numerous benefits of hosting a provincial imperial cult, including elevating the status of the city in the region and economic

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<sup>197</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 124–5; and Ruiz, 'Taking a Stand', 126, who similarly stated that the imperial cult linked periphery to centre. See also, Erik M. Heen, 'Phil 2:6-11 and Resistance to Local Timocratic Rule: Isa Theō and the Cult of the Emperor in the East', *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; New York: Trinity, 2004) 131.

<sup>198</sup> Price, *Rituals of Power*, 136.

<sup>199</sup> Fergus G. B. Millar, 'The Greek City in the Roman Period', *The Ancient City-State: A Symposium on the Occasion of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, July 1-4, 1992* (ed. M. H. Hansen; Copenhagen: Kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 1993) 246.

<sup>200</sup> Unlike provincial imperial cults, municipal cults could be established without the expressed approval of the emperor. The evidence we have for civic rivalry for imperial honours therefore focuses on the provincial cults.

<sup>201</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 16–18.



development through commerce associated with imperial festivals and games which attracted visitors from neighbouring regions. The imperial cult also provided opportunities for individuals to advance socially in the city, and even in the Roman political system, through an appointment to an office related to the administration of the cult or by acting as a benefactor to sponsor the construction of the temple or the funding of its festivities and games.<sup>202</sup> There was also competition between cities for the honour of hosting agonistic games, which typically featured representations of Rome in various forms regardless of whether the games were associated with an imperial cult.<sup>203</sup> Onno Van Nijf reports that cities in the eastern provinces would typically send out envoys ‘to the entire *oikoumene*’ to invite neighbouring cities to their games and suggests that, regarding the function of the games and other festivities hosted by Greek cities in the East, ‘Everywhere Greek agonistic festivals were used to accommodate the realities of Roman power, and to negotiate the relations between the local communities and the centre in Rome.’<sup>204</sup> Similarly, Barbara Levick states that festivals in honour of the emperor had a role in maintaining inter-city connections, noting that when Mytilene established games in honour of Augustus a decree was set up in neighbouring cities including Pergamum, Actium, Brundisium, Tarraco, Massilia, and Antioch.<sup>205</sup> So as with the imperial cults, agonistic games served the dual function of promoting a city’s relationship to Rome as well as to its regional neighbours.

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<sup>202</sup> Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 11; Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 158; Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 18; Kearsley, ‘Epigraphic Evidence’, 132–3, on opportunities for women; and Barbette Stanley Spaeth, ‘Imperial Cult in Roman Corinth: A Response to Karl Galinsky’s “The Cult of the Roman Emperor: Uniter of Divider?”’, *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (ed. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011) 77–8.

<sup>203</sup> Onno Van Nijf, ‘Local Heroes: Athletics, Festivals and Elite Self-Fashioning in the Roman East’, *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (ed. Simon Goldhill; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 320.

<sup>204</sup> Van Nijf, ‘Local Heroes’, 311–20.

<sup>205</sup> Levick, ‘Greece (including Crete and Cyprus)’, 659, referring to IGRR IV 39.

An inscription on a statue base in Ephesus illustrates the formation of connections between cities of Asia in response to the development of imperial cults. As Friesen has observed, the foundation of the provincial cult of the *sebastoi* in Ephesus (inaugurated 89–90 CE) provided an opportunity for other cities of the region to affirm their support of the cult and thus their reverence for the emperor, and in doing so also affirm and display their relationship with Ephesus.<sup>206</sup> The cities may have supported the building of the temple by the provision of funds or by donating a statue for the temple. Reynolds provides the following translation of the inscription on the statue's base.

To Imperator divus Caesar Vespasianus, in the proconsulship of M. Fulvius Gillo, the people of Aphrodisias, devoted to Caesar, being free and autonomous from time past by the grace of the emperors, dedicated (this) in the provincial temple of the emperors at Ephesus, of their own grace, on account of their loyalty to the emperors and their goodwill to the city of Ephesus which is the temple-warden. The monument was supervised by Aristion, son of Artemidorus the son of Callisteus, priest of Pluton and Core, and a curator of the fabric of the temple of the goddess Aphrodite, in the year when Ti. Claudius Phesinus was high priest of Asia.<sup>207</sup>

The inscription states that the statue was to express loyalty to the emperors and the goodwill of the Aphrodisians to Ephesus. The temple at Ephesus served to acknowledge and further elevate the status of Ephesus in the region yet the inscription of the Aphrodisians drew attention to the special standing and status of their own city. It points out that Aphrodisias was a free city by the grace of the emperors, referring to the status which had been bestowed upon it by Julius Caesar. Reynolds also suggests that by emphasising the voluntary nature of

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<sup>206</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 36–49, the cult was for the Flavian family, possibly including Domitia. There is consensus that the temple was completed under Domitian but it is uncertain which of the Flavians approved it.

<sup>207</sup> Document 42 in Joyce Reynolds, *Aphrodisias and Rome: Documents from the Excavation of the Theatre at Aphrodisias Conducted by Professor Kenan T. Erim, Together with Some Related Texts* (London: The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1982) 167–8. Reynolds dates the inscription to 89–91 CE.

the benefaction, that is, that they gave the statue ‘of their own grace’ (ἰδίᾳ χάριτι), the Aphrodisians were emphasising their independence even from the *koinon* of Asia.<sup>208</sup> The inscription draws a parallel between the emperors and the Aphrodisians who both bestow grace on another; Rome honoured Aphrodisias with freedom and the Aphrodisians, in that freedom, honoured Ephesus. The intention may have been to present the act of benefaction as an expression of the greatness of the Aphrodisians and to avoid any connotation of their inferiority, something that could have been suggested by the fact that Ephesus was *neokoros* of a provincial imperial cult while the Aphrodisians had only a municipal cult.

L. Michael White posits that the imperial cult at Ephesus was a centralising force in provincial organisation.<sup>209</sup> While this order was acknowledged by the cities of the region through their benefactions, inscriptions, and participation in cultic festivals, there was also a desire among the civic elites to affirm the greatness of their own city. And so the order imposed on the province by the development of imperial cults was negotiated between the cities as they sought to acknowledge the status of the neighbouring city without compromising the esteem of their own. The inscription of the statue base in Ephesus indicates that these aims could be achieved simultaneously. However, such efforts to elevate the prestige of each city necessarily promoted competition between them. Friesen comments on an inscription on a temple at Miletus listing *neopoioi*, people who administered temple finances or functioned as a building committee.<sup>210</sup> He observes that alongside each name the city to which the person belonged is listed and the cities are representative of the regions of the province. Furthermore, the inscription says that the names of the cities were randomly

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<sup>208</sup> Reynolds, *Aphrodisias and Rome*, 168.

<sup>209</sup> L. Michael White, ‘Urban Development and Social Change in Imperial Ephesos’, *Ephesos Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture* (ed. Helmut Koester; Pennsylvania: Trinity, 1995) 58.

<sup>210</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 23–4.

arranged, which may indicate an underlying competition for status. Competition created connections between the cities which were materialised in artefacts such as temples, statues, and inscriptions, as well as socially in terms of participation in festivities and engagement in offices. These connections developed in response to the Roman imperial cult, which provided the system of organisation and consequently the cities were simultaneously coordinated to each other and Rome.

In conclusion, Friesen's view that the imperial cult in the province of Asia affirmed a centre-periphery cosmology may be refined by recognising that from the perspective of the province it served to elevate individual cities and coordinate the cities of the region. The imperial cult provided an opportunity for the cities to take on aspects of the ideological characterisation of Rome. For example, Ephesus's standing as a regional centre was reinforced when it became *neokoros* of the provincial cult of the *sebastoi*. And Aphrodisias posed as a great benefactor to a neighbouring city. The cities accepted the symbolism of Rome at the centre of the world while avoiding the symbolic associations of belonging to the periphery. This could be achieved because hosting an imperial cult elevated the city's status, and especially in the case of provincial cults, was a monument testifying to Rome's acknowledgement of that status. The presence of an imperial cult was not a symbol of subjugation but an exchange in honour; the city exalted Rome and Rome acknowledged the city. The system was mutually beneficial since the greater Rome was made to seem, the more significant was its approval of the city. Another explanation for the compatibility of Roman and provincial interests in the propagation of Roman imperial ideology is that two different yet compatible cosmologies were in operation. Roman imperial ideology located Rome at the centre and barbarism on the periphery but the Greek conception was that civilisation

belonged to the *poleis* and barbarianism outside them.<sup>211</sup> The connotations of affirming Rome's centrality differed under the two cosmologies; under Rome's cosmology it could suggest the provincial city belonged to the barbarians on the periphery; under the other, because the status of the city was elevated, the connotation was that the provincial city was civilised and so in a way 'central' like Rome. Viewed from the centre, the cults may have reinforced the centre–periphery cosmology, as Friesen suggests, but viewed from the province of Asia, the imperial cults plotted multiple centres of significance on the symbolic landscape of the region. The result in the province of Asia was a cosmology with a web of interconnected 'centres' with Rome as a common point of reference.

#### 6.4.2) *The Cosmological Reliefs of the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias*

The Sebasteion of Aphrodisias features cosmological imagery associated with Roman imperial ideology. It has often been noted that the imagery of the Sebasteion strongly resembles that found on reliefs and artwork at Rome.<sup>212</sup> For this reason it is of prime importance to the assessment of the local deployment of the cosmology of Rome's cosmology in the province of Asia. In comparing the Sebasteion to the *Ara Pacis*, R. R. R. Smith states that the *Ara Pacis* represents the ideology of the centre while the Sebasteion

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<sup>211</sup> Tim Whitmarsh, "'Greece Is the World': Exile and Identity in the Second Sophistic", *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (ed. Simon Goldhill; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 271, notes that since Aristotle social identity for the Greeks was inseparable from the polis such that to be removed from it was to be sub-human. See Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.1.8–12, and the discussion in Hansen, *Polis*, 37–8.

<sup>212</sup> Possible influences include the theatre of Pompey, the *Porticus ad Nationes*, and the *Ara Pacis*; see Smith, 'Imperial Reliefs', 96, 104–6, 136; Smith, 'Simulacra Gentium', 71–2; and Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, 158–61. Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics*, 47, also suggests that Augustan writings, including Strabo and the *Res gestae*, influenced its design. Rubin, '(Re)Presenting Empire', 7, argues a novel position, suggesting the *ethne* series of the Sebasteion were more greatly influenced by Persian monuments than those in Rome.

gives a view of Rome from the provinces.<sup>213</sup> The imagery of the Sebasteion demonstrates how cosmological imagery was used to elevate the prestige of the city through adapting and incorporating Roman imperial ideology in the local Greek setting.

Aphrodisias is in the region of Caria in the southwest of the province of Asia, a region that neighboured the cities addressed in Rev 2–3. The city was wealthy and well-known for its artistic schools which specialised in marble sculpture.<sup>214</sup> A relationship between Aphrodisias and Rome was forged in the Republican period. Aphrodisias was granted freedom by Rome for supporting Oppius during the Mithridaic War.<sup>215</sup> There was a cult to Roma in Aphrodisias from at least the second half of the first century BCE and the association of Aphrodite with Venus, the goddess from whom Julius Caesar claimed descent, further strengthened ties.<sup>216</sup> The connection to the Julio-Claudians was consolidated under Augustus through Gaius Julius Zoilos, a freedman of Augustus who returned to Aphrodisias, his native city, and sponsored a large number of building works and helped to secure privileges for the city.<sup>217</sup> A wall of the theatre in Aphrodisias was covered with inscriptions dating from the second century onwards which largely consisted of letters documenting the history of Aphrodisias in Roman Asia.<sup>218</sup> The letters included the *Senatus consultum de Aphrodisiensibus*, a senatorial decree giving Aphrodisias special status, and other letters from emperors ranging from Trajan to Gordian III. These inscriptions publicly displayed the importance of the relationship between Aphrodisias and Rome, as did the Sebasteion on a

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<sup>213</sup> Smith, 'Imperial Reliefs', 136.

<sup>214</sup> Erim, *Aphrodisias*, 133–51, maintains that there was a school of sculpture at Aphrodisias.

<sup>215</sup> Millar, 'Greek City', 236.

<sup>216</sup> Joyce M. Reynolds, 'The Origins and Beginning of Imperial Cult at Aphrodisias', *CCJ* 26 (1980) 70–1.

<sup>217</sup> Erim, *Aphrodisias*, 18–19, his works included the north agora, the first temple to Aphrodite, and the stage structure of the theatre.

<sup>218</sup> Erim, *Aphrodisias*, 83.

larger scale through its reliefs and its function as a place for worship of the Julio-Claudian emperors.

The Sebasteion was constructed between 20 and 60 CE, having been commenced under Tiberius and completed under Nero. It consisted of a northern and southern three-storey portico on either side of a court which led to the temple at the eastern end. On a map of the ancient city, the Sebasteion was roughly central, located on the edge of the theatre and agora and 200 metres to the southeast of the temple of Aphrodite. The building was sponsored by two wealthy Aphrodisian families who dedicated it to ‘Aphrodite, the divine Augusti, and the People’. Smith reports that originally there were 190 reliefs in the north and south porticos combined.<sup>219</sup> There is a loose arrangement of the reliefs such that four registers can be defined:

- North upper: allegories including some reliefs with cosmic representations;
- North lower: the *ethne*;
- South upper: gods and emperors;
- South lower: Greek mythology.<sup>220</sup>

The reliefs of the north portico and south portico will be discussed separately before commenting on the overall symbolic significance of the reliefs of the Sebasteion.

In the lower register of the north portico were a series of personifications of various *ethne*. As has been mentioned already, the *ethne* reliefs may have been influenced by similar lists or graphic depictions in Rome, such as the *Porticus ad Nationes*, or literary works such as the *Res gestae*. Smith has mapped the location of the known *ethne* and shown that they largely belong around the boundaries of the Roman Empire in the first century, apart from the

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<sup>219</sup> Smith, ‘Simulacra Gentium’, 51.

<sup>220</sup> Smith, ‘Simulacra Gentium’, 51.

three islands included, that is, Sicily, Cyprus, and Crete.<sup>221</sup> It may be that the islands were considered remote for being detached from land even though they are in the centre of the Mediterranean. Apart from the peripheral nature of the *ethne*, it is also pertinent that peoples with a long Greek tradition, including those of the province of Asia, do not feature.<sup>222</sup> A person from Aphrodisias viewing the reliefs would have been struck by the large number of peoples with names perhaps unheard-of, in some cases located far away, giving the impression that these conquered peoples were barbarians and not Greeks.<sup>223</sup> Reynolds has argued that the selection of *ethne* is based upon the conquests of Augustus, though Smith points out that this theory does not fit all the data, for example, Judea and the three islands.<sup>224</sup> It seems best then to follow Smith in considering them a selection of peoples which together illustrated the vast area under Roman *imperium*. Smith suggests the symbolic significance of the entire *ethne* series is rather straightforward, ‘Their numbers and outlandish names represented the idea that the boundaries of the empire were co-terminus with the ends of the earth.’<sup>225</sup>

The north portico included cosmic reliefs in the upper storey. Based on inscriptions on the base of the allegorical reliefs, they included Hemera and Okeanos and it is likely that their counterparts, Nyx and Ge, also featured, though no remains of the reliefs have been found.<sup>226</sup> Smith surmises as much on the basis of parades for Ptolemy II and Antiochus IV which included the display of paired cosmological allegories including Day and Night and Heaven and Earth.<sup>227</sup> In their abstraction, these reliefs contrast with and complement the

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<sup>221</sup> Smith, ‘Simulacra Gentium’, 56–7.

<sup>222</sup> Smith, ‘Simulacra Gentium’, 57.

<sup>223</sup> Smith, ‘Imperial Reliefs’, 98; and Smith, ‘Simulacra Gentium’, 77.

<sup>224</sup> Reynolds, ‘New Evidence’, 319; and Smith, ‘Simulacra Gentium’, 58.

<sup>225</sup> Smith, ‘Myth’, 95.

<sup>226</sup> Smith, ‘Myth’, 92.

<sup>227</sup> Smith, ‘Simulacra Gentium’, 53; see Athenaeus, 5.195B, 197D; and Polybius, 30.25.15–16.



particularity of the depictions of conquered *ethne* in the lower register. The arrangement invites the viewer to universalise the symbolism established by the *ethne* and to consider the cosmic ramifications of Rome's rule over the entire *oikoumene*. The upper and lower storeys of the north portico combine to provide a clear example of a provincial expression of the tenet of imperial ideology which claimed that Rome ruled to the ends of the earth. The significance of the deployment of Roman imperial ideology in the local setting will be considered following discussion of the south portico.

The second storey of the south portico contained reliefs showing scenes from Greek mythology. Forty-five mythological scenes have been found, such as Achilles and the Amazonian queen Penthesilea, a seated hero with dog, and Herakles and the Boar. The assemblage of familiar mythological scenes would invite a viewer from Aphrodisias to recall their Greek traditions and culture. On the second storey at the eastern end nearest the temple itself there was also a distinctly Roman mythological relief, the flight of Aeneas from Troy. Its inclusion suggests a harmony between Greek and Roman mythological traditions. Above the Aeneas relief in the upper storey was a relief with Augustus and Victory. This arrangement situates the foundation of the city of Rome and the empire built under Augustus within the Greek tradition.

Not all panels were correlated between the second and third storeys, as was the case with the panels showing Aeneas and Augustus. However, the viewer is invited to shift their focus upwards from the second-storey reliefs, which establish a sense of the Greek tradition and culture, to the third-storey, which contained representations of both Greek gods and the Julio-Claudian emperors.<sup>228</sup> The two storeys of the portico together present a visual rhetoric in which the Roman emperors naturally belong among the Greek pantheon and in the Greek tradition. Friesen has even suggested that the effect of the panels of the south portico was to

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<sup>228</sup> Smith, 'Imperial Reliefs', 96–7.

represent the Roman emperors as the new Olympians.<sup>229</sup> The panels do not explicitly locate the emperors in the heavenly realm but that may have been inferred by the emperors' position alongside the gods. Several of the imperial reliefs employed cosmological themes to depict the emperors as divine, or divine-like, beings. Augustus appears nude and striding forwards with a billowing mantle overhead (Fig. 9).<sup>230</sup> Together with the striding motion of the figure, the mantle suggests quick and free movement. Combined with the nudity of the figure the billowing mantle contributes to the representation of Augustus as a divine figure.<sup>231</sup> At the left and right foot of Augustus are figures representing Land and Sea and above them Augustus holds the cornucopia and *akrostolion*.<sup>232</sup> The imagery is like that of the cuirassed statue from Cherchel as well as the Tellus relief of the *Ara Pacis* and presents Augustus as master of *terra marrique*.

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<sup>229</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 92–3.

<sup>230</sup> The locks of the hair of the emperor are not typical of portraits of Augustus and resemble those of Tiberius and Claudius.

<sup>231</sup> Smith, 'Imperial Reliefs', 104–6, thinks the mantle does not present Augustus as divine but only as an idealised figure but the location of the panel alongside Greek gods reinforces the suggestion of divinity.

<sup>232</sup> Smith, 'Imperial Reliefs', 104–6, notes that the figure representing Land is too young to be Ge and that the figure representing Sea cannot be identified with any known figure.



Figure 9. Augustus by Land and Sea. Aphrodisias Sebasteion, Upper South Portico. Photo: 'The Emperor by Land and Sea' by Egisto, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/69716881@N02/15279679989/> / CC BY-NC-SA 2.0; background of original photo removed

Two other panels have imperial princes holding the globe to symbolise that they are heirs who will one day rule the Empire and hence the entire world.<sup>233</sup> In one example, Germanicus holds the globe in his left hand and may be crowning a trophy with the other while a captive boy stands nearby (Fig. 10). Another shows two Julio-Claudian princes, either Gaius and Lucius or Nero and Britannicus, with one holding the globe and the other holding an ornament from a ship. Again, imperial succession is associated with symbols of world domination, including the sea.

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<sup>233</sup> Smith, 'Imperial Reliefs', 110–11.



Figure 10. Germanicus holding globe from Aphrodisias Sebasteion, upper south portico. Photo: 'Prince (Germanicus ?) with captive' by Egisto Sani, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/69716881@N02/15291751660/> / CC BY-NC-SA 2.0; background of original photo removed

There are two notable examples in which imperial conquest of the world is expressed through the depiction of the emperor slaying a representation of an *ethne*. In one, Claudius is shown on the verge of slaying Britannia who has one breast exposed to recall the slaying of the Amazons (Fig. 11). Another panels shows Nero standing over a representation of Armenia who is seated with her neck exposed in a position of extreme vulnerability; nonetheless, Nero does not appear poised to strike as was Claudius. These panels of the Sebasteion illustrate the occurrence in the province of Asia of another key tenet of Roman imperial ideology, that Rome's place in the cosmos was established through its conquest of barbarians.



Figure 11. Claudius slays Britannia from Aphrodisias Sebasteion, upper south portico. Photo: Claudius images, © Steve Kershaw / CC BY-NC-SA 3.0; background of original photo removed

Smith believes that the reliefs of the Sebasteion do not amount to a tight coherent body of propaganda, though he acknowledges there was a message for those who reflected on the assemblage of images.<sup>234</sup> It has been seen that some of these messages closely resemble the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology. For example, the idea that Rome ruled to the ends of the earth and that Rome and the imperial family were supported by the gods and belonged to the heavenly realm. The above–below and centre–periphery cosmological frameworks appear in the provincial setting but their deployment is not identical to that in Rome. The emperors appear as heroic figures like those of Greek mythology, whose accomplishments earned them a place among the gods. And the reliefs recall the support of Venus/Aphrodite for Rome’s foundation and the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

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<sup>234</sup> Smith, ‘Imperial Reliefs’, 138.

There is then a kind of harmony between heaven and earth, and the Roman emperors are possibly represented as occupying heaven and ensuring succession on earth through their heirs. While the Sebasteion exhibits the divine favour of Aphrodite/Venus for the *sebastoi*, there is no suggestion that the supreme will of heaven, as manifest in Jupiter's ordinances, granted Rome its *imperium*. And while the emperors are placed among the pantheon they are not given prime position alongside Jupiter in ruling the cosmos as in the *Astronomica* or the *Gemma Augustea*. This is not to say that the designers of the Sebasteion necessarily denied these conceptions but rather that they did not serve the function of the iconography in the local setting. The iconography was not designed to legitimate the Roman Empire but to demonstrate that the elevated status Aphrodisias gained from Roman 'grace' was entirely compatible with the Greek tradition of the city.<sup>235</sup> Aphrodisias could affirm and honour Rome's position in the cosmos and maintain its traditional sense of identity because Roman imperial power could be seen as a continuation of the Greek tradition.<sup>236</sup> To achieve this, the iconography of the Sebasteion only needed to place Rome within the Greek tradition and among its heroes and deities but not over and above them.

The centre-periphery framework is suggested at Aphrodisias by the representation of Rome's domination of *ethne* distributed around the *oikoumene* and especially at its periphery. It has been seen that in Roman imperial art, the periphery is sometimes represented by the defeated and dejected barbarians. This cosmological framework presented the risk to Aphrodisias, along with other cities in the provinces, that in affirming Rome as the centre of the cosmos they could imply they themselves were the barbarians. At Aphrodisias this risk

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<sup>235</sup> Similarly, Smith, 'Imperial Reliefs', 135, observes that the reliefs of the south portico were concerned with the integration of imperial power with the Greek world, which was a local concern and not one of Rome.

<sup>236</sup> Smith, 'Myth', 100, states that while Virgil and Augustan monuments in Rome presented the Roman Empire as the destiny of Roman history, the Sebasteion incorporated it into Greek culture, which is presented as the forerunner to Roman *imperium*.

was avoided not by challenging Rome's place in the cosmos but by assigning other, predominantly non-Greek, *ethne* to the periphery while simultaneously establishing a strong connection to Rome itself; for example, by the common connection with Aphrodite/Venus. As Smith observes, 'The clear implication is that Greeks are not conquered subjects, like the Piroustae, but partners in the empire.'<sup>237</sup> By carefully nuancing the deployment of imagery, the Aphrodisians characterised their city as belonging to the centre rather than the periphery. To designate a city or site as the centre of the world was not primarily about its geographic location but its status.<sup>238</sup> The Sebasteion of Aphrodisias suggests that a city spatially removed from Rome could formulate a civic identity in which its status brought it into alignment with Rome's central position in the cosmos.<sup>239</sup> The possibility of multiple centres surrounded by barbarians on the periphery may be problematic in an imperial construction of the world which required a single supreme power at the centre. But it was less problematic in the Hellenistic tradition which focused on the polis as the place in which 'humanity' was cultivated in opposition to barbarism outside. It should also be noted that the existence of multiple centres of civic organisation which maintained order in the provinces served Rome's

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<sup>237</sup> Smith, 'Myth', 100.

<sup>238</sup> Though some Roman writers did attribute Rome's conquest of the world to the beneficial climate it experienced being in the central region of the world. According to the Augustan architect Vitruvius, 'it is in the true mean within the space of all the world and the regions of the earth, that the Roman people holds its territories' (*De arch.* 6.1.10–11 [Granger]). And Pliny, *Nat.* 2.190, located Rome in the middle of the earth, where the moderate environment promoted ideal humanity. See discussion in Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 32.

<sup>239</sup> To further illustrate, Shelley Hales, 'The Houses of Antioch: A Study of the Domestic Sphere in the Imperial Near East', *Roman Imperialism and Provincial Art* (ed. Sarah Scott and Jane Webster; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 184, 191, concludes her discussion on the artistic representation of Greek mythology in houses of Antioch by suggesting the Antiochenes saw themselves as a centre in their region, not a defiant peripheral city, and more generally that cities sometimes asserted their standing as a centre by peripheralizing other cities.

interests too because it meant that it was not required to expend its military and administrative resources in the provinces.<sup>240</sup>

The Sebasteion of Aphrodisias demonstrates that there was a cosmological dimension to the form of Roman imperial ideology that appeared in the province of Asia. It also demonstrates how local conceptions of the cosmos, which were centred on the polis, and local concerns related to the expression of ‘civic ideology’ could shape the deployment and function of cosmology in the local setting. Roman imperial ideology was adapted and integrated into reworked traditional myths to serve the articulation of civic identity.<sup>241</sup> The local elites of Aphrodisias successfully negotiated Roman power by affirming tenets of its ideology while elevating the status of their city, which in turn provided them personally with social status.

In the present section it has been argued that the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology was manifest in the province of Asia in a way that served local interests while also honouring Rome. Rome could look out to the province and see its own ideological image reflected back – Rome was the supreme power which ruled the entire world. And yet the same imagery viewed by the residents of the Asian city was a projection of the city’s image of itself as a great polis in the region. So rather than being a threat to civic identity, Roman imperialism and its ideological system provided an opportunity for the formulation

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<sup>240</sup> On the civic elites’ capacity to maintain order, as evidenced in various civic festivities and rituals, Van Nijf, ‘Local Heroes’, 332–3, comments, ‘The emperor must have loved it.’ In addition, Jack N. Lightstone, ‘Urbanization in the Roman East and the Inter-Religious Struggle for Success’, *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (ed. Richard S. Ascoug; Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005) 217, states that Augustus recognised that the senatorial and equestrian classes were not competent to effectively administer the eastern provinces.

<sup>241</sup> On the reworking of myths to serve local interests at Aphrodisias, see Friesen, ‘Symbolic Resistance’, 291–8.



and propagation of civic identity in terms which were common through the province.<sup>242</sup> That the Romans were supportive of this system is suggested by the fact that they encouraged the cities of Asia to aspire to the status of polis and consequently requests for recognition as a polis was a common appeal made by Asian cities to the emperor.<sup>243</sup> In discussing the display of the *Res gestae* in the province of Asia, Jaś Elsner describes the imposition on the residents of the cities as ‘an uncompromising Roman picture of the city, the emperor and the world’, which constituted a ‘supreme act of geographic imperialism’ and a ‘demonstration of conquest’.<sup>244</sup> The *Res gestae*, like the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, featured a representation of conquered *ethne* and in Elsner’s opinion the impact in Asia of the concept was to reinforce the sense of subjugation to Rome. This may have been the case in some locations, or was possibly true for some groups and individuals within a city but not others. However, the function of the iconography at Aphrodisias, as it has been presented here, suggests the possibility that some or even most residents were not left with a sense of their inferiority but pride in their city.

#### 6.4.3) *The Formulation of Civic Identity in Ephesus*

It may be that Aphrodisias presents a unique case because of its history of support for Rome and the special status it earned in the bestowal of freedom by Caesar. An exhaustive analysis of the cities of Asia is beyond the scope of this study, however, the general enthusiasm for the establishment of imperial cults in the region is one indicator that numerous cities were eager to incorporate symbols of Roman power into their civic life. And

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<sup>242</sup> Similarly, regarding Roman imperialism in Gaul, Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 239, observed that Roman imperialism provided the elite with an opportunity to use Roman culture to acquire privileged positions for themselves in society.

<sup>243</sup> Levick, ‘Greece (including Crete and Cyprus)’, 652, 669–70.

<sup>244</sup> Elsner, ‘Inventing Imperium’, 35–8, 49.

the city of Ephesus, which unlike Aphrodisias was opposed to Rome in the Mithridaic War and later showed support for Antony against Octavian in the civil war, also provides evidence of the accommodation of Roman imperial ideology. During the first century and culminating in the reign of Domitian, the public spaces of Ephesus were transformed by the construction of Roman temples, buildings, statues, and monuments.<sup>245</sup> Rogers comments that the upper agora area of Ephesus, which contained the imperial cult of the *sebastoi*, became a new urban centre which was dominated by imperial images.<sup>246</sup> Friesen considers the impact of the monumental architecture on a viewer standing in the plaza before the temple of the *sebastoi*.<sup>247</sup> The viewer would see a series of deities and behind and above them the *temenos* of the *sebastoi*. He postulates that the viewer would understand that the gods and goddesses supported the emperors and/or that the emperors united the cultic systems of the Empire.<sup>248</sup> Significantly, Friesen also states that this symbolism was not imposed on Ephesus but reflected local values.<sup>249</sup> The cult of Artemis was of prime importance to the sense of civic identity in Ephesus and yet symbols of Roman imperial power were incorporated alongside those of Artemis to forge a civic identity related to both. Peter Scherrer proposes that the celebration of cults to Artemis and Augustus in close proximity at the political centre of Ephesus symbolised the city's existence as both a nominally free city and as a part of the Roman Empire.<sup>250</sup> Rogers has analysed an Ephesian procession initiated and sponsored by

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<sup>245</sup> Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 142, and for an overview of urban development in Ephesus during the early imperial period, see Peter Scherrer, 'The Historical Topography of Ephesos', *Urbanism in Western Asia Minor: New Studies on Aphrodisias, Ephesos, Hierapolis, Pergamon, Perge and Xanthos* (ed. David Parrish; Portsmouth, Rhode Island: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2001) 57–87.

<sup>246</sup> Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 142; see also Price, *Rituals of Power*, 136; and Zanker, *Power of Images*, 298.

<sup>247</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 75.

<sup>248</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 75.

<sup>249</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 75.

<sup>250</sup> Peter Scherrer, 'The City of Ephesos: From the Roman Period to Late Antiquity', *Ephesos Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture* (ed. Helmut Koester; Pennsylvania: Trinity, 1995) 5. Rick Strelan, *Paul, Artemis, and the Jews in Ephesus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996)

Vibius Salutaris in 104 CE that involved carrying over thirty-five statues on a circuit that commenced outside the city at the Artemision, passed by key political and cultic centres in the city including the temple of the *sebastoi*, and then returned to the Artemision.<sup>251</sup> The statues included representations of Trajan, the Roman senate, the people of Rome, the city of the Ephesians, Augustus, the city founder Androklos, Uranos, and Ge.<sup>252</sup> Rogers interprets the procession in light of the Roman influence on the re-shaping of the city's public spaces and considers it to be a form of subtle resistance which re-asserted the priority of Artemis over the *sebastoi* in the city's formulation of its 'sacred identity'.<sup>253</sup> However, as Millar has pointed out, it need not be considered inherently anti-imperial. It could be interpreted to function, like the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias, as a celebration of the present situation as the fulfilment of the city's history under both Greek and Roman influence.<sup>254</sup> If so, Ephesus provides evidence which supports the view that cities in the province of Asia accommodated Roman imperial ideology in their local formulations of civic identity.

#### 6.5) Conclusions: Roman Cosmology and the *Poleis* of the Province of Asia

Cosmology was a crucial dimension of Roman imperial ideology. It was used to express the legitimacy, scale, and durability of Rome's *imperium*. There is evidence that Rome's cosmic claims were not dismissed as an affront in the province of Asia but were reiterated in slightly modified forms to serve the advancement of the *poleis* and the civic elite within them. To conclude this chapter some suggestions will be made to explain why the

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6, states that the development of the city plan in the early imperial period was intended to communicate to the residents 'Just who ran the show', that is, Rome.

<sup>251</sup> Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 83–141; also, Klauck, 'Die Johannesoffenbarung', 201–6; and Zuiderhoek, *Politics of Munificence*, 96–7.

<sup>252</sup> Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 83.

<sup>253</sup> Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 136–41.

<sup>254</sup> Millar, 'Greek City', 248–55.

strategy of accommodating Roman imperial ideology was commensurate with the culture of cities in the province of Asia. This will lead into chapters 7 and 8, which will address the way that John, and other Christian groups, engaged with the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology. Firstly, as has been stated, identity formation was fixed on the polis and its place in the region and this framework was not inherently in conflict with the Roman claim to universal rule, especially since Roman imperial rule typically allowed independence to the provinces where possible. Wallace-Hadrill comments on a difference in the Roman and Greek formation of identity in the imperial period; while the Romans had a concept of national identity, the Greeks did not; rather, their identity was related to the polis and aspects of Hellenistic culture such as language, common gods, the gymnasia, and education.<sup>255</sup> This difference made the expression of imperial ideology and civic ideology in Asia compatible. Friesen touches on this compatibility in his discussion of the imperial cult in Ephesus, ‘The democratic ideals of the Greek cities were affirmed even as those cities were being incorporated into the growing imperial system. In this way, contemporary developments in the ordering of social life of Asia were integrated with the Greek civic traditions.’<sup>256</sup>

Secondly, the residents of Asia were largely polytheistic and so the claims to divinity made on behalf of the Roman emperor and his family were less problematic. In addition, the history of ruler worship in the Hellenistic world explains the enthusiasm in Asia for imperial cults. Momigliano comments on the compatibility of Roman and provincial systems, ‘In the provinces, the Roman rulers were the importers of an alien system of values and habits that did not contradict, and might even support, the extant polytheistic establishment.’<sup>257</sup> Ideological claims such as divine approval of Rome, and even of the presence of deceased Roman emperors in heaven, could be accommodated into a system which allowed for

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<sup>255</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, ‘Creation and Expression of Identity’, 357–60.

<sup>256</sup> Friesen, *Twice Neokoros*, 166.

<sup>257</sup> Momigliano, ‘Roman Emperors’, 184; see also, Lightstone, ‘Urbanization’, 230.

multiple deities and various forms of divinity. For example, to maintain that Jupiter had determined the foundation of Rome did not conflict with the special relationship between Ephesus and Artemis, and nor did Julio-Claudian descent from Venus complicate the relationship of Aphrodisias to the Greek equivalent Aphrodite. There is an apparent contrast with John's more exclusive theological position, as Rogers observes,

A Roman emperor who became *another* god could easily be fitted into the Ephesians' theological framework, and did not threaten their role as Artemis' defenders; but a god who was exclusive, universalist, and intolerant, struck at the very heart of the Ephesians' essentially polytheistic framework of belief, and was destined to bring the Kuretes back to Mt Solmissos with their arms, as first the Jews, and later the Christians of Ephesos found out.<sup>258</sup>

The tension between John's theological stance and the cosmologies of Rome and the province of Asia will be explored in the following chapters.

Finally, Roman imperialism supported the place of political munificence in the cities of Asia by providing opportunities for the local elites to sponsor building works, the operation of imperial cults, and civic festivals. While opportunities existed apart from those provided by Rome, the benefit of opportunities associated with the imperial cult was that they included the potential to rise in the ranks of Roman society.<sup>259</sup> The competition for honours, such as hosting a provincial imperial cult, also provided the means for a city to demonstrate its status in relation to other cities of the region. Accommodating Roman imperial ideology potentially served the interests of local elites intent on social advancement and would

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<sup>258</sup> Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 146. Richard S. Ascough, 'Greco-Roman Religions in Sardis and Smyrna', *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (ed. Richard S. Ascough; Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005) 41–2, notes there were only exceptional cases in which Greco-Roman cults required exclusive devotion.

<sup>259</sup> Gregory Woolf, 'Becoming Roman, Staying Greek: Culture, Identity and the Civilizing Process in the Roman East', *CCJ* 40 (1994) 125; Kearsley, 'Epigraphic Evidence', 132; and Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 104–5.

therefore be a desirable strategy for this small but influential sector of Asian society. In contrast to the elites, John promoted detachment from key aspects of civic life and strongly rejected Rome's legitimacy and aspects of its ideology.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Ruiz, 'Taking a Stand', 129.

## 7) The Cosmology of the Book of Revelation

The previous chapter described three cosmological dimensions of Roman imperial ideology; that heaven and earth were in harmony under Roman *imperium*, that Roman *imperium* extended to the ends of the earth, and that Roman *imperium* incorporated heaven. Section 6.4 discussed the accommodation of these cosmological concepts in the province of Asia. This discussion leads to the topic of the present chapter in which the cosmology of the book of Revelation will be examined as another response to Rome's cosmology arising from the province of Asia. It will be seen that in Revelation a cosmological narrative is constructed which offers a representation of power and authority which dramatically differs from the one conveyed in the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology. The discussion in chapter 8 will highlight the contrasting approaches to Rome's cosmology evident in the book of Revelation and in the province of Asia more broadly.

The book of Revelation invites the audience to imaginatively engage with a drama which has the cosmos both as its setting and as an object of its plot development. The primary conflict between God and Christ and the Dragon and his Beasts is played out in the cosmos and becomes manifest in tension between the realms of heaven and earth. The resolution of the conflict between the key protagonists results in the dissolution of cosmic tension bringing harmony in heaven and earth, ultimately depicted in the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven to earth. Cosmological components of the narrative of Revelation will be described and then discussed as settings in relation to the plot and the characters.

### 7.1) The Components of the Cosmology of Revelation

The major cosmic spaces in the narrative of Revelation are: heaven (οὐρανός), earth (γῆ), sea (θάλασσα), and 'under the earth' (ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς). Associated with heaven are the mid-heaven (μεσουράνημα) and the air (ἀήρ); with the earth is the desert (ἐρημος); and with 'under the earth' are the springs of water (πηγὰς ὑδάτων), the abyss (ἄβυσσος), Death

(θάνατος) and Hades (ᾗδης), and the lake of fire (ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός).<sup>1</sup> The occurrence of these spaces in Revelation is outlined below.

### 7.1.1) Heaven – οὐρανός

The term οὐρανός occurs fifty-two times in Revelation, in the singular form in all cases except for Rev 12.12.<sup>2</sup> It always appears with the article apart from its use in the vocative in Rev 18.20 and Rev 21.1.<sup>3</sup> In thirty-eight instances, οὐρανός occurs with prepositions with various spatial functions: ἐν – eighteen times; ἐκ – seventeen times; εἰς – twice; and ἄχρι – once. These prepositional occurrences reflect the function of heaven as a setting. Visions are set in (ἐν) heaven and the action of the vision narratives generally proceeds out of (ἐκ) heaven to (εἰς) earth.<sup>4</sup> In relation to the action of the plot, heaven as a space is not significantly transformed or acted upon until its ultimate transformation in the final chapters. Apart from that, the firmament (ὁ οὐρανός) is rolled back like a scroll in a vision of cosmic dissolution (Rev 6.14) and heaven is opened or a door in heaven is opened to allow John to see a vision located there (Rev 4.1; 19.11). The only occurrences of οὐρανός as subject to an active verb occur in Rev 20.11 and Rev 21.1 where it fled (ἔφυγεν) from the great white throne of judgment with the result that it is said to have passed away (ἀπῆλθαν).

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<sup>1</sup> Death and Hades appear as a realm in Rev 1.18; 20.13–14, but are also personified and function as characters in Rev 6.8. Locating the lake of fire under the earth are Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989) 1.22; Aune, *Revelation*, 318, 1065–7; and Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 70–1. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 157, thinks it cannot be located in any realm.

<sup>2</sup> This verse may be an allusion to Ps 96.11–13, where heaven and earth are called on to rejoice because the Lord has come to judge the earth, compare Isa 44.23; 49.13; T. Levi 18.5. These verses contrast with this section in Revelation where heaven may rejoice but not the earth and sea.

<sup>3</sup> Following the UBSGNT which has the plural article bracketed for Rev 12.12; as does Aune, *Revelation*, 655.

<sup>4</sup> Note the reversal in the relative use of the prepositions ἐκ and εἰς with the terms οὐρανός and γῆ – 17:2 and 2:13 respectively. Things moved from heaven to earth include the seven spirits of God (Rev 5.6), fire (Rev 8.5, 7; 13.13), stars (Rev 6.13; 9.1; 12.4), the Serpent/devil (Rev 12.9, 13) and the bowls of wrath (Rev 16.1–2).



The term οὐρανός can designate both an aspect of the physical universe and the transcendent realm where divinities, spirits, angels, and the souls of deceased humans may dwell.<sup>5</sup> In the former case, the term can refer to the astral domain containing the sun, moon, and stars; the atmosphere containing the clouds, winds, and birds (a space that can also be designated by ἀήρ or μεσουράνημα); and the firmament.<sup>6</sup> No sharp distinction was drawn in the ancient Near Eastern mindset between the idea of heaven as a transcendent realm of the divine and as a component of the physical cosmos.<sup>7</sup>

Pennington has demonstrated that the Gospel of Matthew is the only exception to the rule that there is no semantic difference in the use of the singular and plural forms of οὐρανός in the NT.<sup>8</sup> He found that in Matthew, as well as in the Wisdom of Solomon and the Testament of Abraham, the plural form is used with reference to the dwelling place of God and the singular for a component of the physical cosmos. In Revelation, with no distinction of form to indicate the referent of the term, context alone may be used to make the determination. Though it should be noted that in some cases there is intentional ambiguity

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<sup>5</sup> As in Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1.5.

<sup>6</sup> Pliny, *Nat.* 2.102, notes that the region between the moon and earth associated with meteorological phenomenon was designated as both heaven (*caelum*) and air (*aera*). On the firmament, see Traub and von Rad, *TDNT* 5:502–3. Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 56–7, comments that the firmament (רָקִיעַ) was thought solid and that the Hebrew term was used in parallel with the term for heaven (שָׁמַיִם) suggesting an identification or at least a close association of the terms (Gen 1.8; Ps 19.1). In other verses differentiation is evident (Gen 1.14, 17). The Greek word for the firmament, στερέωμα, does not occur in Revelation but descriptions of heaven rolling up like a scroll suggest the firmament.

<sup>7</sup> Mauser, “Heaven”, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 99–161; see also Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1.5. The LXX translates שָׁמַיִם with the plural of οὐρανός only 51 times compared with 370 for the singular form. Where the plural is used it can be explained by its association with a plural verb or its use as a ‘poetic plural’. Aune, *Revelation*, 655–6 observes that in other Greek literature the plural sometimes expresses the idea of multiple heavens. See the discussion of the plural form in Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 23–4.

and in others the referent is uncertain.<sup>9</sup> A classification of the semantic application of the term οὐρανός in Revelation reveals that it primarily denotes the transcendent realm of God's dwelling. Of the fifty-two occurrences, thirty-one collocations are used in this way.<sup>10</sup> For example, 'At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne' (Rev 4.2). A component of the physical cosmos is denoted thirteen times including the following various uses:

- the firmament or sky – 'The sky (οὐρανός) vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place' (Rev 6.14);
- the astral realm – 'His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven (τῶν ἀστέρων τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) and threw them to the earth' (Rev 12.4);
- the meteorological realm – 'and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people, until they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague' (Rev 16.21).<sup>11</sup>

There is ambiguity or uncertainty in the remaining eight occurrences.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to other apocalypses and some Greco-Roman accounts of the cosmos, Revelation does not depict a multi-level heavenly realm.<sup>13</sup> It is unlikely that the sole occurrence of the plural οὐρανοί in Rev 12.12, which in some contexts denotes multiple heavens, bears that meaning when there is nothing else in Revelation to support the

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<sup>9</sup> Traub and von Rad, *TDNT* 5:498, states that οὐρανός cannot be given clearly separated meanings; so too Houtman, *Der Himmel*, 65–8; and Donald K. Innes, 'Heaven and Sky in the Old Testament', *EQ* 43 (1971) 145–7. Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 56–7; and McDonough, 'Climax of Cosmology', 180, comment on the ambiguity in Revelation.

<sup>10</sup> Rev 3.12; 4.1, 2; 5.3; 8.1; 10.1, 4, 8; 11.12a, 12b, 13, 15, 19; 12.7, 8, 10, 12; 13.6; 14.2, 13, 17; 15.5; 16.11; 18.1, 4, 20; 19.1, 4; 20.1, 2; 21.10.

<sup>11</sup> Rev 6.13, 14; 8.10; 9.1; 10.6; 11.6; 12.4; 14.7; 16.21; 18.5; 19.11; 20.11; 21.1.

<sup>12</sup> Rev 5.13; 10.5; 12.1, 3, 4; 13.13; 15.1; 20.9.

<sup>13</sup> Apocalypses with multiple heavens include 2 Enoch, 3 Baruch, Apocalypse of Abraham, Ascension of Isaiah, Life of Adam and Eve, and Apocalypse of Paul. Notable examples in Greco-Roman literature include Plato's Myth of Er (*Rep.* 10.614B–621B), Plato, *Tim.* 35C–36D, and Cicero's Dream of Scipio (*Rep.* 6.9–26).

concept.<sup>14</sup> It should also be noted that the space of heaven is not partitioned, as it is in 1 En. 14.8–23, by the courts of the temple in heaven, though there is a concentric ordering of space in Rev 4–5 where divine worship is focused on God and the Lamb on the throne.<sup>15</sup> The heavenly realm consists of features and objects that could be arranged into levels, for example, the astral realm above the meteorological, but there is no narrative of an ascent or descent that constructs such a scheme.

While the heavenly realm is not structured by levels, objects located in heaven make it a differentiated space and contribute to the characterisation of the space overall. The main objects in heaven are the throne (Rev 4.2) surrounded by twenty-four other thrones and four living creatures (Rev 4.4–6), seven torches (Rev 4.5), a sea of glass (Rev 4.6), an altar (Rev 6.9; 8.3, 5; 9.13; 11.1; 14.18; 16.7), and a temple/sanctuary (ναός) (Rev 11.1, 19; 14.15, 17; 15.5–6, 8; 16.1, 17). These artefacts portray heaven as both a throne room and temple and thereby associate the realm with power and holiness. These also provide structure to the plot as action at times originates at these features of heaven.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to οὐρανός, the term μεσουράνημα is used on three occasions to refer to the space immediately over the earth (Rev 8.13; 14.6; 19.17). It always appears in the dative with the preposition ἐν, and always following the verb for flight (πέτομαι) in reference to an eagle (Rev 8.13), an angel (Rev 14.6), and birds (Rev 19.17). Both the eagle and the angel make a declaration to those dwelling on earth while in the final instance the birds are the recipients of a message from an angel positioned with the sun. This region is a lower area of the atmosphere, part of heaven and not earth, and yet close enough to the earth for its inhabitants to clearly hear a message. It may be considered heaven's 'frontline'.<sup>17</sup> The term ἀήρ occurs

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<sup>14</sup> Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 62; and McDonough, 'Climax of Cosmology', 181.

<sup>15</sup> DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 97.

<sup>16</sup> From the altar (Rev 8.3–5), from the four living creatures (Rev 6.1–8), and from the throne (Rev 19.5; 21.3).

<sup>17</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 155, considers the mid-heaven to be the uppermost part of the earth.

in Rev 9.2 where smoke from the abyss darkens the sun and air (ἀήρ), and in Rev 16.17 where an angel in heaven pours the contents of the final bowl into the air (ἐπὶ τὸν αἶρα) triggering a series of images of cosmic catastrophe including thunder, lightning, and a massive earthquake. The term ἀήρ can have an elemental meaning but it more typically refers to the atmospheric region.<sup>18</sup> In Revelation, the substance of the space seems to be in view rather than the space alone. This is suggested by the fact that in Rev 16.1 the angels are instructed to pour out the bowls of God's wrath on the earth yet in Rev 16.17 it is poured out on the air and a combination of heavenly and terrestrial phenomena result, namely, thunder and lightning as well as an earthquake.<sup>19</sup> In Revelation, ἀήρ is a substance of heaven and earth.

#### 7.1.2) Earth – γῆ

The term γῆ occurs eighty-two times in Revelation, always with the article apart from Rev 21.1 where it is found in the expression οὐρανὸν καινὸν καὶ γῆν καινὴν. It occurs most frequently in prepositional phrases: ἐπὶ – twenty-one times; εἰς – thirteen times; ἐκ – twice; ὑποκάτω – twice; and ἀπό – once. The preposition ἐπὶ occurs most frequently because it is the preferred preposition to locate actions or beings on the earth, as illustrated in the range of prepositions used in this cosmological formula, 'Then I heard every creature in heaven and on (ἐπὶ) earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them' (Rev 5.13).<sup>20</sup> There is a reversal in the relative use of the prepositions ἐκ and εἰς for the terms οὐρανός and γῆ –

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<sup>18</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 899, suggests the elemental meaning occurs in Rev 16.17. See Acts 22.23 and 1 Th 4.17 for other NT examples.

<sup>19</sup> Seneca, *Nat.* 4.18.1–5, states that earthquakes were caused by a violent movement of air. Seneca, *Nat.* 2.4.1, also stated that thunder, lightning, and earthquakes should be discussed together because of their common relationship to air, which joined heaven and earth and was the medium in which they communicated.

<sup>20</sup> It also occurs twelve times in denoting 'the inhabitants of the earth' (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) (Rev 3.10; 6.10; 8.13; 11.10a, 10b; 13.8; 13.12, 14a, 14b; 14.6; 17.2, 8).

17:2 and 2:13 respectively. This relates to the predominant direction of the action in the plot which is from heaven to earth, especially in the narratives of the judgments which brought about the extension of God's kingdom from heaven to earth.

The term γῆ occurs twenty-six times in the genitive, often in a description of a component of the earth, for example, the four corners and four winds of the earth, 'After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth' (Rev 7.1). Or in describing characters identified with the earth such as 'the kings of the earth' (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς) (Rev 6.15). The term γῆ is the subject of an active verb five times. These instances occur in notably mythical narratives of the text, including Rev 12–13, where the personified earth comes to the aid of the heavenly woman by opening its mouth to swallow the river spewed out by the Dragon.

The term γῆ can be used to denote various aspects of the created realm. When used with οὐρανός, as in καὶ εἶδον οὐρανὸν καὶ γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν, a merism is formed that refers to the entire created realm (Rev 21.1).<sup>21</sup> Here, the earth encompasses everything under heaven and would include realms that are being treated separately below including the sea and the realm under the earth.<sup>22</sup> In such cases, unless the earth is explicitly differentiated from the sea, the term γῆ should be taken to denote both land and sea. Another merism, 'earth and sea', can convey the same meaning, as in, 'Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea' (Rev 12.12).<sup>23</sup> In such cases, γῆ is referring

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<sup>21</sup> Houtman, *Der Himmel*, 26–8, notes this merism is common in the HB and other ancient Near Eastern texts.

<sup>22</sup> Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 3, states that earth is understood this way when the expression 'heaven and earth' is used to denote the entire cosmos.

<sup>23</sup> The use of the merism in this context is explained by the appearance of a beast from both the sea and earth in the next chapter.

to the ‘land’, which is the better translation in cases such as Rev 10.2 where the angel places one foot on the sea and the other on the land (γῆ).<sup>24</sup>

Two other words associated with the earth are κόσμος and οἰκουμένη. The word κόσμος has some semantic overlap with γῆ and in the NT is typically translated as ‘world’. It occurs three times in Revelation. Firstly, in Rev 11.15 after the blowing of the seventh trumpet a voice in heaven announces, ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ. The word κόσμος is used here to denote space centred on earth but extending beyond it to the entire universe. In the preceding narrative, judgments are directed from heaven against the land, rivers, the sea, a mountain, and the sun, moon, and stars. Judgment is truly cosmic in scope, extending beyond the earth to the astral realm yet still focused on the inhabitants of earth. The association of the word with the realm in opposition to God, found elsewhere in the NT and especially in John, may contribute to imagery of God conquering hostile territory.<sup>25</sup> In Rev 13.8 and Rev 17.8, κόσμος refers to creation in its entirety, in both cases appearing in the phrase, ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.<sup>26</sup> In these instances there is no connotation of hostility to God so in Revelation κόσμος is primarily used to refer to the creation in its entirety.

The term οἰκουμένη is also typically translated as ‘world’ though its sense is the inhabited world and sometimes the inhabitants of the world, a meaning evident in the parallel phrasing in Rev 3.10, ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. It is also used in the NT with reference to the Roman Empire in particular, which may reflect the rhetoric of imperial

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<sup>24</sup> Instances where the earth is distinguished from the sea include: Rev 5.13; 7.1c, 2–3; 10.2, 5–6, 8; 12.12; 13.11; 14.7; 20.11.

<sup>25</sup> For example, John 7.7; 8.23; 12.31; 15.18; 16.33; 17.25; 18.36. On the word in the Gospel of John, see Salier, ‘What’s in a World?’, 105–17; and in Paul, Adams, *Constructing the World*.

<sup>26</sup> The phrase also appears in Matt 25.34 and Heb 4.3.

ideology which identified its empire with the entire world (Luke 2.1).<sup>27</sup> The term is used three times in Revelation, always with negative connotations: in Rev 3.10 the whole world (τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης) will endure a time of testing; in Rev 12.9 the whole world is deceived by Satan; and in Rev 16.14 the kings of the whole world are assembled for the battle of Armageddon where they are defeated. In all cases, ἡ οἰκουμένη primarily refers to people rather than place.

Key features of the region of the earth include the desert or wilderness (ἐρημος) as well as Mount Zion and the great mountain (ἐπὶ ὄρος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν) (Rev 21.10).<sup>28</sup> In the cosmological thought of the ancient Near East, there was a desert at the ends of the earth bounded only by the great river, *Okeanos*.<sup>29</sup> In Revelation there is nothing to indicate the location of the desert/wilderness region. The desert has connotations of both a place of death, danger, and unclean spirits as well as of a place of refuge for the persecuted, such as for Elijah when he fled from Jezebel (1 Kgs 19.1–18).<sup>30</sup> In Rev 12.6, 14, the celestial Woman flees from the presence of the Dragon in heaven to the wilderness. The wilderness is a place provided to the Woman by God for protection and nourishment. It is a region of the earth that the Dragon seems unable to enter; the best he can do is spew out water in the hope that it will flood the wilderness and drown the Woman, a plan foiled by the earth itself when it swallows the water. In Rev 17.3, John is transported in the spirit to a desert by an angel where he

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<sup>27</sup> See also section 6.2.

<sup>28</sup> Kittel, *TDNT* 2:658, the term ἐρημος means an uninhabited place and so it can be applied to a desert but also to a wilderness.

<sup>29</sup> Wyatt, 'Sea and Desert', 378.

<sup>30</sup> G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980) 149, uses the desert/wilderness as an example of a metaphor with multiple meanings. Kittel, *TDNT* 2:658, notes it also developed in Jewish eschatological thinking as the place from which salvation would come, hence messianic expectation became associated with the desert or wilderness. Keel, *Symbolism*, 76–7, notes that in the ancient Near East the desert was associated with danger, death, and bandits. In 1 En. 60.7–9, Behemoth dwells in a desert east of Eden.

experiences a vision of the judgment of the Great Prostitute. It is not clear whether the desert is the setting for the vision or only features as a typical location for a visionary experience. However, the association of the desert with death, evil spirits, and desolation is in accord with the imagery used to describe the judgment of the prostitute. For example, she becomes a dwelling place for demons, unclean spirits, and birds and experiences death, grief, and famine (Rev 18.2, 8).<sup>31</sup>

The mountain appears as a significant space in the cosmos in Rev 14.1 with Mount Zion and then in Rev 21.10 with ‘a mountain great and high’ (ὄρος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν).<sup>32</sup> Both images relate to the concept of the mountain of God or cosmic mountain which was widespread in ancient Near Eastern thought. This mountain was imagined as the place of a god’s throne on earth, as a prototypical temple, and was often the site of an actual temple.<sup>33</sup> It was thought of as the place where heaven and earth merged, and even as a place which spanned the entire cosmos including heaven, earth, and under the earth.<sup>34</sup> Mount Zion was similarly imagined as the place on earth where God dwelt in his Temple.<sup>35</sup> In Rev 14.1–5, Mount Zion is a meeting point of heaven and earth where the Lamb, who was previously

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<sup>31</sup> The idea that Babylon had become a desert is attested in Greek and Latin historians; see Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.1.5–6; Pliny, *Nat.* 6.121–122; and Dio Cassius, 68.30.1.

<sup>32</sup> In Rev 21.10, John is taken to a great and high mountain for a visionary experience of the descent of the holy city, Jerusalem. There is a clear allusion to Ezekiel’s vision of Jerusalem and the Temple in Ezek 40.2 (מֶלֶךְ נְבִיאֵי אֱלֹהִים). In Ezek 40, the very high mountain is not named Zion but it is suggested by its location in Israel. William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) 167, suggests the identification is not made to allow for associations with Sinai, where Moses received the blueprint for the tabernacle (Ex 25.9), and the eschatological Mount Zion (Isa 2.2; Mic 4.1). The New Jerusalem can be imagined descending from heaven to earth along its slope; see Cornelis Houtman, ‘What Did Jacob See in His Dream at Bethel?: Some Remarks on Genesis Xxviii 10–22’, *VT* 27 (1977) 347–8.

<sup>33</sup> Metzger, ‘Wohnstatt Jahwes’, 146. In 1 En. 18.6–8, Enoch sees seven mountains and the central one, which is taller than the others, is described as reaching to the heavens and is likened to the throne of God.

<sup>34</sup> Metzger, ‘Wohnstatt Jahwes’, 146; and Wyatt, ‘Sea and Desert’, 378.

<sup>35</sup> See Ps 20; 132.13–14, where Zion is the place where YHWH is enthroned.



located standing at the heavenly throne, now stands among the 144,000 representing the faithful saints who have been redeemed from those dwelling on earth.

Another feature of the earthly realm is the city. Apart from the seven cities used to locate the churches addressed in John's vision, the word πόλις occurs twenty-six times in Revelation, referring either to Babylon, Jerusalem, or the New Jerusalem.<sup>36</sup> As is often noted, a key aspect of the prophetic narrative is the destruction and replacement of the great city Babylon with the New Jerusalem descending from heaven. These cities act as the centre of the earthly realm and, as will be argued, they also claim cosmic centrality. The final aspect of the earth to consider is its periphery, the ends of the earth. In 1 Enoch, the ends of the earth and what lies beyond is a significant cosmological region where both the righteous and wicked dead are kept. It is also the place where the punishment of the watchers takes place. In Revelation, there is no explicit reference to the ends of the earth; however, the four corners of the earth, representing the cardinal points, are mentioned in Rev 7.1 and Rev 20.8. In both cases, destructive forces are located there.<sup>37</sup> The river Euphrates is a boundary separating East and West and beyond it there are destructive forces (Rev 9.14; 16.12). The Euphrates marks the end of the inhabited world of the Roman Empire and thus may be considered the periphery of ἡ οἰκουμένη.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Nine times it refers to Babylon, four times to Jerusalem, and thirteen times to the New Jerusalem.

<sup>37</sup> In Rev 7.1, there are four winds that harm the earth and sea when released by controlling angels. In Rev 20.8, Satan rallies support from the nations at the four corners of the earth.

<sup>38</sup> On the Euphrates as a frontier of the Empire, see Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 27, 53–5. On the Euphrates in Lucan, Pogorzelski, 'Orbis Romanus', 161. Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 108–9, notes the Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire, citing Strabo, *Geogr.* 11.6.4, 11.9.2–3, but was also the ideal limit to Israel's territory (Gen 15.18; Ex 23.31; Deut 1.7; 11.24; Josh 1.4). Virgil, *Georg.* 4.559–562, mentions the Euphrates as the boundary between Rome and the Parthians, which is also in Sib. Or. 4.119–24.

### 7.1.3) *Sea – θάλασσα*

The word sea, *θάλασσα*, occurs twenty-six times in Revelation, nearly always with the article and fourteen times in a prepositional clause. As with *γῆ*, it occurs most often with *ἐπί* – seven times, followed by *εἰς* – three times, *ἐν* – three times, and *ἐκ* once. It is used in the expression *θάλασσα ὑαλίνη* twice where the location is in heaven; otherwise the sea is a domain of the earth (Rev 4.6; 15.2). As has been mentioned, occasionally the merism ‘earth and sea’ is used to denote the entire realm under heaven. The sea features alongside the earth as a realm exposed to judgment, for example, ‘I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea’ (Rev 7.2). In the narrative of Rev 12–15, the Dragon brings forth the first Beast out of the sea, which is supported by a second from the earth. The sea is also identified as being a store for the dead along with Death and Hades in Rev 20.13. Lastly, the final reference to the sea in Rev 21.1 explains that in the new heaven and earth the sea no longer exists because it was a part of the old order which passed away. The significance of this development will be discussed in section 7.2.7.b.

### 7.1.4) *Under the Earth – ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς*

The expression *ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς* only occurs in Rev 5.3 and Rev 5.13; however, there are other features of the cosmos associated with the realm including the abyss, the springs of water, Death and Hades, and the lake of fire. The realm under the earth features in cosmological formulae in Rev 5.3 (heaven–earth–under the earth) and Rev 5.13 (heaven–earth–under the earth–sea). A four-part cosmological formula is found in Rev 14.7 where God is acclaimed as the Maker, only here *ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς* is replaced by *πηγάς ὑδάτων* and the order is changed to give two pairings – ‘heaven and earth’ and ‘sea and

springs of water'.<sup>39</sup> The change in terminology was possibly to avoid making the statement that God created the underworld, a realm which in Revelation is a place where destructive forces and evil beings dwell.

The springs of water were the sources of fresh water that emerged from under the surface of the earth but which had their origin in the primordial waters of chaos that were tamed and separated in some cosmogonies.<sup>40</sup> They are therefore sometimes associated with the deep (in Hebrew תהום and in Greek ἄβυσσος), for example, 'When there were no depths (תהום) I was brought forth, when there were no springs (מעינות) abounding with water' (Prov 8.24).<sup>41</sup> In a blessing of Joseph, the springs of the deep are located under the land, 'And of Joseph he said: Blessed by the LORD be his land, with the choice gifts of heaven above, and of the deep that lies beneath' (Deut 33.13). In Ps 18.16 (Ps 17.16 LXX), valleys of the sea (אפיקי מים) is translated as springs of waters (πηγαὶ τῶν ὑδάτων) and appears in parallel with the foundations of the world, 'Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD' (Ps 18.15). In As. Moses 10.6–7, the 'sources of waters' is in parallel with the abyss, 'And the sea all the way to the abyss will retire, to the sources of waters which never fail.' Plato, *Phaed.* 111D–E; 112C, locates extensive bodies of water under the earth including subterranean rivers, lakes, and seas. These waters rise to the surface of the earth in some places. The literary evidence presented indicates that the springs of water belong under the earth. Consequently, the

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<sup>39</sup> The four-part cosmological formula in Rev 14.7 may be used for stylistic reasons to match the four-fold description of the addressees in the previous verse, the inhabitants of the earth (ἐπὶ πᾶν ἔθνος καὶ φυλὴν καὶ γλῶσσαν καὶ λαόν). Praise of God as Maker of heaven and earth is common in the HB, especially in the Psalms, see 2 Kgs 19.15; 2 Ch 2.12; Ps 115.15; 121.2; 124.8; 134.3; Isa 37.16; 51.13. See also, 2 Macc 7.28; Jdt 13.18; Bel 5. The sea is added in some instances, in which cases a fourth phrase is typically included – καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς; see Ex 20.11; Ps 146.6; Neh 9.6; Acts 4.24; 14.15.

<sup>40</sup> Rüdiger, 'Šāmajim', 95; Horowitz, *Cosmic Geography*, 318–62; Gen 1–2; Deut 8.7; Ps 74; Prov 8.23–9.

<sup>41</sup> Compare Isa 51.10; Ezek 26.19; 31.15.

formula in Rev 14.7 establishes the same four coordinates as the formula in Rev 5.13 (heaven–earth–under the earth–sea) and similarly emphasises the comprehensive nature of God’s creation.

The abyss first appears in Rev 9.1, ‘And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit (ἄβυσσος).’ In this verse it is apparent that the abyss is a region under the earth separated from the surface of the earth by a passageway that is usually locked.<sup>42</sup> In other traditions, the abyss could be located at the ends of the earth, as in 1 En. 17.7–8. The abyss could be thought of as a watery place and associated with the primordial waters of chaos and the cosmic ocean (Jon 2.5; Jub. 2.2, 16; 48.14).<sup>43</sup> The shaft presumably passes through the earth to reach the waters kept at bay below.

In Revelation, the abyss contains destructive forces such as smoke and locusts, which emerge to harm the earth. The king of the locusts is the angel of the abyss named *Abaddon* and *Apollyon*, which can be translated as destruction or destroyer. The Beast also arises from the abyss in Rev 11.7 and Rev 17.8, and the abyss functions as a temporary prison for the Dragon/Satan/the devil in Rev 20.1–3.<sup>44</sup> The abyss may be distinguished from Death and Hades because it is a place for evil beings whereas the latter contain the dead in general.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Jubilees 6.26 describes the mouth of the abyss, which opens and closes to retain or allow passage of water.

<sup>43</sup> In 4QShir<sup>b</sup> XXX, 3, the abyss is associated with the depths of the earth, ‘the heavens and the heavens of heavens and the abysses and the depths of the earth’.

<sup>44</sup> Compare Luke 8.31 and 1 En. 18.10–19.2. Friesen, ‘Symbolic Resistance’, 304, notes the beast Leviathan was thought to dwell in the abyss.

<sup>45</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 156; see also Luke 8.31; 1 En. 10.13; 18.10–19.2. Note that this idea of the abyss overlaps with that of Tartarus, which appears in the NT in 2 Pet 2.4 as the place where disobedient angels were imprisoned. In Virgil, *Aen.* 7.568–571, the Furies emerge from an abyss.

Death and Hades feature as a realm in this sense in Rev 1.18 and again in Rev 20.13–14. In Rev 6.8, Death and Hades are personified as agents of death and envisioned as horsemen.<sup>46</sup>

Death and Hades are always paired in Revelation, with Death the leading term in all four cases.<sup>47</sup> In the HB, Death (מוֹת) and Sheol (שְׁאוֹל) occur in parallel phrasing and the order of the terms varies (Ps 18.4–5; 49.14; 116.3; Isa 28.15, 18; Hos 13.14; Hab 2.5). In Revelation, no distinction is made between the two terms and so they should be taken to refer to the same realm even though when personified they appear as separate individuals. Death and Hades are not explicitly located in Revelation but given their location in the underworld in both Hellenistic and Hebrew traditions they are best imagined in that realm.<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere in the NT, Hades is coordinated as the opposite pole to heaven and thus as a place of punishment, for example, ‘And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades’ (Luke 10.15). It is also associated with torment and fire in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16.23–4). While the personifications of Death and Hades enact judgment on the earth in Rev 6.8, the realm is not associated with fire or identified as a place of punishment in Revelation.

The lake of fire (λίμνη τοῦ πυρός), which is labelled the ‘second death’ in Rev 20.14 and Rev 21.8, is the ultimate place of punishment. The Beast, False Prophet, the devil, and

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<sup>46</sup> In Rev 1.18, the genitives in τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾗδου, could be interpreted as subjective genitives and hence Death and Hades would be personifications here too; however, Aune, *Revelation*, 103–5, argues that the idea of Death or Hades possessing keys is rare and the likely allusion to the goddess Hekate in the description of Christ would support a spatial interpretation of Death and Hades.

<sup>47</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 401, suggests Death comes first because it is to be imagined as the one who reigns over the realm of Hades. Strictly speaking this implies that only Hades should be interpreted spatially.

<sup>48</sup> Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 87 n. 48, there is ambivalence on the location of Hades in Greek authors, and even in the one author. It can be under the earth (Homer, *Il.* 8.13–16; 15.191; Hesiod, *Theog.* 721–745) or at the western end of the earth (Homer, *Il.* 12.240; *Od.* 9.26). In 1 En. 22.1–4, Enoch journeys to the far west and sees a large mountain with four smooth holes in it where the spirits of the dead, both the righteous and the wicked, are kept for the day of judgment.

Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, as are all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life and the immoral people listed in Rev 21.8. It is explicitly stated in Rev 20.10 that the Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet undergo everlasting torment in the lake of fire. The same is not stated regarding the people referred to in Rev 20.15 and Rev 21.8. The casting of Death and Hades into the lake of fire signifies their absence from the new heaven and earth.

Aune notes that there are no references to a lake of fire in Hebrew or Greco-Roman literature but that it does appear in Egyptian texts where it is part of the underworld.<sup>49</sup> He suggests that Egypt may be the source of the concept, though he acknowledges that John himself may have developed the idea by combining other common concepts, such as fire as judgment, underworld rivers of fire, and the Acherusian lake as the place of Hades.<sup>50</sup> A possible influence is the sea of fire, which is seen on a tour of the cosmos in Apoc. Zeph. 6.1–17 (first century BCE to first century CE).<sup>51</sup> In this text the sea of fire is the place of eternal judgment and is identified with both the abyss and Hades. There are also similarities between the lake of fire and gehenna (γέεννα), which is typically translated as ‘hell’; namely, the shared concepts of ultimate punishment, destruction, and fire.<sup>52</sup> However, John chose not to name the realm gehenna. A possible explanation for this is that he wanted to create a space differentiated from others in his cosmology, and gehenna to some extent overlaps with the

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<sup>49</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 1065–7, notes the phrase ‘the second death’ also appears in Egyptian texts.

<sup>50</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 1065–7. There is a subterranean river of fire in Homer, *Od.* 10.512–515, and Plato, *Phaed.* 111D. In *Phaed.* 113A–B, one of the subterranean rivers empties into a region of great fire under the earth and becomes a lake of boiling water and mud. The river is called ‘Pyriphlegethon’ and from it comes the lava of volcanic eruptions.

<sup>51</sup> O. S. Wintermute, ‘Apocalypse of Zephaniah: A New Translation and Introduction’, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha – Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1983) 504, comments that NT influence on the Apocalypse of Zephaniah is unlikely and that parallels are best explained by influence of the text on the NT or a common milieu.

<sup>52</sup> Gehenna occurs in the NT only in the gospels except for Jas 3.6. It is associated with fire in Matt 5.22; 18.9; Mark 9.43; and Jas 3.6, and explicitly with destruction in Matt 10.28.

conception of Hades.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the concept of the lake of fire is more expansive in nature than that of gehenna. Not only is it a place of punishment for Satan (Rev 20.10) and the wicked (Rev 21.8), it also consumes the realm of Death and Hades itself (Rev 20.14).

There is nothing in the text of Revelation that locates the lake of fire in the cosmos. Friesen states that, 'The Lake of Fire cannot be systematically integrated into the three kinds of space. It remains a paradox.'<sup>54</sup> He defines it ontologically in opposition to heaven, which is the place of absolute being, whereby it becomes the place of the annihilation of being.<sup>55</sup> This definition makes the lake of fire a space without a definite place, in the cosmology of Revelation it is 'off the map'.<sup>56</sup> The cosmic tour in 1 Enoch may illustrate the idea. In 1 En. 18.10–21.6, Enoch is taken beyond the ends of the earth to a fearful place where there is neither heaven above nor earth below. There he sees seven stars like burning mountains imprisoned until the final judgment. Beyond that place he sees a fiery abyss where those stars will be punished forever and the region is described as desolate and chaotic (1 En. 18.12).<sup>57</sup> The concepts of fire and everlasting punishment, its extra-cosmic location, and its nature as the antithesis of life, all correspond to Revelation's lake of fire. In conclusion, the region under the earth features spaces which in other early Jewish and Christian writings conceptually overlap each other. In Revelation, however, these realms are not identified with each other but are differentiated to accommodate their functions in the text, for example, as a setting associated with characters. The one unifying notion of the region is its association

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<sup>53</sup> Milikowsky, 'Which Gehenna?', 240, distinguishes two concepts of gehenna in early Jewish and Christian writings, one a place of immediate post-mortem punishment of wicked souls, the other a corporeal place where body and soul suffer post resurrection.

<sup>54</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 157.

<sup>55</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 157.

<sup>56</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 38, speaks of the lake of fire as an unclassifiable space.

<sup>57</sup> Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 288–9, suggests the chaotic state may be an allusion to the primordial chaos of Gen 1.2 as the same Greek word, ἀκατασκεύαστος, is used in both 1 Enoch and Gen 1.2 (LXX).

with evil and death. The realm under the earth is their source but also the place of their eventual punishment and abolition.

#### 7.1.5) *Excursus: The Use of Cosmological Formulae in Revelation*

In addition to the word κόσμος, cosmological formulae are used to denote the cosmos as a whole in Revelation.<sup>58</sup> A cosmological formula is an example of a merism in which contrasting or key parts of the cosmos are used to denote the whole. The most common examples are ‘heaven and earth’ or ‘heaven, earth, and under the earth’. Cosmological formulae commonly appear in poetic texts or those with an elevated style as well as in texts with mythological and theological subject matter.<sup>59</sup> E. G. Schmidt observes that they appear with similar form and function in texts from ancient Greece and the ancient Near East.<sup>60</sup> They vary in the number of parts used, typically from two to four, as well as in the choice of parts featured. The form of the cosmological formula used may relate to stylistic preference or, as Hardie has argued for Virgil’s *Aeneid*, to develop a theme.<sup>61</sup>

Cosmological formulae appear seven times in Revelation. This number includes instances where the terms are separated by a copulative as well as those where there are intervening words or phrases.<sup>62</sup> They will be classified here by the number of parts in the formula. It should be noted that this does not always correspond to the number of cosmic tiers connoted in the expression, for example, heaven–earth–sea has three parts but refers to only two cosmic tiers.

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<sup>58</sup> These phrases can also be called universal expressions; as in Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 293.

<sup>59</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 293.

<sup>60</sup> Schmidt, ‘Himmel-Meer-Erde’, 23.

<sup>61</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 294, though he concedes that in some instances a stylistic explanation is more fitting.

<sup>62</sup> Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 193–9, classifies the heaven-earth formula as ‘copulative’ when there is only a copulative separating the terms, ‘thematic’ when other words intervene, and ‘implied’ when one of the contrasting terms is missing but is implied by the context.



#### 7.1.5.a) *The Two-part Cosmological Formula*

The most basic cosmological formula is the two-part ‘heaven and earth’ expression. Hardie suggests its widespread use relates to the human tendency to conceive of reality in binary oppositions.<sup>63</sup> Pennington argues that it also reflects the bipartite cosmology which was the primitive and foundational conception in ancient Near Eastern traditions.<sup>64</sup> Its use can also be accounted for in stylistic terms as an abbreviated form of the more comprehensive formulae and for this reason it should not be assumed that its use denies the existence of other realms, such as the underworld.<sup>65</sup> The formula occurs twice in Revelation, both times in Rev 21.1, a verse which contrasts the new heaven and earth with the first heaven and earth. The two-part formula here echoes Isa 65.17 (LXX), ἔσται γὰρ ὁ οὐρανὸς καινὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ καινή.<sup>66</sup>

In Rev 20.11, the same terms appear in the reverse order, that is, ‘earth and heaven’. Houtman has observed that in the HB, this order occurs 52 times compared with 131 for heaven then earth, and has suggested stylistic reasons for the differing usage including to form a chiasmus or for variety.<sup>67</sup> In this instance, however, the phrasing should not be taken

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<sup>63</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 295. Annette Krüger, ‘Himmel-Erde-Unterwelt: Kosmologische Entwürfe in der poetischen Literatur Israels’, *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Beate Ego; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 66, notes it is the most common formula in the HB.

<sup>64</sup> Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 170–80, citing Keel, *Symbolism*, 30, for support regarding Egyptian and Mesopotamian conceptions. Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 126; and Wright, *Early History*, 53, consider the tripartite cosmology foundational. Houtman, *Der Himmel*, 283–99, suggests there were co-existing disparate conceptions in Israel’s *Weltbild*.

<sup>65</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 293.

<sup>66</sup> The absence of the article with the terms for heaven and earth in Rev 21.1 may be influenced by the lack of the article in the Masoretic Text of Isaiah; see also, 1 En. 91.16.

<sup>67</sup> Houtman, *Der Himmel*, 51–4.

as a cosmological formula but to connote the parts separately.<sup>68</sup> The context of the terms is a vision of cosmic collapse in which the cosmos is disintegrated. The earth is the realm more distant to the great white throne in heaven and so it fractures and departs before heaven which is nearer to it.

#### 7.1.5.b) *The Three-part Cosmological Formula*

A three-part cosmological formula first occurs in Rev 5.3, where John learns that no one in heaven, on earth, or under the earth can open the sealed scroll. Elsewhere in the NT, a similar formula appears only in Phil 2.10 where, like Rev 5.3, it refers to the entirety of space in the cosmos that can be occupied by sentient beings.<sup>69</sup> The realm under the earth is included to eliminate the possibility of a deceased human, or perhaps a deity or angel, being worthy to open the scroll. Hardie, speaking about Greco-Roman literature, suggests that the inclusion of the underworld in cosmological formulae introduces a mythological dimension to the concept of the cosmos.<sup>70</sup> It may be that the underworld is included in the expression in Rev 5.3 to assert the superiority of Christ over gods and heroes acknowledged in other mythologies. We are later told that the Beast rises from the abyss (Rev 11.7) and it may be that this figure and what it represents, that is, Rome and its emperors, are being precluded. In this instance, the cosmological formula conveys a point about the entirety of created beings and could be

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<sup>68</sup> This interpretation is supported by the use of the plural pronoun (αὐτοῖς) instead of the singular at the end of the verse. If the cosmos in its entirety was being imagined a singular pronoun could have been used to emphasise the fact.

<sup>69</sup> This formula also appears in Ignatius, *Tralles* 9.1, where the realms are places for sentient beings, ‘He was truly crucified, and truly died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth.’

<sup>70</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 294. Adler, *Vergil’s Empire*, 13, suggests that physiologic poetry, which describes the physical operation of the cosmos, prefers a cosmology consisting of sky, earth, and sea, whereas political poetry, such as Virgil’s *Aeneid*, uses the four-part cosmos of sky, earth, sea, and underworld. She suggests that political poetry does this to utilise the fear of the underworld in accounting for the necessity of the empire.

expressed in modern terms by a combination of other oppositions; physical and spiritual, living and dead, and good and evil.

Another form of the three-part cosmological formula, heaven–earth–sea, appears in Rev 10.6 and Rev 12.12. This formula is used in the HB to denote the creation or to call for praise from all creation (Ex 20.4, 11; Deut 5.8; Neh 9.6; Ps 69.34; 96.11; 146.6; Amos 9.6).<sup>71</sup> A similar use occurs in ancient Greek and Roman literature and in the NT (Homer, *Il.* 18.483; Virgil, *Aen.* 6.724; Ovid, *Metam.* 2.6–7; *Fast.* 5.11–14; Manilius, *Ast.* 2.61; and Acts 4.24; 14.15). In Acts, there is usually a fourth phrase to denote the inhabitants of each realm, as in Acts 4.24, ‘Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them’. In Rev 10.6, the inhabitants are mentioned following each realm, ‘who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it’. Both the selection of the three cosmic realms and the separate reference to their inhabitants reflects the cosmogony of Gen 1 in which cosmic spaces are first created and then filled.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, it may be that the underworld is not included in Rev 10.6 because the realm does not feature in the Genesis account, and perhaps also to avoid attributing to God the creation of the realm associated with death.<sup>73</sup> The three-part formula is used in this verse in a scene in which an angel swears an oath. In the HB and other Jewish literature, heaven and earth are mentioned as witnesses to oaths (Gen 14.22; 24.3; Deut 4.26; 31.28; 32.1; 2 Bar. 19.1; and T. Moses

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<sup>71</sup> It also appears in Jdt 9.12–13 and Jub. 2.2. See discussion in Krüger, ‘Himmel-Erde-Unterwelt’, 66–8.

<sup>72</sup> There is an explicit reference to Gen 1 in the use of this formula in Ex 20.11.

<sup>73</sup> Death and Hades are ultimately cast into the lake of fire in Rev 20.14, which suggests they are not a feature of the original creation deemed to be ‘good’. Keel, *Symbolism*, 30, notes that the bipartite cosmic formula is used in the Psalms when the cosmos is the object of God’s creation, suggesting the place of the dead was thought to be of lesser reality.

3.12).<sup>74</sup> Schmidt finds the use of this three-part formula common in oaths in early Greek epic literature, which Hardie also observes in his study on the *Aeneid*.<sup>75</sup>

#### 7.1.5.c) *The Four-part Cosmological Formula*

There are two four-part cosmological formulae in Revelation; ‘heaven, earth, under the earth, and sea’ (Rev 5.13), and ‘heaven, earth, sea, and springs of the deep’ (Rev 14.7). Such formulae are sometimes labelled the ‘comprehensive formula’ as they are generally the fullest partite cosmic descriptor.<sup>76</sup> The greater number of parts gives the impression of an exhaustive list which emphasises the totality of the cosmos as well as its unity. In Rev 5.13, the realm under the earth is inserted into the three-part formula, typically used in contexts of praise to God as the creator (heaven–earth–sea), to get, ‘Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them’.<sup>77</sup> The inclusion of the realm under the earth in the vision of universal worship of the Lamb is difficult to make sense of since the text only located evil beings there and there is no suggestion the realm exists in the new creation of Rev 21, unless the lake of fire is intended. It is probably best to consider the use of the formula as an example of a literary flourish amounting to ‘all beings wherever they might be’.

In Rev 14.7, the fourth part of the cosmos mentioned is the springs of water (πηγᾶς ὑδάτων). In this formulation, the article occurs with the first two terms but not the second two

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<sup>74</sup> Also, Jas 5.12, and for discussion, see Aune, *Revelation*, 565.

<sup>75</sup> Schmidt, ‘Himmel-Meer-Erde’, 3, and Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 323. Juno/Hera swears with one hand on earth and one on sea to invoke all the gods of the underworld in the oath; see Homer, *Il.* 14.272; and Plautus, *Trin.* 1070.

<sup>76</sup> For example, Hesiod, *Theog.* 736, 807.

<sup>77</sup> Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 61 n. 92, sees this formula as a list of realms in descending order, thus the sea should be taken as the abyss to get heaven > earth > under the earth > abyss, though it is unclear why John did not simply use the word abyss if that was the intention. Furthermore, 1 Clem. 20 features the cosmological formula with the order: the heavens, the earth, the underworld/abysses, and the sea.

(τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν καὶ πηγὰς ὑδάτων), which may indicate there are two pairings; heaven and earth, and, the sea and springs of water. The springs of water are the source of water under the earth which provides for both the sea and land-borne bodies of water. In Ps 135.6, there is a similar formula with heaven, earth, and sea followed by a reference to the abysses. In Revelation, springs of the deep may have been substituted for the abyss to allude to the realm under the earth while avoiding stating that God created the underworld.<sup>78</sup> Avoiding that suggestion is especially important at this point in the narrative because the abyss has been associated with an angel of destruction (Rev 9.11) and the Beast (Rev 11.7). The fourth part of the formula may have been included for the sake of symmetry with the previous verse where there is a four-fold description of the inhabitants of the earth, ‘to every nation and tribe and language and people’ (Rev 14.6).

#### *7.1.5.d) Conclusions: The Function of Cosmological Formulae in Revelation*

Cosmological formulae help to define and to reinforce the cosmological setting in the narrative of Revelation. The cosmos has four major dimensions in three levels; heaven at the top, earth and the sea below, and the underworld below these. These dimensions feature in various combinations in cosmological formulae which are employed for stylistic effect or to represent the structure of the cosmos in a way that supports the development of the narrative; for example, by establishing a setting to accommodate characters and their action in the plot. The three and four-part formulae contribute to the theme of the universal power of God and Christ by emphasising the totality of the domain over which they reign.<sup>79</sup> Schmidt states that cosmological formulae are generally used in the context of praising the gods for their power

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<sup>78</sup> In 1 Clem. 20, the author is comfortable to assert that the underworld abides by God’s law but the creation of the realm is not attributed to God.

<sup>79</sup> As in Schmidt, ‘Himmel-Meer-Erde’, 1–24.

over the cosmos.<sup>80</sup> In Revelation, only the Lamb is worthy in the whole cosmos, God and the Lamb are praised by the whole cosmos, and God is the maker of the whole cosmos.

## 7.2) The Cosmos as Setting in the Narrative of Revelation

In section 7.1, the cosmology of Revelation was described in detail, now it will be discussed as the setting of the narrative. It will be argued that in Revelation the cosmos is structured and characterised as a setting to facilitate the representation of a competition for space between the primary rivals of the text, those being God and Christ on the one hand and Satan and his Beasts on the other. Resseguie defines setting as the background against which a narrative takes place, and states that it may include geographical, topographical, architectural, religious, political, cultural, social, temporal, and spatial dimensions.<sup>81</sup> In the present discussion the primary focus will be the spatial dimension of setting. Seymour Chatman has stated that the main function of setting in a narrative is to establish mood and lists other possible functions including to establish symbolism, reveal characters, determine conflict, and provide structure to the story.<sup>82</sup> These functions of the setting will be discussed in relation to Revelation where they are relevant. In his study on spatiality in 1 Enoch, Pieter Venter commented that space in a story not only provides a necessary setting for characters and events but also conveys an ideological perspective through coordinating the existence and operation of various powers in the cosmos.<sup>83</sup> In Revelation, the cosmos as setting is highly significant in the text's ideology as it structures the relationships between God, Satan, Rome and provincial authorities, and the saints of the churches. It is also a key component of

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<sup>80</sup> Schmidt, 'Himmel-Meer-Erde', 10. Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 313–22, cites nineteen instances of the 'heaven, earth, and sea' formula in the *Aeneid* and comments that it is used by Virgil to express the universal lordship of Jupiter.

<sup>81</sup> Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 87.

<sup>82</sup> Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 141–3; and Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 70.

<sup>83</sup> Venter 'Spatiality', 212.

the rhetorical strategy of the text.<sup>84</sup> In Revelation, the cosmos is disputed territory claimed by rival powers, ultimately God and Satan, but also manifest in a contest between the saints and the Beast to justify their position on earth.

The text of Revelation consists of a long narration of John's visions embedded within an epistolary frame. Within the epistolary frame, John introduces his visions by briefly detailing the situation in which they were received (Rev 1.9–12). Setting can be considered at multiple narrative levels in Revelation: a) John sends a letter from an unknown location to churches in Asia; b) John is on Patmos receiving visions; and c) The visions themselves. The function of the cosmos as setting at each of these narrative levels will be discussed following the structure of the text outlined in section 3.3 (and see Appendix 1 for a diagram).

#### *7.2.1) The Epistolary Frame (Rev 1.1–8; 22.21)*

In the epistolary frame, the setting is established by the implied action of John writing a letter to the seven churches of Asia about an event that happened sometime in the past, namely, his reception of prophetic visions. John's location in writing is not given in the text and so it is the nominated recipients who establish the geographic setting for the narrative in the province of Asia.<sup>85</sup> The epistolary form gives the text a feel of everyday, earthly reality while the motif of divine revelation and mention of the angelic messenger (Rev 1.1) introduces the sense of transcendence and establishes a heaven and earth dynamic in the setting. The transcendence of heaven is emphasised by the multiple stages of transmission involved in relaying the revelation; from God to Jesus Christ to his angel to his servant John

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<sup>84</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 16.

<sup>85</sup> Aune, 'Social Matrix', 27, notes that while Ephesus is considered the likely place of John's residence when he composed the text, the text itself is silent on the matter.

and finally to the seven churches.<sup>86</sup> Heaven is not explicitly mentioned in this section, however, identities associated with heaven are mentioned such as God, Jesus Christ, the seven spirits, and angels.<sup>87</sup> Also mentioned is the divine throne, which was typically envisioned in heaven. The throne is the only heavenly feature of this section, apart from divine beings, making it the dominant feature of heaven and characterising heaven as the place of divine authority. Heaven is also the source of knowledge about events on earth, which characterises it as the ultimate source of wisdom.

Earth (γῆ) is mentioned twice (Rev 1.5, 7), in each case as a genitive adjectival modifier of a group of people; the kings of the earth (τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς) and the peoples of the earth (αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς).<sup>88</sup> The use of τῆς γῆς signifies totality and in context emphasises the universality of Christ's rule. In some texts, τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς represent the authorities of the earth in opposition to God's reign and in most occurrences of the phrase in Revelation they are hostile to God.<sup>89</sup> In this section, the earth is portrayed as being subjugated to Christ's heavenly authority but there is also the suggestion of its hostility to that rule. The cosmic setting and the heaven and earth context of the divine revelation has established *gravitas* in the mood. Some symbolism has been established in relation to the cosmos; heaven is the place of authority and wisdom and there is the suggestion of hostility to heaven on earth. The dualistic cosmos establishes the potential for conflict, and tension between the realms is heightened by locating characters with authority in opposing realms; that is, God in heaven and the kings on earth. The epistolary frame also grounds the narrative

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<sup>86</sup> Adler, 'Introduction', 12–15, suggests that early Christians viewed Jewish apocalypses as esoteric wisdom and that the rhetorical function of the esotericism was to inculcate a sense of prestige in the recipients. The summary of the transmission of the visions in Revelation may have had a similar function.

<sup>87</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 40, comments that the seven spirits are seven angels and not the Holy Spirit.

<sup>88</sup> The phrase αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς only occurs here in Revelation, elsewhere the expression τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς is the preferred designation for the inhabitants of earth. The expression alludes to Matt 24.30, where πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς represent humanity in hostility to God.

<sup>89</sup> On the expression, see Ps 2.2; Isa 24.21; T. Moses 8.1; Acts 4.26.



in a sociohistorical setting which, as the vision narratives unfold, invites the audience to find symbolic relationships between features of the visions and that setting.<sup>90</sup>

### 7.2.2) *The Visions of Christ (Rev 1.9–20; 22.7, 12–20)*

Before relaying the visions, John reports that he received them on the island of Patmos, which is located off the coast of Asia near the seven cities mentioned in the text. He also explains that he was there διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ. There are differing views on whether the preposition διὰ indicates result or purpose; the former possibly suggesting John was in exile on Patmos because of his prophetic activity, the second that he may have travelled there in order to receive a prophetic revelation.<sup>91</sup> Based on the text itself, the former seems likely given John's self-designation as a partner in tribulation and perseverance in the opening of the verse. David Barr suggests the setting on Patmos has symbolic significance because an island is a transitional space, between land and sea, which reflects John's transitional state between the ordinary world and the visionary.<sup>92</sup> It may be that the symbolic value of the island setting lies in its separation from the mainland and hence remote quality that makes it akin to a desert region in being suitable for visionary experiences. There is also a psychological and a temporal setting established in Rev 1.10, 'I was in the spirit on the Lord's day'.<sup>93</sup> John's elevated psychological state, the timing on a

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<sup>90</sup> For example, in apocalypses beasts typically symbolise empires and so when they are introduced in Revelation the audience would think of Rome, the dominant empire at the time.

<sup>91</sup> Bousset, *Die Offenbarung*, 191–2; Theodor Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1924–1926) 187–8; Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1.21–2; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 55; Aune, *Revelation*, 81–2; DeSilva, 'Social Setting', 286; and Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 172–3.

<sup>92</sup> Barr, *Tales of the End*, 62.

<sup>93</sup> Reference to the Lord's day (ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ) is unique to the NT here, though in the second century it became a common way for Christians to refer to Sunday. On the significance of the day, see Collins, 'Numerical Symbolism', 1276. The reference to being in spirit (ἐν πνεύματι), in addition to describing John's psychological state, tells the audience that he physically remains on Patmos.

significant day of the week, a remote location, as well as the undisclosed tribulation that brought John to Patmos, together function to enhance the gravity of the mood.

In Rev 1.11, the voice which addresses John draws attention to the setting in Asia by listing the names of the seven churches of Asia that were previously alluded to. Following this, John narrates the vision of the ‘One like a Son of Man’. Apart from characterising the Christ figure as awesome and glorious, the vision defines the spatial dimension of the seven churches in a heaven and earth dynamic. It is not until Rev 4.1 that John is called up to heaven and so in Rev 1–3 he is on earth. In Rev 1.12, John turned to see the voice that had just named the seven cities but he first sees the seven lampstands which are before the figure. The lampstands, which we are later told correspond to the seven churches, are around the figure who stands in their midst (ἐν μέσῳ). The lampstands and the feet of the Son of Man constitute the earthly domain. The golden lampstand was a feature of the tabernacle and the Temple and could symbolise the entire Temple (Ex 25.31–40; 1 Chron 28.15–16; Zech 4.2–14).<sup>94</sup> Temple imagery was applied to the church in early Christian writings and so it is not surprising that the lampstands represent the churches.<sup>95</sup>

The heavenly dimension is established by the upper periphery of the vision, which is occupied by the seven stars held in the Son of Man’s right hand. The seven stars are a typical way of representing the heavenly or astral realm.<sup>96</sup> John is also told that the stars represent the angels associated with each of the churches.<sup>97</sup> The concept of parallel and corresponding realities in heaven and on earth is supported by the image of the lampstand which had seven

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<sup>94</sup> The captured menorah was a symbol of the destroyed Temple on the Arch of Titus.

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, 1 Cor 3.16; 2 Cor 6.16; Eph 2.21.

<sup>96</sup> For discussion, see Aune, *Revelation*, 97–8; Mauser, “‘Heaven’”, 33; and Benedikt Otzen, ‘Heavenly Visions in Early Judaism: Origin and Function’, *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature* (ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 206.

<sup>97</sup> Stars represent angels in Jdg 5.20, where in the Song of Deborah and Barak the stars are said to fight for Israel. The idea of an angel associated with each church probably developed from the ancient Near Eastern idea that nations had representative angels in heaven, see Collins, ‘Son of Man’, 55–6.

branches and was understood by both Jewish and Christian interpreters to symbolise the heavenly dimension of the cosmos, which in the ancient world was believed to consist of seven planets.<sup>98</sup>

There is a reference to the underworld in Rev 1.18 where the Son of Man declares he holds the keys of Death and Hades. As Aune proposes, there is probably an allusion to the goddess Hekate, who also held the keys to the underworld, thereby presenting the Son of Man as a cosmic figure with power over heaven, earth, and the underworld.<sup>99</sup> It should be noted, however, that while there is a reference to the realm it is not a major feature of the vision of the Son of Man, and the heaven and earth duality remains the primary spatial setting at this point. The visionary space has an above–below structure, though as Resseguie observes, a centre–periphery structure may also be discerned with the Son of Man figure central to the lampstands/churches on the periphery.<sup>100</sup>

In the opening visions of Christ, the heaven and earth structure of the cosmos is reinforced but also developed. The spatial realm of the seven churches is a heaven and earth duality defined by the body of the Son of Man, which also connects the realms. The application of Temple imagery to the churches as well as their association with the Christ figure establishes a space on earth with positive connotations in contrast to the negative portrayal of the earth in the previous section. Thus, the cosmic setting becomes more complex. The earth becomes a differentiated space, which allows for plot development and

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<sup>98</sup> Philo, *QE* 2.73, 78, 81, 104; Josephus, *B.J.* 5.217; and Clement, *Strom.* 5.6. Manilius, *Ast.* 1.535–538, states that the seven stars, that is, the planets, sun, and moon, lie between heaven and earth, meaning they are below the constellations that are fixed in the heavenly vault. Cicero, *Rep.* 6.17–19, written before the *Astronomica*, reflects the same concept of the cosmos.

<sup>99</sup> See Aune, *Revelation*, 104, for a discussion of the imagery and the relationship to Hekate. Hekate is related to heaven, earth, and sea in Hesiod, *Theog.* 411–415, and as one with power in heaven and hell in Virgil, *Aen.* 6.247. Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995) 72–3, suggests the imagery depicts the Son of Man figure as the ‘polokrator’ who holds the seven pivotal stars of the astronomical sphere in his right hand and turns the pole of heaven and earth.

<sup>100</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 38–9.

characterisation; the former because tension in the plot arises from conflict in the earthly realm, and the latter because characters are developed through their association with spaces in the cosmos. Also, the existence of the churches on earth creates the possibility of alignment between heaven and earth and so an element of hopefulness is introduced.

### 7.2.3) *The Messages to the Churches (Rev 2.1–3.22)*

The messages to the churches consist of seven oracles, sometimes labelled letters, sent from Christ to seven churches of cities in the province of Asia.<sup>101</sup> Each oracle opens with a reference to the angel of the church and a statement about Christ. These introductions recall the opening vision of the Son of Man and reinforce that vision's heavenly and earthly setting in which Christ is the central figure. In Rev 2–3, the earthly tension implied in the previous two sections becomes more explicit. For those in the churches at least, the earth is a place of hardship, suffering, and temptation. Opposition to the churches comes from the Synagogue of Satan and temptation from Jezebel and the Nicolaitans. Furthermore, those who will face trial and testing are labelled 'earth-dwellers' (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) (Rev 3.10). The contrast between heaven and earth is made starker by locating the promised rewards in the heavenly realm, including: the tree of life (Rev 2.7); the heavenly New Jerusalem (Rev 3.12); and the heavenly throne (Rev 3.21).<sup>102</sup> As tension within the earthly realm and between heaven and earth increases, the mood becomes graver, yet despondency is avoided by the promised rewards, even though the rewards are distant in space and time.

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<sup>101</sup> David E. Aune, 'The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2–3)', *NTS* 36 (1990) 97.

<sup>102</sup> The text locates the tree of life in paradise, which in early Jewish thought was in heaven. In 2 Cor 12.1–4 it is in the third heaven.

#### 7.2.4) *The Vision of the Throne, the Lamb, and the Scroll (Rev 4.1–5.14)*

So far, the earth has been the focal point of the setting but from Rev 4 onwards heaven becomes the focus from the point at which John is instructed to ‘Come up here’ (ἀνάβα ὧδε) by the Son of Man (Rev 4.1). Following the command John finds himself at once in heaven. In heaven, the first object John sees is a throne (Rev 4.2), from there his vision moves to the one seated on the throne and the beings and objects that surround it. In this way, the narrative reinforces the heavenly throne as the centre of heaven but also of the whole cosmos when the section ends with the scene of universal worship of God and the Lamb on the throne, ‘Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”’ (Rev 5.13).<sup>103</sup> The transition to a heavenly setting with the throne as the focal point follows a reference to the throne in the final promise to the victor (ὁ νικῶν) in Rev 3.21, ‘To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.’ Revelation 4–5 narrates the Son of Man’s conquest, describing how the Son of Man/Lamb came to take *his* place at the throne of God. Though we are not told that he sits on the throne, his victory makes him eligible to open the seals of the scroll, a process which initiates a series of judgments which eventually leads to the final conquest of the earth when the heavenly throne is relocated to earth in the closing chapters.

While the discussion of setting in this section is primarily concerned with space, it is worth noting that a shift in temporal setting takes place. The shift is not simply from present to future but involves a change in the type of time. The oracles to the seven churches follow a pattern of describing the present circumstances for each community followed by an

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<sup>103</sup> See also Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 38–9, and compare Ps 103.19–22, where the establishment of God’s throne in heaven leads to an exhortation for the whole cosmos to praise God starting with the heavenly beings and expanding to all creatures of the cosmos.

exhortation and a promise of reward to the victorious. There is the present time of hardship, trial, and promise to be followed by the time of judgment, reward, and fulfillment. At Rev 4.1, the setting shifts from the present to the time of fulfillment at the eschaton when the victory of the Son of Man is manifest.<sup>104</sup> Just as the visions that follow Rev 4.1 take place in a distinct temporal setting, so too there is a corresponding spatial shift from earth to heaven. To see the things that happen ‘after these things’ (μετὰ ταῦτα) John must go up to heaven.<sup>105</sup> Heaven is an appropriate setting for such visions because of its transcendent nature which means that things can be seen in heaven that are hidden on earth and so it offers a new perspective on earthly events.

Heavenly space is arranged around God seated on the throne among the heavenly beings, which include the four living creatures, the seven spirits, and the twenty-four elders. As the cosmic centre, the heavenly throne acts as a point of reference against which all other realities are measured. The oracles of Rev 2–3 are an expression of that order with authoritative messages sent from the centre to the periphery.<sup>106</sup> The Son of Man is associated with the centre and the churches of the seven cities of Asia are therefore in a peripheral relationship to heaven. The centre–periphery structure of the cosmos means that earthly entities such as the churches, and the earth-dwellers in general, can be characterised spatially in terms of cosmic alignment or nonalignment.

Through the vision of the heavenly throne room, heaven is established as the default point of view for the extended series of visions that follow commencing in Rev 6. Following the instruction to ‘come up here’ in Rev 4.1, John remains in heaven until he is again instructed to ‘come’ and is taken to a desert to see the great prostitute (Rev 17.1–3), and then

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<sup>104</sup> This significant shift in time is indicated by a strong textual marker (μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον) in Rev 4.1.

<sup>105</sup> Note the coordination of spatial and temporal transcendence, which are two definitional characteristics of apocalypses; see Collins, ‘Introduction’, 9.

<sup>106</sup> Marshall, ‘Who’s on the Throne?’, 127.

again to a great and high mountain to see the bride of the Lamb (Rev 21.9–10).

Consequently, the visions of Rev 4–16 are experienced in and seen from heaven.<sup>107</sup> However, despite heaven being the default point of view the earth is the primary focus.<sup>108</sup> From Rev 6, the earth is the object of the judgments issued from heaven and even in Rev 4–5 there are reminders of earth even as our attention is lifted to heaven. Firstly, it is only ‘in spirit’ (ἐν πνεύματι) that John is taken to heaven, his body remains on Patmos. Secondly, there are heavenly representatives of earthly realities, namely, the twenty-four elders who hold bowls of incense which are the prayers of the saints.<sup>109</sup> Through these representatives the faithful of the earth participate in heavenly worship. Finally, the praises of the whole world rise to be heard in heaven (Rev 5.13). So while the visionary activity takes place in heaven our attention is repeatedly turned back to earth.

There is mention of the underworld in the two uses of a cosmological formula in this section; Rev 5.3, ‘And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it’, and Rev 5.13, ‘Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them’. In both cases the formula is used to refer to the cosmos in its totality, firstly to exclude the possibility of any other being that is worthy to open the scroll and secondly to include all creation in worship.<sup>110</sup> The underworld will later become a significant setting but at this point it simply serves to highlight the supreme importance of heaven.

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<sup>107</sup> Aune, ‘Court Ceremonial’, 7, notes that the narrative refers to features found in the throne room including the altar (Rev 6.9), the innumerable host before the throne (Rev 7.9–17), and the offering of incense on the altar before the throne (Rev 8.3–5).

<sup>108</sup> This is an aspect of the connectedness between heaven and earth described in Minear, ‘Cosmology of the Apocalypse’, 25–6.

<sup>109</sup> According to Scott, *On Earth as in Heaven*, 4, 34, a similar idea occurs in Jubilees, which has angels acting as priests in heaven as the counterparts of the Levites and priests on earth; see Jub. 30.18–20; 31.13–15.

<sup>110</sup> On the use of the tripartite and comprehensive cosmological formula, see section 7.1.5.

Aune has drawn attention to similarities in the depiction of the heavenly throne room in Rev 4–5 and ceremonial activities of the Roman imperial court, concluding that the scene in Revelation can only be a parody of the latter.<sup>111</sup> John was probably also drawing on Jewish traditions such as Isa 6.1–7 which describes God on a throne in heaven.<sup>112</sup> Nonetheless, the symbolism of heaven as a palace sets up a comparison with the earthly power of Rome, especially once allusions are made to Rome later in the text.<sup>113</sup> In this way, the setting contributes to the rhetoric involving an antithetical relationship between God’s power and imperial power. It should also be noted that while the throne establishes the concept of heaven as a palace, the primary function of heaven is as a temple. It is a place where offerings are made on an altar and hymns of praise are declared.<sup>114</sup>

#### *7.2.5) The Series of Seven Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls (Rev 6–16)*

At this point, we will break from following the narrative in a strictly sequential way to discuss together the development of setting in the three septets of judgments; the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls. There are three textual units that may be considered excurses that will be discussed in section 7.2.6.<sup>115</sup> This approach will be taken because the setting develops in a consistent way in the three septets while the excurses present some unique developments, especially Rev 12–15. In all three septets, a symbolic action takes place at the heavenly throne which results in various judgments falling upon the earth. These actions are the opening of a seal, the sounding of a trumpet, and the pouring out of a bowl. The impact of the

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<sup>111</sup> Aune, ‘Court Ceremonial’, 5.

<sup>112</sup> Wright, *Early History*, 76. In the HB, see Isa 6.1–7.

<sup>113</sup> Explicit references to a throne on earth are in Rev 2.13 (Satan’s throne in Pergamum) and Rev 16.10 (the Beast’s throne). All other references to the throne, equalling forty of forty-two in Revelation, are to the throne of God.

<sup>114</sup> The heavenly altar is mentioned in Rev 6.9; 8.3, 5; 9.13; 14.18; 16.7.

<sup>115</sup> Namely, Rev 7; 10–11; 12–15.



dramatic and violent judgments brought upon the earth from heaven is to escalate the pre-existing tension between these realms into outright conflict. The extreme tension between the two becomes apparent with the opening of the sixth seal. The entire cosmos is shaken and the firmament of heaven is rolled back to remove the barrier between heaven and earth and the earth-dwellers hide in caves and under rocks and say, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb' (Rev 6.16). Those belonging to the earth find the mere sight of heaven unbearable.

In contrast to the order of heaven in Rev 4–5, the earthly realm in Rev 6–16 is shown to be fragile and vulnerable as chaos and destruction overcome it with the judgments from heaven. Even the earth's fixed points of reference are moved from their place, including the stars of the sky, the mountains on land, and the islands at sea. In this section, the basic representation of the cosmos as 'heaven and earth' becomes more complex with the differentiation of space in the earthly realm. This differentiation accommodates a multiplication of judgments and gives the impression of total devastation. The realm of the earth includes the sea, mountains, islands, rivers, caves, and trees. Interestingly, the meteorological and astrological components of the heavenly realm are also impacted by the judgments from heaven. For example, the sun turns black, the moon blood-red, and fiery hail falls on the earth (Rev 6.12; 8.7). The abyss appears in Rev 9.1–11 as a place from which locusts ruled by an angel called Abaddon or Apollyon, meaning destruction, emerge to scourge those living on earth. The abyss is not set in opposition to heaven, as in the popular modern notion of heaven and hell, rather it is the place of concealed and contained forces of chaos which are released at the bidding of God in heaven. The 'ends of the earth' is introduced as a cosmological region in Rev 7.1 and, like the abyss, is a region containing destructive forces. Winds at the four corners of the earth are temporarily held back by angels. So too, the Euphrates connotes the eastern end of the civilised world and beyond it angels and the kings of the earth are restrained. The impact is to present the earth as a place

surrounded by hostile destructive forces such that it is vulnerable to attack not only from above but also from below and the periphery.

In the three judgment septets, there emerges a comprehensive depiction of the ancient Near Eastern cosmos; earth and sea with an underlying abyss, the winds at four corners of the earth, a sky/heaven containing clouds, the sun, moon and stars, and above the heavenly firmament the throne room of God. Most of the features of the cosmos are generic in nature; for example, there are mountains, trees, rivers, and the sea but no particular geographic identifiers. The reference to the Euphrates may be an exception, though by the late first century the Euphrates was a typical referent for the boundary of the οἰκουμένη and so it is fitting in a mythological representation of the cosmos.<sup>116</sup> The mythological setting increases the gravity of the mood by suggesting the events have a kind of cosmogonic significance. This is an idea which will be developed at a later point of the present thesis, including the section to follow. The mood becomes increasingly tense with the escalation of the tension between heaven and earth along with the characterisation of the earth as a vulnerable realm surrounded by hostile forces.

#### 7.2.6) *The Excurses (Rev 7; 10–11; 12–15)*

The three sections considered excurses are: Rev 7.1–17, which lies between the sixth and seventh seal; Rev 10.1–11.14, between the sixth and seventh trumpet; and Rev 12.1–15.8, between the septet of trumpets and the septet of bowls. They share a common interest in the place of the saints in the cosmos and in these sections the symbolism of heaven is developed as a place of refuge and safety. Revelation 12 is significant because it operates as a cosmogony for the text's setting, explaining how the cosmos which features throughout most

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<sup>116</sup> See, for example, Strabo, *Geogr.* 11.6.4, 11.9.2–3; Philo, *Legat.* 10–11; Sib. Or. 4.119–24, and discussion in Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 27, 53–5.

of the narrative came to be.<sup>117</sup> Revelation 7 opens with the image of the earth as a vulnerable place surrounded by threatening forces on the verge of catastrophic change. The previous chapter concluded by asking the question, ‘who is able to stand?’ given the wrath of the Lamb, and in Rev 7 comes the response. The servants of God on earth are sealed for protection in Rev 7.1–8 and then in the verses that follow the scene shifts to heaven where a great multitude is seen around the throne. The multitude are identified as the ones who have come out of the great tribulation. The earth is a dangerous place and only the process of sealing makes it safe, at the same time the servants of God are perfectly safe in heaven.

The vision of the Temple and two witnesses in Rev 11 represents heaven as a place of safety for the saints. In verses 1–2, a distinction is drawn between the inner and outer courts with the seer granted permission to measure the former but not the latter. This signifies the inner court is protected and secure but the outer court is vulnerable and exposed to assault.<sup>118</sup> This distinction parallels the characterisation of the heavenly and earthly realms in the vision of the two witnesses who are persecuted and mocked on earth but vindicated and find safety through ascent to heaven.<sup>119</sup> In the third excursus, there is another allusion to heaven and the throne of God as a place of safety, though in this instance it is the son of the Woman who is snatched up to heaven away from the threat of the Dragon. This relative security of the two realms may also be seen in the hostility of the Beast from the Sea in Rev 13.5–7, which is manifest in war against the saints on earth but merely in words of blasphemy against those in heaven.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> A similar view is found in David L. Barr, ‘The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis’, *Int* 38 (1984) 45, who considers Rev 12 a recapitulation that explains how the reality declared in Rev 11.15, that God reigns over the world, came to be.

<sup>118</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 494, shows how the vision of the destruction of the temple in Dan 8 and of its protection through measuring in Ezek 2–3 are combined in Rev 11.1–2 to portray the temple as a space that is both secure and under threat.

<sup>119</sup> Giblin, ‘Revelation 11.1–13’, 438, argues the inner and outer courts directly symbolise heaven and earth.

<sup>120</sup> See Yeates, ‘Blaspheming Heaven’, 38–9.

Another distinctive feature of the excurses is the suggestion of cosmic unity in Rev 10.1–8 which breaks the ongoing depiction of a polarised cosmos in a state of tension. The mighty angel unites the cosmos with one foot on earth, the other on the sea, and his right hand raised to heaven. The union of the cosmos in a body recalls the opening vision of the Son of Man who also spans heaven and earth. The image depicting cosmic unity in Rev 10 suggests the current state of tension is not permanent. There is a parallel image of unity, perhaps intended as parody, in the Dragon and two beasts. The Dragon stands at the shore of the sea and in Rev 13.1 brings forth the Beast from the Sea and in Rev 13.11 the Beast from the Earth.<sup>121</sup> In this case the heavenly realm is not included because in the preceding narrative the Dragon had been expelled from there. Ultimately the narrative will reveal this diabolic unity as a failure. The image of cosmic unity juxtaposed with the representation of a cosmos in tension hints at the contingency of the present order. In other words, though the cosmos appears divided and at war, there is one who claims authority over the entire cosmos. Given the foreboding mood of the judgment sequences, the contingency of the existing order evokes relief and hope.

The cosmos as it appears in Rev 12 involves some features which are anomalous in the wider narrative. Elsewhere in the text, and especially following the vision of the heavenly throne room in Rev 4–5, the heavenly realm is portrayed as the realm of God’s domain, the place of order, stability, and safety. In contrast, in Rev 12 the Dragon dwells in heaven and causes chaos by casting stars from heaven to earth and by threatening the Woman. In other parts of the narrative the saints find refuge from the hostilities of earth in heaven whereas in Rev 12 the Woman, who is originally in heaven, flees to the earth to seek refuge in the

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<sup>121</sup> In Rev 12.18, some ancient manuscripts have ἐστᾶθην (*I stood*) instead of ἐστᾶθη (*he stood*), which would mean that John and not the Dragon was standing on the shore. The manuscripts in support of the latter (ℙ<sup>47</sup> ⚭ A C 205 209 1854 2344 2351) are stronger than the former (P 046 051 1006 1611) and most commentators prefer ἐστᾶθη; for example, Aune, *Revelation*, 716, and Koester, *Revelation*, 568.

wilderness. The earth, now personified, comes to the aid of the Woman in Rev 12.16, opening its mouth to swallow the torrent of water spewed out by the Dragon. This represents the only strongly positive reference to the earth in all of Revelation and suggests an underlying allegiance between heaven and earth.<sup>122</sup>

In Rev 12.7, a war breaks out in heaven between the angels of God and the Dragon and his angels. So initially there is conflict in heaven while the earth is presumably at peace, though as the narrative unfolds Satan and his angels are defeated in heaven and cast down to earth. The cosmological significance of this event is emphasised by the statement in Rev 12.8 that there was no longer a place for them in heaven (οὐδὲ τόπος εὑρέθη αὐτῶν ἔτι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ). The result is a cosmos in which heaven is free of Satan and solely ruled and occupied by God and those aligned to him while the earth has become a contested domain. This order is expressed in Rev 12.12, ‘Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!’<sup>123</sup> Revelation 12 concludes with the Dragon positioned on the sand of the sea resigned to pursuing the Woman’s offspring as she has been removed to safety in the wilderness. The following chapters narrate how the Dragon wages war on the offspring through his two beastly agents. The cosmos is now as it appears in the narrative elsewhere; heaven is God’s secure domain while the earth is contested and a place of persecution and hardship for the saints.

Revelation 12 explains the existing order as the result of a primal conflict between God and Satan. It also reveals that the present cosmos is in a state of transition, a partial victory has been won with the securing of heaven and a future victory is anticipated

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<sup>122</sup> See discussion in section 7.1.2.

<sup>123</sup> Note the cosmos is structured as heaven, earth, and sea yet mention is made of the abyss (Rev 11.7) and the springs of the deep (Rev 14.7). It is possible that the Beast from the Sea is to be imagined arising from the abyss through the sea.

involving the conquest of the earth. In addition to providing a back story to the cosmic setting, in Rev 12–14 the setting is developed with the revelation of the two beasts. There are numerous interpretations of the beasts.<sup>124</sup> Most scholars recognise Rome, or some figure representing it, in the Beast from the Sea and the second beast can be identified as an institutional power in the province of Asia which promoted subservience to and worship of Rome. The hostility of the earthly realm is developed with the introduction of a sociopolitical dimension and the connection of cosmology and ideology comes to the fore. This development in the earthly setting is the basis of the plot development that occurs in the final set of visions to be discussed in the following section.

#### 7.2.7) *The Visions of the Great Prostitute and the Bride (Rev 17–22)*

In the final section of Revelation, the key conflict between God and the Lamb and the Dragon reaches a climax and is resolved along with the cosmic tension between heaven and earth. The plot develops through three major movements from heaven to earth; John the seer (Rev 17.3), the rider on a horse together with an army of saints in white robes (Rev 19.11–

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<sup>124</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 733, 756, states that the Beast from the Sea may have represented the Roman governor and the Beast from the Earth the imperial priesthood that promotes the imperial cult. Paul Barnett, 'Polemical Parallelism: Some Further Reflections on the Apocalypse', *JSNT* 35 (1989) 111–12, agrees on the second beast but thinks the first is the Roman emperor. Beale, *Revelation*, 682–5, 707–8, relates the Beast from the Sea to the Roman Empire but thinks the Beast from the Earth represents false teachers within the churches. Bauckham, *Climax*, 441, sees the *Nero redivivus* myth in the Beast from the Earth. Steven J. Friesen, 'The Beast from the Land: Revelation 13:11-18 and Social Setting', *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (ed. David L. Barr; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 62–3, develops the view of Adela Yarbro Collins that the Beast from the Earth represents wealthy local elites but broadens the concept to include Roman institutions in general and the whole way of life associated with the Roman Empire in the province of Asia. An alternative view is that of Rick van de Water, 'Reconsidering the Beast from the Sea (Rev 13.1)', *NTS* 46 (2000) 245, who thinks the beasts represent political messianism in Palestine and the diaspora.

16), and finally the New Jerusalem (Rev 21.2).<sup>125</sup> These movements will be used to structure the discussion of the cosmic setting in Rev 17–22.<sup>126</sup>

7.2.7.a) *From Heaven to Earth – John (Rev 17.1–19.10)*

John was previously translocated ‘in spirit’ from Patmos to heaven in Rev 4.1–2 and it may be assumed he remains there until he is again translocated in spirit to a desert in Rev 17.3. He is also translocated in spirit to a great mountain in Rev 21.9–10. Both the desert and great mountain are located on earth, though the mountain probably signifies a place where heaven and earth meet. These earthly settings have symbolic value and contribute to the characterisation of the objects of the seer’s visions, that is, the Woman riding a beast and the New Jerusalem. We learn that the Woman represents a city called ‘Babylon’, which is a sobriquet for Rome.<sup>127</sup> Obviously, Rome is not literally located in a desert but the concept of the desert as a place of desolation inhabited by evil spirits resonates with John’s depiction of the city as corrupt and destined for destruction. In Rev 18.2, John hears an angel prophesy, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul bird, a haunt of every foul and hateful beast.’ So too, it

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<sup>125</sup> John is also translocated to a great and high mountain in Rev 21.9–10 and from there describes the New Jerusalem, and angels move from heaven to earth in Rev 17.3; 18.1; 20.1.

<sup>126</sup> Regarding the structure of the text, the first of these sections focuses on the fall of Babylon, which is in antithetical parallelism with the establishment of the New Jerusalem from heaven. The intervening section includes the final conflict narrative.

<sup>127</sup> In Rev 17.9, the seven horns of the beast on which the Woman sits are interpreted as seven hills, an allusion to the seven hills of Rome. Not all scholars take Babylon as a symbol of Rome; for example, Malina, *Genre and Message*, 218, takes the seven hills to be a reference to the remaining seven hills of Babylon, thus there is no symbolism. Others interpret Babylon more broadly as an archetype of the corrupt city, including but not limited to Rome; see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 237–8, and Beale, *Revelation*, 885–6. Van de Water, ‘Reconsidering the Beast’, 245–61, interprets Babylon as a reference to Jerusalem. Giancarlo Biguzzi, ‘Is the Babylon of Revelation Rome or Jerusalem?’, *Bib* 87 (2006) 371–86, weighs the evidence for what he considers the two most likely meanings, Rome and Jerusalem, and favours the traditional view that Babylon symbolises Rome.

does not seem the New Jerusalem is located *on* the great mountain; rather, it is the place from which John views the descent of the city.<sup>128</sup> The significance of the great mountain as a meeting point of heaven and earth resonates with the vision of the New Jerusalem as a holy place where God dwells with humanity.

The visions seen from the desert and mountain focus on two cities, Babylon and the New Jerusalem. These two visions bracket the story of the final conflict between God and Satan (Rev 19.11–21.8) and they place the cosmic drama in a civic setting as the narrative draws to its close. The cosmic setting has narrowed in focus as the narrative progressed; the locus of opposition to God was first found on earth in general, then in the Roman Empire, and finally in the city of Rome itself. This development in setting can be illustrated by comparing the judgments of the three septets and the judgment depicted in Rev 17–19; the former involves generic features of the earth such as land, sea, mountains, rivers, caves, and trees, the latter involves social disintegration including the breakdown of trade (Rev 18.11–13), the loss of wealth (Rev 18.14–17), and the end of social activities such as music, work, and marriage (Rev 18.22–3). The description of civic destruction is paralleled and put in contrast to renewal and restoration in the new heaven and earth centred on the New Jerusalem.

The progression in the setting from a generalised cosmos to a civic setting provides an intensification of the mood which complements the increasing tension in the plot as it approaches its resolution. The intensity increases as the audience is taken from a generic setting, which allows for a degree of emotional detachment, to one that engages them personally as it becomes more familiar. In Rev 17–22, the scenes of destruction and restoration involve aspects of everyday life such as work, music, goods, trade, merchants, wealth, and weddings. As the setting develops, especially with the visions of the Beasts (Rev

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<sup>128</sup> First Enoch 25.3 states that a great mountain is the place where God will visit the earth.



13) and the Great Prostitute/Babylon (Rev 17–18), it also becomes increasingly clear that the visions of Revelation pertain to Rome and its empire. This makes the setting more familiar to an audience in the province of Asia in the first century where people were surrounded by reminders of Rome through iconography, engravings, activities of the imperial cult, and festivals. The obviously hostile stance of the text towards Rome would emotionally engage the audience as they sense that they are being invited to adopt a similarly hostile view towards the Empire, which their society had largely embraced.<sup>129</sup> This development in the setting also redefines and clarifies the conflict as John perceived it; whereas it was previously related to alignment with either heaven or earth, now it is a matter of civic association – would the audience stand among or apart from society. The dualism of heaven and earth has morphed into a dualism of two cities. Those on earth either mourn or celebrate the fall of Babylon, they either share in the blessings of the New Jerusalem or weep and wail outside its walls. In terms of the social world of the audience this polarity amounted to a decision (or series of decisions) about the city in which they resided – would they belong to their society or would they ‘come out of her’ in obedience to the heavenly command? With this development, the relationship between cosmology and ‘civic ideology’, in addition to Roman imperial ideology, emerges.

#### *7.2.7.b) From Heaven to Earth – The Rider on a Horse (Rev 19.11–21.1)*

The next movement from heaven to earth is that of the rider on a horse. In Rev 19.11–16, he appears on a white horse leading an army from heaven to earth to meet the Beast and his army in battle. This conflict and the one which follows involving the Dragon are the final showdown between the forces aligned with God and those aligned with Satan. It is the climactic and ultimate clash between heaven and earth. Previously, it had been heard from

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<sup>129</sup> The nature of the emotional response would depend upon their view of the Roman Empire.

heaven, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever’, now at last this conquest is envisioned (Rev 11.15).

The lake of fire is introduced as a new cosmic space in Rev 19.20. It occurs only in the section under discussion and is the feature of the cosmos in focus when the section closes in Rev 21.8. The lake of fire has been discussed in section 7.1.4 and so only its function as a setting will be discussed at this point. An explanation for the introduction of the lake of fire is that the other places of the underworld, namely, the abyss and Death and Hades, have been characterised as places which hold people or spiritual beings for a limited time only. In contrast, the lake of fire is the place of final and ultimate judgment. Here we see John adding spaces to the setting to facilitate his development of the plot. This development in the setting also demonstrates the importance of allocating spaces in the cosmos to his characters. For example, John is not content to state that Satan and the Beasts were defeated and killed; rather, he must assign them to a place and when an appropriate place was lacking he created another.

In Rev 20.1–10, an opposition is established between heaven and the abyss with Satan bound in the abyss for a thousand years while the martyred saints reign with Christ in heaven also for a thousand years.<sup>130</sup> The result is not a tension between the two realms, like that which has existed between heaven and earth through most of the narrative, but rather the removal of key characters from the earthly domain to leave it in a relative state of peace, albeit for a limited time. In Rev 19, Christ and his army defeated the Beasts and their

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<sup>130</sup> Reasons for a heavenly location of the martyred saints in Rev 20.4 include: the thrones of Rev 20.4 may be the twenty-four thrones in heaven in Rev 4.4; martyred saints have previously appeared in heaven (Rev 6.9); Rev 3.21 says that those who conquer will sit with Christ on his throne, which in Rev 4–5 is in heaven; and finally, they are said to be priests of God and Christ (Rev 20.6) and a heavenly temple is described in Rev 11.19. While the martyred saints are said to reign with Christ whom John saw coming from heaven to earth in Rev 19.11–16, it need not be assumed that Christ remains on earth thereafter as he does not feature in the battle that follows the millennium. For an overview of the literature on this passage, see J. W. Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992) 15–58.

followers on earth so that the latter were removed from earth in being assigned to the lake of fire. And in Rev 20, Satan is bound in the abyss and the martyred saints are located in heaven. For a lengthy yet limited time symbolised by the millennium, the earth is not occupied by forces antagonistic to heaven and is free of Satanic deception. This change creates dramatic suspense, as if the earth were in the ‘eye of the storm’, and after a brief reprieve the earth is then swarmed by the league of Satan (Rev 20.7–9).

When Satan is released from the abyss he gathers the nations from the four corners of the earth and they converge upon and encircle the encampment of the saints, which is also designated the beloved city.<sup>131</sup> Satan rises from under the earth and from the periphery launches an attack on the centre, now held by the saints, but this centre (unlike Babylon/Rome) is aligned to heaven above which comes to its aid and fire from heaven destroys the forces of Satan. The position of the combatants in the cosmos in this brief battle reflects a re-orientation of power. Satan was removed from heaven to earth and then from earth to the abyss.<sup>132</sup> His earthly allies have moved from the centre, represented by Babylon/Rome, to the periphery. At the same time the saints have come to occupy the centre and their legitimacy in holding that position is confirmed by their divinely orchestrated victory. This victory and re-orientation of power in the cosmos prefigures the final major vision of the New Jerusalem, a vision which represents the ultimate embodiment of the new order.

Once Satan is defeated and removed from the cosmos to the lake of fire (Rev 20.10), the cosmos begins to disintegrate before the throne of God which is the locus of the final judgment. The old cosmic order is stripped away to make room for the new heaven and earth.

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<sup>131</sup> The beloved city is probably Jerusalem.

<sup>132</sup> See Wolfgang Metzger, ‘Das Zwischenreich: Ein Beitrag zum exegetischen Gespräch der Kirche über den Chiliasmus’, *Auf dem Grunde der Apostel und Propheten. Festgabe für Landesbischof D. Theophil Wurm zum 80. Geburtstag am 7. Dezember 1948* (ed. M. Loesner; Stuttgart: Quell-Verlag der Evangelische Gesellschaft, 1948) 110–18, who adds that Satan then loses his place in the underworld to complete the cosmic defeat.

In Rev 20.11, John sees a great white throne and before it earth and heaven flee and we are told that no place was found for them.<sup>133</sup> The absence of heaven and earth means that all people are exposed before the throne of judgment, which has become the only spatial reality to which one could be aligned. At this point, comparison with 1 En. 21.1–3 illuminates the significance of this bare setting; it reads, ‘I travelled to where it was chaotic. And there I saw a terrible thing; I saw neither heaven above, nor firmly founded earth, but a chaotic terrible place. And there I saw seven of the stars of heaven, bound and thrown in it together, like great mountains, and burning in fire.’ In 1 Enoch, the absence of heaven and earth is a terrible sight and indicates a place of judgment. The removal of heaven and earth establishes an awesome and fearful mood fitting to the scene of judgment.

The cosmos is stripped back further once the sea and Death and Hades have also surrendered their dead. In Rev 20.14, Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, presumably they have served their purpose and have no function in the renewed cosmos which will shortly appear.<sup>134</sup> Significantly, the sea does not depart and is not removed from the cosmos as were the earth, heaven, and Death and Hades. Despite this, in Rev 21.1 we are told that the sea no longer exists after the arrival of the new heaven and earth. While it may be that John simply chose not to narrate the departure of the sea from the cosmos there is another explanation. At the appearance of the great white throne the cosmos has undergone a process of de-creation, returning the cosmos to primordial chaos.<sup>135</sup> In Gen 1.2, before

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<sup>133</sup> The usual word order is reversed with earth preceding heaven. This may be because earth is further from the throne and flees first before the heavenly realm can follow. The heaven which flees, like the new heaven which replaces it in Rev 21.1, is the material heavens.

<sup>134</sup> Only evil beings have been cast into the lake of fire so casting Death and Hades there reinforces the association of the realm with evil. It is worth noting that heaven and earth are not thrown into the lake of fire, suggesting that they are not viewed as inherently evil.

<sup>135</sup> Caird, *Language and Imagery*, 113–14, considers the language of cosmic catastrophe to be hyperbole typically utilised by prophets to describe the judgment of God on a nation (Isa 13.9–11; Jer 4.23–6). He comments that in Jer 4.23–6, the whole cosmos returns to the primordial waters of chaos. The view that the language of cosmic catastrophe was metaphoric rather than literalistic was challenged in McDonough, ‘Beasts

creation the emptiness of the cosmos is described as dark water over which the spirit of God hovers. Through a process of dividing and establishing order the waters are supplanted by heaven and earth.<sup>136</sup> It may be that the sea which remains in John's deconstructed cosmos should be envisioned as that dark, watery emptiness.<sup>137</sup> And so when in Rev 21.1 we read, 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away (ἀπῆλθαν), and the sea was no more (καὶ ἡ θάλασσα οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι)', the absence of the sea is the result of the re-creation of the new heaven and earth. This reading is supported by the shift in verb tense from the aorist (ἀπῆλθαν) to describe the passing of the old order, to the present tense (ἔστιν), which emphasises the resulting state of the cosmos.

At this point in the narrative, it is important to note the close affinity between Revelation's setting and its plot. At the climactic moment in the plot, most elements of the cosmic setting disintegrated providing an appropriately heightened mood but also focusing attention on the characters and the action of judgment. As the narrative continues the cosmic setting *becomes* the story when the anticipated new order is expressed in the form of a city which constitutes a society incorporating God and restored humanity.

#### 7.2.7.c) *From Heaven to Earth – The New Jerusalem (Rev 21.1–22.20)*

The final major vision in Revelation is the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven to earth. It is described in summary in Rev 21.1–7 and in more detail in Rev 21.8–22.15.<sup>138</sup>

The structure for the text of Revelation proposed in the present thesis emphasises the

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and Bees', 232–3, and Adams, *Stars Will Fall*, 44–9. The motif of cosmic catastrophe is common in Jewish and Greco-Roman texts, for example, 1 En. 1.5–7; 4 Ezra 5.1–13; Hesiod, *Theog.* 686–720; Lucan, *B.C.* 1.73–82.

<sup>136</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 181–91, discusses the ancient Near Eastern conceptual setting of Genesis and notes that the act of creation did not involve making something out of nothing but imposing order on formless substance.

<sup>137</sup> G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 262.

<sup>138</sup> In the structure of Revelation, Rev 21.1–8 concludes the conflict narrative that commences in Rev 19.11.

significance of the arrival of the new cosmic order by having it coincide with the eighth in an unnumbered series which signifies the anticipated end has finally been reached. The first thing to note about the setting in this section is that it involves a *new* heaven and earth. In this context, the expression ‘heaven and earth’ is a merism denoting the cosmos as a whole. The heaven referred to is the material heavenly realm consisting of the sky, sun, moon, and stars. It is emphasised in Rev 21.1–7 that this new reality replaces the old order of the cosmos, which is designated the first heaven and earth. The newness of the cosmos is also emphasised by the explicit exclusion of certain things, including the sea, death, mourning, grief, and pain (Rev 21.1, 4). Positively, the newness of the cosmos involves God’s dwelling with his people and fellowship with them (Rev 21.3) and access to the spring of living water (Rev 21.6). The new cosmos is a paradisiacal, ideal creation, like Eden only improved because all opposition to God and threat to the created order has been removed.<sup>139</sup> The change in setting removes the negative characterisation of the earth as a place of opposition to God and of the cosmos as a whole as a place of hardship, conflict, and judgment. The cosmic setting is free of any tension just as tension in the plot has also been resolved.<sup>140</sup>

The second point to make about the setting is that it is focused entirely on the earthly realm. The earthly focus began with the descent of John from heaven to earth in Rev 17.1–3, and in Rev 21–2 the New Jerusalem moves from heaven to earth and other key elements of

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<sup>139</sup> The absence of the sea is typically explained as the removal of a threatening place from the renewed cosmos, for example, Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 52–3, Aune, *Revelation*, 1119–20, and Beale, *Revelation*, 1041–3. While this is possible it is worth noting that in Revelation the sea is largely viewed positively as a realm created by God and from which he may be praised (Rev 5.13; 10.6). An alternative view is that of Thomas E. Schmidt, “‘And the Sea Was No More’: Water as People, Not Place’, *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honor of Robert H. Gundry* (ed. Thomas E. Schmidt and Moises Silva; University of Michigan: JSOT, 1994) 248, who follows the approach of Gundry and suggests the sea represents people not place, and that ‘the sea was no more’ signifies that human chaos must be removed to make way for perfect community.

<sup>140</sup> The presence of the lake of fire and those it holds does not create cosmic tension because it is absolutely removed from the new heaven and earth.

heaven are now located on earth in the city; most significantly, the throne and God and Christ. The New Jerusalem descends from heaven in the final cosmic movement from above to below. The heaven from which the New Jerusalem descends is not the new heaven mentioned in the previous verse (Rev 21.1), as suggested by Charles, but heaven as the divine realm surrounding the throne.<sup>141</sup> The logic of the narrative seems to be that the righteous dead are in heaven when they are vindicated in judgment before the great white throne and then descend from there to earth either as the New Jerusalem or in association with it.<sup>142</sup> And, since they have been constituted as God's dwelling, God and his throne follow them at some point and are thenceforth located on earth.

In the new heaven and earth, heaven has been largely emptied. God, the Lamb, the throne, angels, and the righteous saints are all found on earth. There is also no temple and presumably no altar either in heaven or on earth. There are some parts of the material heavens that if they remain are redundant, namely, the sun and moon (Rev 21.23). Heaven is not mentioned at all in Rev 21–2 after it is said that the New Jerusalem descended out of heaven in Rev 21.2, 10. It has been suggested by several scholars that this is explained by the fact that the vision depicts the merger and union of the realms of heaven and earth, replacing a dualistic cosmology with one in which heaven and earth occupy the same space.<sup>143</sup> This

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<sup>141</sup> Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 2.154. Minear, 'Cosmology of the Apocalypse', 32–3, uses the cumbersome phrases 'third heaven' and 'the above the above' to distinguish the heavenly divine realm from the new heaven mentioned in Rev 21.1. He also incorrectly states that the new heaven and earth descend from heaven when in fact Revelation only speaks of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven.

<sup>142</sup> Robert H. Gundry, 'The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People', *NovT* 29 (1987) 254–64.

<sup>143</sup> Deutsch, 'Transformation of Symbols', 126; Ryan S. Schellenberg, 'Seeing the World Whole: Intertextuality and the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21–22)', *PRSt* 33 (2006) 471; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 87; and Leonard L. Thompson, 'Mapping an Apocalyptic World', *Sacred Places and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (ed. Jamie Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley; Westport: Greenwood, 1991) 119. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007) 116, speaks of heaven and earth merging like man and woman in marriage; and McDonough, 'Climax of Cosmology', 188, also speaks of the marriage of heaven and earth.

suggestion essentially involves not only the transference of key beings and objects from heaven to earth, which to be precise is what the text narrates, but also the removal of distinction between the realms, which is not explicitly stated in the text. The view that heaven and earth have become a single entity argues for too much when there are other explanations for the shift in focus from heaven to earth that need not imply heaven and earth are no longer distinct. Firstly, as Jan du Rand has argued, the main story of Revelation involves the establishment of God's rule on earth as in heaven.<sup>144</sup> The story is told with an element of symmetry; it begins in Rev 4 with a scene of the throne in heaven and concludes with the throne on earth. Just as the earth does not feature significantly in Rev 4–5, so too heaven does not feature in Rev 21–2. In other words, the final earthly setting is a feature of the plot structure. Secondly, there is a shift in focus from an above–below to a centre–periphery cosmological framework.<sup>145</sup> The former typically features in the judgment narratives, the last of which is in Rev 19.11–21.8, and as has been stated already, the final movement from above to below is that of the New Jerusalem. The centre–periphery framework is employed in Rev 4–5 and Rev 21–2, where God and the Lamb on the throne are at the centre of the New Jerusalem. Blessing radiates out, such as in the living water that flows out from the throne and through the tree of life that produces fruit for healing. Beyond the walls of the city are the nations who represent the periphery, only they are not hostile but subservient to the centre and bring their glory into the city. This cosmic centre is the antithesis of the corrupt and false centre that Babylon represented. In summary, the switch from the above–below to the centre–periphery cosmological framework relates to the rhetorical strategy of the text. The second part of Revelation (Rev 4–22) begins with a cosmic centre in heaven and ends with one on earth. Between the two are a series of conflicts between the realm above and the realm below. The lack of interest in the heavenly realm in the final chapters is explained by

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<sup>144</sup> Du Rand, 'Your Kingdom Come', 70.

<sup>145</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 38, 40–1.



this narrative structure. In conclusion, it is better to say that heaven fades into the background than that it merges with earth. Nickelsburg describes the restored cosmos of 1 Enoch as a renewed earth under a renewed heaven, so too it should be maintained that in Rev 21–2 there remains a bipartite cosmos with one crucial difference to the typical version – that God now rules over the cosmos from earth and not from heaven.<sup>146</sup>

#### 7.2.8) *Conclusions: Revelation's Cosmology as Setting*

Hardie proposed two functions of a cosmological setting in a narrative promulgating Roman imperial ideology; firstly, for completeness, or what he referred to as the encyclopaedic drive, and secondly, to lend dignity to the account.<sup>147</sup> He also commented that in general, cosmology may be used to ground a conception of human life or history in the order of the universe.<sup>148</sup> These observations are useful in accounting for the cosmological setting of Revelation. In terms of the first of Hardie's explanations, the cosmological setting of Revelation suggests the narrative concerns universal matters and not only local ones. The effect is that the struggles of a minority group living in a province of the Roman Empire are connected to events crucial to the destiny of the entire cosmos. Revelation 2–3 defines the ideal human experience as one of faithfully enduring hardship and adversity with the hope of future reward. Revelation grounds this conception of human life in the condition and order of the cosmos, which consisted of a world in conflict and one which, because of its internal tension, was presently unstable and on the verge of transformation.

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<sup>146</sup> Nickelsburg, 'Place of Eschatological Blessing', 63, though he also notes that 1 Enoch suggests the righteous dead will live in heaven rather than on a restored earth. The final cosmos in Revelation is not tripartite, however, because there is no underworld, Death and Hades are now in the lake of fire, and the abyss may be presumed absent.

<sup>147</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 67–8.

<sup>148</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 71, cites Plato's Myth of Er as an example. The concepts are discussed in Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 25, 34–7.

Hardie's second observation explains John's choice of a 'mythological' cosmology, that is, the three-tier cosmos of heaven, earth, and underworld. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil provided a mythology for the foundation of Rome as the centre of a world-wide, eternal empire. In Revelation, John did the same for the New Jerusalem and God's kingdom, which filled the new heaven and new earth. While John's visions are eschatological in that they relate to the end time, or in his words, 'what must take place after this' (Rev 4.1), they can also be taken to provide a cosmogonic account of the creation of a new heaven and earth through God's defeat of the chaotic forces of evil, which were manifest in Rome as an instrument of Satan. Eliade argued that in ancient societies the construction of sacred spaces was considered a cosmogonic act. Revelation can be viewed as the account of the creation of the ultimate sacred space, the New Jerusalem.<sup>149</sup> The mythological cosmos of Revelation facilitated the construal of the subject matter in these terms.

Revelation's cosmology is less detailed than some other apocalyptic texts, such as 1 Enoch. It is also less detailed than the 'scientific' cosmologies of the Greco-Roman tradition such as Aristotle's *De caelo*, Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, Manilius's *Astronomica*, Cicero's *Naturales quaestiones*, and the second book of Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historia*. Ryan considers the lack of spatial differentiation in heaven notable, though the same may be said for other aspects of the cosmos including the underworld and the ends of the earth.<sup>150</sup> This relates to the fact that John does not tour the cosmos extensively the way that Enoch does. Only in heaven does he detail what he sees and then the focus is on the beings that reside there rather than the architecture or landscape of heaven. When he is taken to the desert and the great mountain it is not to describe those places but to receive a vision of a different reality. The reasons for this difference in cosmic setting is that John is primarily interested in cosmology as a vehicle for communicating about power and authority. He is also not

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<sup>149</sup> Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 51–2.

<sup>150</sup> Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 71.

attempting a scientific account of the workings of the cosmos and nor is he locating wisdom in the structure of the cosmos itself. Venter argued that in 1 Enoch, the present structure of the cosmos communicated a key theological message of the book; he states, 'It is revealed to Enoch that God has already set his judgment upon evil and those who have brought evil upon earth. The revelation is conceptualised in terms of allocated space on earth.'<sup>151</sup> The narrative of Revelation is more concerned about the transformation of the cosmos than its current structure alone. The importance of the visions relates to their capacity to reveal what is about to take place in the cosmos, its trajectory and destiny, rather than knowing its current features in detail. In terms of the structure of the cosmos, there is a concern in the narrative to locate characters in certain realms, for example, the deceased saints in heaven and the Dragon/Satan on earth, but not to describe the appearance of those realms in detail. Schüssler Fiorenza has argued that the main concern of Revelation is not the interpretation of history, as in many apocalypses, but the issue of power.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, Revelation is concerned with cosmology as a means of mapping power and its transformation.

Chatman suggested the primary effect of setting was on the mood of a narrative.<sup>153</sup> In Revelation, the cosmic setting imparts gravity to the mood of the narrative by describing events and actions that affect the whole cosmos and which have their origin in transcendent realms such as heaven and the underworld. By including heaven and earth in the narrative the supernatural world is brought into contact with the natural world, which elevates the significance of the narrated events. The gravity of the mood instils in the audience a sense of fear and awe as the visions unveil God's judgment as well as wonder and delight when the new creation finally arrives. The cosmic setting complements John's choice of themes, which

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<sup>151</sup> Venter, 'Spatiality', 229, drawing upon Collins, 'Cosmos and Salvation', 136, who states regarding 1 En. 39.4 that cosmology is used to 'show that the afterlife is provided for in the structure of the universe'.

<sup>152</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 24.

<sup>153</sup> Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 141.

are also weighty in nature; they include persecution and martyrdom, judgment and reward and punishment, and true and false worship.

In Revelation, the cosmic setting is used to reveal the relationship between significant entities in the cosmos such as divine beings, political authorities, and the churches. The centre–periphery and above–below frameworks are utilised in this process of definition. Most notably, the heavenly throne room vision in Rev 4–5 establishes a cosmic centre against which earthly realities may be judged in terms of their alignment or non-alignment. The outcome of this demarcation of reality sees the saints vindicated and brought into the centre, at first to heaven after death but ultimately in the New Jerusalem, and the opponents of God cast out of the centre – Satan from heaven, Babylon is destroyed and displaced, and the earth-dwellers are excluded from the New Jerusalem and cast into the lake of fire.<sup>154</sup> The above–below framework is manifest in cosmic tension between heaven and earth. The realm above is characterised as the place of absolute authority and power, the realm below as a vulnerable place subject to heaven’s judgment. Revelation 12 is the prime example of the use of this framework to communicate John’s understanding of the cosmos. By the end of the chapter, God and Christ occupy heaven while the Dragon and Beasts are assigned to earth. The bipartite structure of the cosmos in this section is used to convey a differential in power and authority and to prefigure the inevitable outcome of the conflict.

### 7.3) The Cosmology of Revelation and Plot Development

In section 7.2, the cosmology of Revelation was discussed in terms of the setting of the narrative. In the present section, cosmology and plot development will be addressed, though it should be noted that in Revelation setting and plot are intertwined. Firstly, space is

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<sup>154</sup> DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 100, considers the narrative from a centre–periphery perspective, suggesting the dramatic movement of the narrative revolves around how the centre of Rev 4–5 impacts upon the realities of the seven churches.

characterised in such a way that the significance of actions in the plot is provided by their relationship to the setting (section 7.3.1). Secondly, the main plotline is expressed as much in the transformation of space, that is, the setting, as it is in the transformation of the characters (section 7.3.2). A consequence of this close relationship between setting and plot is that in describing the cosmos as setting in the previous section aspects of the plot that relate to cosmology have been covered already. Therefore, this section will not involve a detailed description of the plot following the structure of the narrative but will instead focus on a discussion of the relationship between setting and the plot.

### *7.3.1) The Characterisation of Cosmic Spaces to Support Plot Development*

Mieke Bal discusses how space can be characterised to establish a frame (a term she prefers to setting) by similar narrative techniques to those used in the development of characters.<sup>155</sup> She also states that once space has been characterised a certain way it can possess symbolic value, for example, inner space may represent safety and outer space danger. So too, boundaries can be heavily invested with symbolic significance.<sup>156</sup> Hardie comments on the characterisation of the setting and its relationship to plot regarding the *Aeneid*. He observes that the association of characters with cosmic realms moralises and politicises them, and that movements between spaces that cross boundaries, moving ‘up’ or ‘down’, take on symbolic significance.<sup>157</sup> In Revelation, the cosmic spaces that provide the setting for the narrative are characterised to develop symbolism which contributes to the development of the plot. The vision of the divine throne in Rev 4–5 establishes heaven, the realm ‘above’, as the place of supreme authority, power, and goodness.<sup>158</sup> This is confirmed

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<sup>155</sup> Bal, *Narratology*, 134–6, defines the frame as the space in which a character is located or precisely not located.

<sup>156</sup> Bal, *Narratology*, 134.

<sup>157</sup> Hardie, *Cosmos and Imperium*, 268.

<sup>158</sup> Bauckham, *Theology*, 31.

in the back story of the cosmos provided in Rev 12, which narrates the defeat and exclusion of Satan from heaven and his banishment to earth. The same narrative confirms the characterisation of the earth as a place dominated by God's opponents, including the kings of the earth and the earth-dwellers, and later the beasts from the sea and the land. The realm 'below' is where those with subdued power dwell. In terms of power, the earth is characterised as a realm subject to external forces. Those dwelling on earth are subject to judgments issued from heaven. They are also subject to beings that operate on earth but which originated elsewhere such as the Dragon (from heaven) and the Beast (from the abyss/sea). Further below the earth is the underworld, which includes the abyss, Death and Hades, and possibly the lake of fire. This realm is associated with destructive and evil forces such as locusts, the Beast, and for a time, the Dragon.<sup>159</sup> Beings in this realm have limited and restrained power. The realm is more morally corrupt than the earth, which contains some 'good' characters such as the faithful saints. As will be illustrated shortly, this symbolic structure of the cosmos facilitates the development of the plot.

In his study on cosmology and the narrative of 1 Enoch, Venter posits that the setting involved zones or 'heterotopian spaces' such that cosmological space formed an arena in which the conflict between good and evil took place.<sup>160</sup> The zones in 1 Enoch resemble the layers of the cosmos in Revelation; the earth involves a mixture of good and evil while heaven is reserved for good angels and God alone.<sup>161</sup> Revelation's cosmological zones are effectively territory, a designation which is especially appropriate considering that a major theme of the narrative is conquest and that its plot development is centred on the establishment of God's kingdom first in heaven and then on earth. Territory is determined by

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<sup>159</sup> Destructive forces are also located at the ends of the earth, such as winds (Rev 7.1), angels and an army (Rev 9.14–19), the kings of the East (Rev 16.12), and the nations and 'Gog and Magog' (Rev 20.8).

<sup>160</sup> Venter, 'Spatiality', 212.

<sup>161</sup> Venter, 'Spatiality', 213.

the location of characters and redefined by their translocation, which occurs through the process of conquest and defeat.

As has been proposed, Rev 12 functions as a cosmogony for the narrative and so this chapter most clearly illustrates the way that the location and translocation of characters constructs territory. In heaven are God, his throne, and the Son once he is taken from the clutches of the Dragon (Rev 12.5). Satan and his angels are originally in heaven but after being defeated by Michael and his angels are expelled from heaven. The text highlights the connection between victory and defeat and occupying space which the text highlights with the statement, ‘they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven’ (Rev 12.8). Satan is cast down to earth and Rev 12.12 declares the new order; heaven has become the exclusive territory of God and Christ and the earth and sea are the realm in which Satan operates.

In Rev 13.4, Satan gives authority (ἐξουσία) to the Beast from the Sea and we are later told that the Beast from the Earth exercises that authority on behalf of the first beast (Rev 13.12). So earth and sea appear to be the territory of Satan though only because he was not strong enough to retain a position in heaven. It seems that heaven, as the transcendent realm, was the native territory of Satan, not earth and not the underworld as in the popular notion that Satan rules in hell. He therefore holds earthly territory as a displaced entity seeking a new dominion. The fact that Satan draws the first beast out of the sea suggests a stronger alignment between Satan and the sea rather than the earth. This is also suggested by the fact that the earth frustrates Satan’s effort to capture the Woman by swallowing water spewed out of the Serpent’s mouth (Rev 12.16). Earlier, in Rev 11.7, the Beast was said to arise from the abyss, suggesting that both the underworld and the sea are territories aligned to Satan. The Woman and her offspring, which represent the people of God, are finally located on earth but only after they have fled from heaven to escape the Dragon. So they are associated with the earth but their heavenly origin establishes ambivalence in their relationship to the cosmos, they reside on earth but are also associated with heaven. The presence of deceased

saints in heaven contributes to the ambivalence. Humanity in general is not represented in the narrative of Rev 12; however, they appear soon after in Rev 13.3–8 where they are described as being in awe of the Beast’s power, they worship the Dragon and the Beast and come under their authority. As a character, this group is associated with the earth without ambivalence and so are appropriately labelled in several places the earth-dwellers (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) because they properly belong in territory claimed by Satan.

After the war in heaven the earth becomes a contested space. Satan operates there, exercises authority, and receives worship. At the same time, the people of God live there in tension with other earth-dwellers because their allegiance is to heaven and not to Satan. From the opening of the first seal, heaven takes offensive action against the earth as judgments originating at the throne are executed upon the earth and its inhabitants. In many cases the instruments of judgment are parts of the cosmos itself, such as the sun, moon, and stars, meteorological phenomena, winds from the corners of the earth, and locusts from the abyss. This demonstrates the fact that as creator of the cosmos, God makes use of all its realms for his purposes, even if they are aligned with his enemy. The direction of the plot is indicated in several places where the announcement of heaven’s conquest of the earth is declared in heaven proleptically, for example, ‘Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever”’ (Rev 11.15).<sup>162</sup> This declaration is finally realised with the fall of Babylon and the descent of the New Jerusalem to earth, at which point the reign of God in heaven has extended to the earth and the cosmos in its entirety has become his uncontested territory.

The cosmic setting has been characterised as territory so that plot development can be conceptualised as territorial change. Victory and defeat are expressed in terms of the ground

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<sup>162</sup> See also Rev 5.10; 15.4; 19.6.



which God and Satan hold, win, or lose. For example, Satan moves from heaven to earth (Rev 12), then from earth down to the abyss (Rev 20.1–3) before emerging once more at the periphery of the earth only to be defeated at its centre by divine intervention from above (Rev 20.7–9). He is then cast out of the cosmos altogether when assigned to the lake of fire (Rev 20.10). Setting and plot are intertwined in the employment of the combat motif which contributes to a major theme of Revelation, the victory of God and the establishment of his kingdom.

### 7.3.2) *Cosmic Transformation as a Feature of Plot Development*

Bal has commented that sometimes space primarily functions as a setting for the narrative, though she adds, ‘In many cases, however, space is “thematized”: it becomes an object of presentation itself, for its own sake. Space thus becomes an “acting place” rather than the place of action. It influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space.’<sup>163</sup> In the preceding section it was proposed that space is ‘thematized’ as territory in Revelation, in the present section the idea will be developed that space, or the cosmos, is an ‘acting place’ in the narrative such that the plot can be accounted for in terms of cosmic transformation.<sup>164</sup>

The cosmos occasionally acts as an agent of change in the plot, such as when God’s judgments take the form of cosmic forces like the wind, hail, and earthquakes. The earth is also personified in Rev 12.16, where it comes to the rescue of the Woman and her offspring. More often the cosmos is acted upon and its transformation constitutes the salvation of God. Initially the cosmos is disordered, heaven and earth are at odds and the earth is a conflict

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<sup>163</sup> Bal, *Narratology*, 136. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 19–20, explains that Russian formalists distinguished the events of the story as they might exist outside the narrative to the actual linking of those events in the narrative. They termed the former the ‘fabula’ and the latter the ‘sjuzet’.

<sup>164</sup> To illustrate, Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 23, 166–7, 191, can outline Revelation’s plot in terms of the heaven and earth relationship.

zone surrounded by threatening forces in all directions. Then the earth is transferred from domination by Satan and the Beast to domination by God and the Lamb; however, this change in authority only comes about once the first cosmos has been dismantled and replaced by a new heaven and earth (Rev 20.11–21.8). The New Jerusalem represents a new cosmic order in which heaven and earth are aligned and the earth is a place of blessing and peace. God’s victory over Satan is told as a story of cosmic transformation from disorder and conflict to harmony and unity. In Revelation, space is not a setting occupied by characters who undergo transformation, rather, it is the transformation of space that carries the key messages of the text – that the present world order is not ultimate and eternal but will be superseded by the ideal order of God’s kingdom, to be enjoyed by all those who overcome in this world.

Thompson is one scholar who has considered the plot of Revelation in relation to the location and movement of characters in the cosmos. His discussion of Revelation’s cosmology focuses on its boundaries and the significance of transition through these boundaries.<sup>165</sup> He suggests that the direction of movement is significant; for example, ‘down’ equals movement away from the divine and towards evil and ‘up’ the opposite.<sup>166</sup> He also suggests that crossing a boundary constitutes transformation; he states,

When Satan descends, he is transformed; so is John when he ascends. Passage through a boundary simultaneously transforms the object from what is on one side to what is on the other, that is, earth to heaven, faithfulness to unfaithfulness, good to evil. The phrase *transformational boundary* describes this particular aspect of a boundary situation; that is, a

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<sup>165</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 75–91; and Thompson, ‘Mapping an Apocalyptic World’, 116–17, 122–4. This approach is supported by an observation in Bal, *Narratology*, 134, that boundaries that delimit the spatial frame of characters can be charged with meaning.

<sup>166</sup> Thompson, ‘Mapping an Apocalyptic World’, 122.

boundary not only locates where differences touch each other; it becomes a place where differences can be transformed into each other.<sup>167</sup>

According to Thompson, Satan changed from being a divine being to a diabolical one when he moved from heaven to earth, and John's psychological and moral character are transformed when he ascends to heaven.<sup>168</sup>

While a focus on cosmic boundaries and transitions is helpful, it is worth noting that uniform symbolic value is not attached to directions of movement in Revelation. For example, Satan's descent from heaven signifies his defeat and unworthiness for heaven whereas the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven represents the glorious fulfilment of God's promises. The two prophets go up to heaven as a sign of their vindication, yet locusts, the Beast, and the Dragon go up from the abyss to bring destruction or to war against the saints. Furthermore, John's change in psychological state, becoming 'in spirit', occurs in the first instance before his ascent to heaven (Rev 1.10; 4.1–2). He is also in the same psychological state when he is taken from heaven to the desert (Rev 17.3) and the great mountain (Rev 21.10), and so psychological transformation is not necessarily linked to spatial transition. And it is unclear what moral transformation Thompson imagines to take place in John when he ascends to heaven as there is nothing in the text suggestive of a change. Likewise, regarding Satan, there is no mention of a prior divine or good nature in the text. The Dragon's first action is to sweep stars out of the sky down to earth, an action bringing about chaos in the cosmos and possibly alluding to the heavenly rebellion of the watchers. The heavenly war with Satan and his consequent expulsion removes a being from heaven who from the start did not belong there.

The case of Satan's expulsion from heaven illustrates one significance of crossing boundaries, that is, they are judgmental rather than transformational actions. As a rebellious

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<sup>167</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 87.

<sup>168</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 83, 87.

being who disrupts cosmic order he does not belong in heaven. His defeat in the heavenly war serves to expel him but also demonstrates his inferior power and authority, another reason he is out of place in heaven. His movement from heaven to earth is a cosmic expression of this judgment of his nature. Another significant boundary crossing is the movement of deceased saints from earth to heaven. Ascent is only described in relation to the two prophets (Rev 11.12); however, the presence of the saints in heaven in other places implies an ascent, or at least a boundary crossing, has occurred (Rev 6.9; 7.13–17; 13.6). In this case, the boundary crossing is also judgmental in nature, it declares that the saints were victorious in death and not defeated by their enemies. In the case of the two prophets, their enemies watch the transition from earth to heaven, thus compelling them to recognise God's judgment on those they had killed. Crossing the boundary does not transform them but reveals their true nature and character.

A final example is the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven to earth, which can also be construed to be judgmental in nature. Babylon had falsely claimed a position at the centre of the earth but was dislodged and destroyed and finally replaced by the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem was prefigured by the churches on earth which were gathered around the feet of the Son of Man in the opening vision of Christ. The descent of the New Jerusalem confirms that the people of God are the valid centre of the earth because they are the ones truly aligned with heaven. Again, the New Jerusalem is not transformed by the descent, rather its legitimacy is confirmed. The significance of cosmic boundary crossings derives from the depiction of the cosmos in Revelation more broadly, that is, the cosmos in its present form is disordered and in the process of correction. This correction involves sorting out what and who belongs where. The narrative explains that the empire of the Beast only reigns on earth as a stage in the cosmos-wide, divine campaign to justify the Woman and her offspring as the ones who truly belong with God, a campaign which simultaneously condemns the Dragon for its defiance. This is done by showing the Dragon forced from centre-stage, and from above to below, before being cast off the map entirely into the lake of

fire, while the Woman turned Bride, takes her place at the heart of the cosmos as the New Jerusalem.

#### 7.4) Conclusions: The Cosmology of the Book of Revelation

It would be misconceived to describe the ‘cosmology’ of the book of Revelation as if there was a single representation of the cosmos sustained throughout the narrative. While a comprehensive depiction of the mythological tripartite cosmos of the ancient Near East, and other traditions, can be assembled from the text, in fact John builds upon the basic ‘heaven and earth’ cosmology, adding dimensions to accommodate narrative developments. The plot progresses with the movement between realms of key characters, such as God, Christ, Satan, the Beasts, and the saints. Acts of judgment sort and re-arrange the cosmos to put authorities and powers in their proper places and finally the cosmos itself is transformed to manifest the ideal order. The cosmology of Revelation contrasts with the response to Rome’s cosmology outlined for the province of Asia in general in section 6.4. Revelation subverts the cosmology that the province accommodated. In chapter 8, this insight will be supplemented by the recognition that Rome’s cosmology is discernible in Revelation as a parody of how it appears in historical sources. Furthermore, it will be seen that Revelation’s cosmology also, even primarily, contends with cosmologies of the province of Asia and John’s Christian rivals.

## **8) The Cosmology of Revelation: Engaging with Rome, the Province, and John's Rivals**

The penultimate chapter of the thesis will draw together the key historical data and arguments that have been established thus far. The aim is to determine how the book of Revelation engages with the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology. Chapter 6 outlined three major themes in the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology:

- that heaven and earth were in harmony under Roman *imperium*;
- that Rome ruled from the centre to the ends of the earth; and
- that Rome ruled in heaven and from heaven.

These dimensions of Rome's cosmology were supported by historical evidence from Rome as well as the provinces. Section 6.4 focused on the province of Asia and demonstrated that a similar cosmology could be observed but significantly it was adapted for local purposes and functioned to advance local interests. It was also noted that there was a compatibility between Rome's cosmology and the provincial cosmology which meant that it was possible for civic elites to affirm the three tenets of Rome's cosmology listed above while promoting local and individual interests. Chapter 7 provided a detailed account of the cosmology of Revelation and in the present chapter it will be demonstrated that, in contrast to the civic elites of Asia, John did not adapt Rome's cosmology but distorted it as he positioned Rome within his own cosmological narrative. In section 8.2, the contrast between John and the civic elites of Asia in their approach to Rome's cosmology will be explored in relation to the rhetoric of Revelation. Section 8.3 will explore the possibility that underlying the tension between John and his Christian rivals were differing cosmologies and that a key difference was the place of Rome in the cosmos. The contribution of the present chapter will be an analysis of the cosmology of Revelation and Roman imperial ideology which is attentive to the local context in the province of Asia and to the social setting involving internal tension in the churches of Asia.

## 8.1) Engaging Rome

### 8.1.1) *A Comparison of the Cosmologies of Revelation and Roman Imperial Ideology*

Before examining how the book of Revelation engages with Rome's cosmology, a comparison of the two cosmologies will be made. The comparison will address the structure and symbolism of the cosmos, the allocation of territory in the cosmos, and the ideological and social implications of each cosmology. The comparison will provide a foundation for the discussion of the place of Rome in Revelation's narrative and rhetorical strategy. Comparing the cosmologies of Revelation and Rome will contribute to an understanding of Revelation's rhetorical strategy. Revelation, in fact, has several cosmologies; it reveals not only the cosmos as it was to the seven churches but also the way the cosmos used to be (Rev 5.1–5 and Rev 12) and what it would become after the imminent series of judgment (Rev 21–2). In other words, Revelation contains a narrative about the cosmos and not just a cosmology. A cosmological narrative may also be discerned in Roman imperial ideology. For example, in the *Aeneid* the foundation of Rome is embedded in a narrative of cosmological transformation from chaos to order. The consequence is that the comparison must address not only the representation of the cosmos as it was in the present but also the narrative about the cosmos which provided an account of how it had come to be and how it would progress in the future.

#### 8.1.1.a) *Comparing the Cosmology of Revelation and Rome: Structure and Symbolism*

The cosmologies of Revelation and Rome have a similar structure. Broadly speaking, they both belong to the 'mythological' representation of the cosmos which has heaven over

the earth and sea, the underworld beneath, and the ends of the earth at the periphery.<sup>1</sup> A difference is that in Revelation the underworld is of greater importance than in Roman imperial ideology. Some possible explanations for this will be offered shortly. As discussed in chapter 5, the use of the mythological three-tier cosmos does not imply that John or Rome and its provincial allies were unaware of other cosmological models, such as the ‘scientific’ multi-tiered cosmos developed in Greco-Roman philosophy – this was clearly not the case for Rome. The use of a mythological cosmology may be because it was well-suited to ideological representations of power and authority in the cosmos and hence to the legitimization of the social order. This was an agenda of Rome as it forged its identity as a worldwide empire as well as for John who sought to represent the Christian churches as the seed of the emerging kingdom of God and Christ.

While the structures of the cosmos are similar, the composition and symbolism of the realms differ in several ways. In the cosmology of both Revelation and Rome, heaven is the dwelling place of divine beings. In Revelation, heaven is occupied by God, Christ, and the angels, and for Rome by Jupiter and the other gods of the pantheon. In both cosmologies heaven is also the dwelling of humans after death. In Revelation, the martyred saints reside there in addition to Christ, who in early Christian traditions was considered both divine and human; and for Rome, its founders such as Aeneas and Romulus, the emperors and members of the imperial family, and other distinguished citizens.<sup>2</sup> The representation of heaven as the astral realm is present in the works of Roman poets such as Manilius, whose *Astronomica* demonstrates that ideas about power and authority could be expressed in an astronomical description of the cosmos. The idea of heaven as the astral realm is not prominent in

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<sup>1</sup> What Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 38, calls the archaic tripartite cosmology.

<sup>2</sup> In what became Christian orthodox theology, Christ was considered a divine being who became and remained human. In contrast, the Roman emperors and other deified persons were humans who became divine or semi-divine. Though some poets did speak of the emperor having some form of pre-existence in heaven, for example, Manilius, *Ast.* 1.799–800.



Revelation, though the four living creatures of Rev 4.6–8 have been interpreted as constellations, and Rev 12, which speaks of the appearance of the sign (σημεῖον) of the Woman and the Dragon in heaven, may also connote the astral realm.<sup>3</sup> In both cosmologies, heaven is presently a realm of order and stability which is assured by the ruling presence of God and Christ in one case and Jupiter with the emperor by his side in the other.<sup>4</sup>

In Revelation, the centrality and cosmic importance of Rome in the earthly domain, which was claimed in Roman imperial ideology, is in one sense acknowledged. Babylon/Rome rules over the kings of the earth and draws merchants seeking wealth to itself (Rev 17.2, 18; 18.3, 9, 11–15, 23). The significant difference is that Rome claimed its *imperium* was for the good of the world, bringing it peace, security, and prosperity, whereas in Revelation Rome brings ruination. The idea that Rome ruled over land and sea (*terra marique*) may also be alluded to in Rev 13 where the Dragon brings forth a Beast from the Sea followed by a Beast from the Earth.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Babylon/Rome is described as a great prostitute who sits on many waters, which may allude to Rome's control of the Mediterranean Sea (Rev 17.1).<sup>6</sup> While the reality of Roman domination of earth and sea is

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<sup>3</sup> The Greek word σημεῖον is used for the signs of the zodiac. See discussion in Tim Hegedus, 'Some Astrological Motifs in the Book of Revelation', *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (ed. Richard S. Ascough; Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005) 73–85. The interpretation of Revelation in Malina, *Genre and Message*, which views the entire work as 'astral prophecy', overstates the significance and extent of astrological allusions and symbolism in the text. The fact that Malina can draw so many connections between the symbolism of Revelation and the symbolism of astrology may be explained by the vast array of images used in astrological writings.

<sup>4</sup> Fears, 'Cult of Jupiter', 9, Jupiter was significant because he was the supreme god and served as the divine model of the emperor's rule on earth. However, some emperors emphasised other gods above Jupiter, for example, Augustus with Apollo. There was conflict and disorder in heaven at a time in the past; for example, Rev 12 describes a war in heaven, and in the *Aeneid* there is conflict between Jupiter and Juno leading up to the foundation of Rome.

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 12.12 announces that the earth and sea have become the domain of the Dragon.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert G. May, 'Some Cosmic Connotations of Mayim Rabbîm, "Many Waters"', *JBL* 74 (1955) 9–21, the reference to 'many waters' in Rev 17.1 has several connotations, including the Mediterranean Sea, the nations or peoples, and a source of threatening chaos.

acknowledged in Revelation, it is made clear that this rule is illegitimate. For example, it is stated that the *imperium* (ἐξουσία) of the Beast is given by the Dragon (Rev 13.4), heaven opposes the earthly authority through its judgments, and in Rev 10, an angel of God lays claim to earth and sea by straddling the two with a foot on each and swearing by the creator of the cosmos as he announces imminent judgment.<sup>7</sup> And Revelation does not concede that Rome ruled to the ends of the earth. In Roman imperial ideology, the ends of the earth were subdued and posed no threat but in Revelation at the four corners of the earth and beyond the Euphrates are destructive forces momentarily contained; including destructive winds, angels, and the kings of the East (Rev 7.1; 9.14; 16.12).

It has already been mentioned that in Rome's cosmology the underworld appears to be of lesser importance than in Revelation. The idea of the underworld as a domain of the gods and the place of the dead remained current in the Roman imperial period. For example, Virgil has Aeneas visit his dead father Anchises in Tartarus. Ovid too describes the underworld in *Meta.* 4.432–480, though Galinsky suggests he demythologised the realm by presenting it as a city, perhaps because sophisticated readers would be averse to any suggestion that the realm should be conceived of literally.<sup>8</sup> Adler argues that Augustus diminished the importance of the underworld noting that at the Secular Games of 17 BCE Augustus substituted the traditional gods honoured at the festival, the chthonic gods Dis and Proserpina, with Jupiter, Juno, Apollo, and Diana.<sup>9</sup> It is also worth noting that while the *Grand Camée de France* represented the cosmos and had a three-tier structure, the lowest

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<sup>7</sup> Hugh J. Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions: A Lexicon and Analysis* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1974) 132–4, ἐξουσία is the Greek term most frequently used to translate the Latin term *imperium*.

<sup>8</sup> Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 267. Epicurean philosophers, such as Lucretius, also denied the existence of the underworld. Though there was a site in the Roman Forum called the *mundus* which was a pit, and later shrine, which was the legendary centre of the city and gateway to the underworld; see Beard *et al.*, *Religions of Rome: Volume 2*, 92–4.

<sup>9</sup> Adler, 'Invocation', 41.

level represented the barbarian periphery of the earth and not the underworld. This can be explained by the gem's design which conveyed the idea of Roman rule attained through victory. Nonetheless, its design suggests an explanation for the diminished importance of the underworld; that is, that Rome's cosmology was primarily concerned with establishing the basis and legitimacy of its *imperium*, which was through victory on earth and the heavenly dwelling of the emperor. The underworld was not crucial in this discourse. Seneca did include the underworld when he mocked the apotheosis of Claudius in the *Apocolocyntosis*. He described the rejection of Claudius from heaven and his descent past the earth and into the underworld. Interestingly, a similar descent appears in Revelation, though it is the Beast's benefactor, Satan, who is cast down and not the Roman emperor. The significance of this observation will be explored in the discussion immediately following on the concept of territory. In conclusion, while the structure of the cosmos in Revelation and Rome was similar, there were distinctions and the symbolism of the various realms differed in ways that reflected their respective ideologies and rhetorical aims.

#### 8.1.1.b) Comparing the Cosmology of Revelation and Rome: Territory

Chapter 5 established that various ancient cosmologies existed in the first-century world. It has also been proposed that John selected the mythological three-tier cosmos primarily because it served his rhetorical purposes and not necessarily because of a lack of education, as Sean Ryan postulated.<sup>10</sup> To elaborate, the cosmology of Revelation served John's rhetorical purpose by allowing him to construct a narrative in which the cosmos was defined as territory belonging to the key opponents. The most significant differences between the cosmology of Revelation and Rome is in the assignment of territory in the cosmos. In Roman imperial ideology, while heaven remained the domain of Jupiter and the gods, the

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<sup>10</sup> Ryan, *Hearing at the Boundaries*, 71–3.

emperors also had a place there such that Statius could even speak of a Domitian establishing a Flavian heaven (Statius, *Silv.* 4.3.18–19). Earth too belonged to Rome with the living emperor as the divine agent, a Jupiter on earth (Ovid, *Tristia* 3.1.35–39; Martial, *Ep.* 9.91.5–6; Statius, *Silv.* 1.6.27; 4.3.128–129).<sup>11</sup> Rome occupied the centre and claimed dominion over land and sea to the ends of the earth. At the periphery were the conquered barbarians. Both above and below and centre and periphery were the territory of Rome, which resulted in a unified cosmos.

A very different arrangement of power and authority appears in the book of Revelation. Heaven is the domain of God who shares his throne with Christ. While God is the creator of earth and displays authority over it by exercising judgment, according to Rev 12.12 the earth and sea are presently Satan's domain. This arises from the removal of Satan from heaven after which Satan's stratagem on earth is to establish Babylon/Rome as the centre of the earth and as the antagonist of God's people who are the offspring of the Woman. Revelation does not narrate the fall of the Roman emperors from heaven because they never ascended to heaven and especially because the source of their authority, Satan, was constrained to the earthly domain. Babylon/Rome is at the centre of the earth but the relationship between Christ and the churches, envisioned in Rev 1–3, suggests the churches constitute an alternative centre. The earth is therefore a contested space just as heaven was before Satan's expulsion. In the judgment narratives, the underworld and ends of the earth are used by God in heaven to assault the earth. The result is that the area of the earth controlled by Satan and Babylon/Rome is surrounded by hostile territory implying that Rome's *imperium* is far from secure despite its central position in the world. Another distinctive element of heaven in Revelation is that it is also the territory of the martyred saints who

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<sup>11</sup> See also the discussion in Kenneth Scott, 'Emperor Worship in Ovid', *TAPA* 61 (1930) 52–7.

gather by the heavenly altar as they await justice.<sup>12</sup> In Rome's cosmos, defeated people are represented at the periphery and their defeat legitimated the heavenly dwelling of the emperor. In Revelation's cosmos, the ascent of the saints to heaven both vindicates them and condemns the war waged against them by the Beast. According to John, Rome was not populating heaven with members of the imperial family, as in Statius, but with the people it persecuted. In summary, Rome claimed the earth as its territory and peripheralised its opponents. It imagined itself surrounded by forces which were either aligned or benign. In contrast, Revelation advanced a cosmology in which the world was presently in a state of conflict with the earth belonging to Satan and Rome but surrounded by hostile territory. The concept of territory will be addressed further in section 8.1.2, which will consider territorial transformation in the narrative of Revelation and how it contributes to its rhetoric.

#### *8.1.1.c) Comparing the Cosmology of Revelation and Rome: Ideological and Social Implications*

In chapter 4 it was established that cosmology, ideology, and social identity are related concepts. The ideological and social implications of the cosmologies of Revelation and Rome will now be explored. A point of difference between the two cosmologies is whether the cosmos in its present state is in harmony; that is, whether there is alignment between heaven and earth and between the centre and the periphery. Rome advanced a cosmology in which there was harmony in both the above–below and centre–periphery axes. The case has been argued at length in chapter 6 and will not be repeated at this point, though an excellent illustration is the action taken by Domitian to move the meridian line of the *Horologium Augusti* in the Campus Martius to demonstrate that heaven and earth were

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<sup>12</sup> Yeates, 'Blaspheming Heaven', 31–51. That heaven is the proper place for the martyred saints is suggested by the fact that they are offspring of the heavenly woman of Rev 12.

aligned under his rule just as it had been under Augustus.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Revelation has a vision of the cosmos in which there is tension between the heavenly throne of God and Christ and the earthly throne of Satan and the Beast. In addition, the periphery of the earth and the underworld are hostile to the earth and its central political power – Babylon/Rome. And so Rome's cosmos was stable but Revelation's was not and in fact was on the cusp of a dramatic adjustment to produce a state of harmony and stability.

The ideological implication of Rome's cosmology was that its empire was secure and its rule legitimate because history had been directed by the gods to the foundation of an ideal cosmic order under its *imperium*.<sup>14</sup> As Friesen argued, Rome presented itself as the end of history and utopia realised.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, opposition to Rome was destined to fail and illegitimate in nature because opposition to Rome threatened cosmic harmony. Roman imperial ideology presented the province of Asia with the option of aligning with its cosmology or of defying the divinely ordained cosmic harmony. This ideological scheme provides context for the topic of martyrdom and the heavenly location of deceased saints in Revelation. In several places it is stated that the Beast/Rome wages war against the saints and defeats them (Rev 11.7; 12.17; 13.7). In Rome's cosmos, their deaths were an inevitable and rightful outcome and a demonstration of the legitimacy of Rome's authority. Furthermore, ascent to heaven for such individuals would be unthinkable because only those who have dutifully served the Empire could be honoured in such a way, not those who opposed it. By showing the martyred saints in heaven, Revelation opposes Roman imperial ideology and counters it with an ideology in which opposition to Rome is legitimate, indeed mandated.

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<sup>13</sup> Heslin, 'Augustus, Domitian', 8.

<sup>14</sup> Woolf, 'Inventing Empire', 317, who comments that Rome forged an identity for itself by relating its history to cosmological constants that demonstrated its power was stable, justified, and understandable.

<sup>15</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 130–1.

In Revelation, the cosmos is presently in a state of transition as the order previously established in heaven is expanded to encompass the earth. In Rome's cosmology, the visible worldly order was the manifestation of the ideal but in Revelation it was neither ideal nor ultimate. In keeping with the apocalyptic genre, the ideal transcended the present world both spatially and temporally. This cosmology was not compatible with Rome's concept of *imperium sine fine* and it undermined the basis of Rome's legitimacy. Roman writers like Seneca, in applying the Stoic concept of *ekpyrosis*, also implied the eventual collapse of the Roman Empire along with the rest of the cosmos. However, in Revelation the Roman Empire is not simply another in the series of empires that will rise and fall but the final empire, the epitome of evil, and an obstacle to cosmic renewal.<sup>16</sup> For the province of Asia, the ideological implication is that because the Roman Empire exercises illegitimate authority and is an obstacle to the foundation of cosmic harmony and stability, hostility rather than affirmation or indifference is the only valid response to Rome.

The process of formulating social identity is interconnected with the development and expression of ideology and cosmology. Social identity partly consists of an individual's or group's understanding of their place in society as well as their concept of the nature of society itself. The cosmologies advanced by Rome and Revelation each promoted a perspective on the nature of the societies in the *poleis* of Asia and therefore influenced the formation of social identity. The first and most obvious observation is that the two cosmologies seek to position the audience differently in relation to the Roman Empire and its administration. Under Rome's cosmology, a legitimate social identity is one which acknowledged the vital importance of Rome in the world. In section 6.4, some examples of such formulations of group social identity were outlined. For example, the reliefs of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias presented Rome as the divinely established successor to Greece

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<sup>16</sup> Such a view of the Roman Empire sits within the Jewish apocalyptic tradition and derives from Daniel where a series of hostile kingdoms precedes the coming of the messianic kingdom.

thereby elevating the city's own prestige through both the validation of its Greek heritage and its more recent relationship with Rome. In contrast, chapter 7 showed that in Revelation's cosmology, Rome was derided as a failed satanic stratagem and that the text sought to persuade its audience to forge an identity in the rejection of Rome and in allegiance to an alternative heavenly source of authority. The audience is to hear the heavenly admonition of Rev 18.4, 'Come out of her, my people', and is urged to root their identity in belonging to the churches gathered around the Son of Man (Rev 1–3) and to the New Jerusalem as their polis.

Rome's cosmology also engendered a positive view of the social order in general and hence supported participation in it. The connection between cosmic harmony and a prosperous and fecund world in Roman imperial ideology has been demonstrated in section 6.1. If the world was coming into the Golden Age, then there was an impetus to embrace the benefits available and in doing so to acknowledge Rome as the great benefactor of the world and divine agent of blessing. Furthermore, the stability of the world and its political system provided warrant for engaging in various social institutions. Rome's cosmology was reinforced by the social realities of Rome's influence in the province of Asia. For example, Rome's *pax terra marique parva* promoted trade and commercial activity. Opportunities for social advancement encouraged participation in local political institutions and imperial cults. The construction of buildings and monuments, as was notably evident at Ephesus, provided opportunities for benefaction.

Revelation's cosmology promoted the opposite disposition towards the social order. If Rome was a diabolical agent and was soon to collapse, then allegiance with Rome was both impious and foolish. The question then becomes which social behaviours signified support of Rome. This will be addressed in sections 8.2 and 8.3 in relation to the residents of the cities of Asia and the Christian communities of the cities respectively. Though it may be noted here that in Revelation there are several instances in which there appears to be an encouragement to detach from core social practices such as commerce (Rev 13.17), eating cultic meat, which could take place at a range of common social contexts (Rev 2.14, 20), and possibly, if the



reference to virgins is intended literally, even marriage (Rev 14.4).<sup>17</sup> If John was an itinerant prophet, it may be that his vocation and lifestyle were a demonstration of social detachment. It is also possible that his presence on Patmos was a self-imposed exile, as a prophetic demonstration of the heavenly call to come out of Babylon.

#### 8.1.2) *Rome in the Cosmological Narrative of Revelation*

Narrative is the primary vehicle by which the rhetoric of Revelation is communicated and so determining the role and function of Rome in the narrative reveals how the text engages with the Roman Empire.<sup>18</sup> In section 7.2.2 it was established that in Revelation, the cosmos is the setting of a story about the location and transferral of power and authority in the world. Central themes of the text are also conveyed through the transformation of the cosmos itself; for example, the victory of God is ultimately manifest in the dissolution of the first cosmos and the appearance of the new heaven and earth. To determine the way the text engages with Rome and its cosmology it is necessary to identify the role Rome plays in these two aspects of the narrative. Hansen has proposed that at the core of Revelation's narrative is a conflict between John's Christ-centred cosmology and Rome's cosmology and that the key plotline is the demolition of the latter and its replacement by the former.<sup>19</sup> This proposal will be evaluated and another will be outlined in which the primary rhetorical strategy deployed in the narrative is the repositioning of Rome in the cosmos by fitting it into John's alternative cosmological narrative.

Hansen identified conflict between God/Christ and Rome as the major subject of the narrative and considered Revelation's cosmology to be crucial in the resolution of the

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<sup>17</sup> It may be that John was viewed by some Christians as a false teacher like that described in 1 Tim 4.1–5, see Royalty, *Origin of Heresy*, 165–6.

<sup>18</sup> See DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 286–9, on Revelation's narrative as argumentation.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 154.

conflict. His thesis is that the visions of Revelation depict the destruction of the present cosmos, which is centred on the Roman Empire, and its replacement by the new creation, which is centred on Christ. For example, regarding John's rhetorical engagement with Roman 'cultic discourse' he states,

John does this to intentionally disrupt the Roman world order and bring it to its end. In portraying the dismantling of the Roman cosmos, John clears the way to bear witness to God's new creative work in making "all things new" (21:5). The end of Roman cosmological discourse and the entrance of John's Christological cosmic discourse is intended to bring about repentance.<sup>20</sup>

A key point of his argument is that the cosmos which is destroyed through God's judgments is the cosmos as it was conceived by Rome.<sup>21</sup> In numerous places Hansen speaks of a 'cultic' cosmos by which he means an understanding of the world in which ritual activity is rewarded by the gods.<sup>22</sup> And so common beliefs in the Greco-Roman world and not only those of Roman imperial ideology contribute to this cultic cosmology; for example, he says, 'In Asia Minor under Roman rule in the first century, the discourse that sustained and shaped the world was centered around the gods, Caesar, and imperial Rome.'<sup>23</sup> Yet it is clear that Hansen thinks that Roman imperial ideology was primarily responsible for the construction of the cosmology, and so he sometimes refers to the cosmos as 'Caesar's world'.<sup>24</sup> In summary, Hansen thinks that John criticised and undermined the legitimacy of Rome's authority by envisioning the destruction of the cosmos that Rome had constructed and which was foundational to its existence.

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<sup>20</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Which is explicitly stated at Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 8–9.

<sup>22</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 67.

<sup>23</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 67. To demonstrate the point, he asserts at Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 8, that it was the imperial cult which 'originated and maintained' the cosmological discourse that prevailed in the province of Asia.

Hansen rightly observes that Rome is criticised in the rhetoric of Revelation and, significantly for the present thesis, that cosmology is a rhetorical device employed to that end. However, two points of clarification are to be made regarding the way cosmology is deployed in the rhetoric of Revelation. Firstly, as has been pointed out in section 8.1.1, the cosmos which John portrays being destroyed differs in significant ways from the cosmology of Roman imperial ideology as established by historical sources. There is no harmony between heaven and earth, the Beast's *imperium* is not universal, the periphery is not subdued, and the Beast has no place in heaven. In other words, according to Revelation Rome's cosmology is a chimera. There is cultic activity in the worship of the Beast but it does not fit the typical pattern of such actions as there is no heavenly correlate to the objects of worship. The only effective cultic activity is the prayers of the saints on earth which rise to the heavenly altar and result in the judgments of the seven bowls. Revelation's 'cultic cosmology' is positively framed. Hansen rightly imagines there to be a clash of cosmologies in Revelation but it is incorrect to suggest it involves Rome's cosmos being replaced by that of Christ for the simple reason that Rome's cosmos, as conceived by Rome, does not feature in the text. The only cosmology John depicts is that of Christ, a cosmology in which Christ's reign emerges and expands to embrace the entire cosmos. John critiques Rome's cosmology not by showing it dismantled and supplanted but by distorting it to fit his own cosmological narrative.

The second point is that Hansen overstates the importance of Rome and neglects the primary conflict in the narrative, which is between God and Satan. The conflict between Rome and the saints of God is subsumed in this primary conflict.<sup>25</sup> Satan calls forth the Beast from the Sea to inflict harm upon the offspring of the Woman after failing to harm the Son. The lesser importance of Rome is evident in the sequence of events in the final conflict

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<sup>25</sup> For example, Bauckham, *Climax*, 185, observes that John embeds the typical defeat of empires within a narrative of the defeat of Satan by the messiah.

narrative of Rev 19–21 in which the battle with the Beast is only the penultimate contest. The final battle with the Beast occurs in Rev 19.19–20 and it is summarily defeated,

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.

After this battle, Satan orchestrates his final offensive against the saints by mustering forces from the ends of the earth to attack the ‘beloved city’. Satan’s forces are defeated by fire from heaven and Satan is thrown into the lake of fire, joining his beasts. The conflict with Rome is an important aspect of the plot, one which contributes to the theme of the victory of God, but it is the penultimate story in the narrative. John’s cosmological narrative extends well before Rome enters the plot, to when Satan still had a place in heaven (Rev 12), and goes beyond its fall, to the final battle which takes place on earth after the millennium (Rev 20). A proper understanding of Revelation’s cosmology must recognise this larger narrative.

It should also be noted that the defeat of Rome is not tied to the destruction of the cosmos, in contrast to Hansen who writes, ‘The judgment and defeat of Rome requires that the world that sustains and makes Rome possible must be dismantled—the world of idolatry must be unmade’.<sup>26</sup> While there are judgments that fall upon the earth throughout the three septets, it is only after the Beast and Satan have been defeated that the cosmos is finally dissolved with earth and heaven fleeing before the great white throne of judgment. So, in relation to the narrative of Revelation, it is not the case that the defeat of Rome required the dismantling of the cosmos because the latter follows the former. The judgments upon the earth and its ultimate dissolution require another explanation as it seems that even once liberated from Satan and every one of his allies the cosmos remains unsuitable for

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<sup>26</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 154.

accommodating the New Jerusalem, the redeemed saints, and the throne of God. The crucial verses are those which compare the new heaven and earth with the first heaven and earth. Revelation 21.3–4 states, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’ The first heaven and earth was inseparable from the ‘first things’, such as suffering and death. John envisions cosmic dissolution not as an element of his rhetoric against Rome but because he conceived the present cosmos to be fundamentally flawed by nature.

It is proposed in the present thesis that Revelation contests Rome’s cosmology by recasting Rome’s role in the cosmos. As mentioned in the second chapter of the thesis on methodology, postcolonial critics have utilised the term *catachresis* to describe how colonised peoples resist the colonial power by subversively adapting colonial discourse, resulting in parody for example.<sup>27</sup> Other scholars speak of re-mythologising by which is meant that myths are modified and retold to critique the dominant authority.<sup>28</sup> John employs these subtler strategies in his rhetoric. To illustrate the point several aspects of Rome’s cosmology will be compared with their occurrence in Revelation. Firstly, in Rome’s cosmology, by the account of its foundation in the *Aeneid*, Rome’s *imperium* was bestowed on it by Jupiter following a conflict in heaven in which Jupiter was eventually supreme, whereas Rev 13.4 states that it was the Dragon/Satan who gave the Beast/Rome its ἐξουσία, a term equivalent to *imperium*.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, Rome’s supernatural ally was the conquered, not the victor, and Satan’s exclusion from heaven and opposition to God who reigns there meant that there was no alignment between heaven and earth under Roman *imperium*, as claimed in

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<sup>27</sup> Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 105–6.

<sup>28</sup> Sánchez, *From Patmos to the Barrio*, 12–45.

<sup>29</sup> Mason, *Greek Terms*, 132–4.

its cosmology. Also, Rome's universal rule is subverted in Revelation by the presence of hostile forces at the ends of the earth. Rome's eternal rule is contradicted by the fact that the source of its *imperium*, Satan, himself has only a short time to exercise his dominion on earth; Rev 12.12 says, 'But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!' And the narrative goes on to tell of Rome's defeat and transferral to the lake of fire where it dwells eternally in torment (Rev 20.10). While Rome occupies the centre of the earth in Revelation, it is only as a pretender as the space had been destined not for 'Babylon' but the New Jerusalem. In its cosmology, Rome presented itself as the agent of divine blessing and the great benefactor which was inaugurating the Golden Age. In Revelation, Rome is the great prostitute who brings corruption, chaos, and impurity to the earth.<sup>30</sup> In Rome's cosmology its emperors, or some at least, were elevated to heaven after death. In Revelation, however, in a manner reminiscent of Claudius's expulsion from heaven and descent to Tartarus in the *Apocolocyntosis*, John relegates the Beast along with its heads to the lake of fire. Rome's self-representation is distorted and the key components of its cosmology are contested by recasting Rome in the cosmological narrative.

Revelation may be contrasted to the strategies employed by elites in the cities of the province of Asia, who also embedded Rome within their own mythological narratives.<sup>31</sup> While both incorporated Roman ideology, and to a greater or lesser extent adapted it for their purposes, in Revelation the process had the purpose of subverting rather than affirming Roman authority. The section to follow will elaborate on contrasts such as this and make further comparisons to illuminate Revelation's rhetorical strategy in the local context.

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<sup>30</sup> Collins, *Combat Myth*, 186, states that the function of the Nero myth in Revelation is to characterise the Roman Empire as a cosmic force of chaos.

<sup>31</sup> See section 6.4 for examples including the imagery of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias and a procession instituted by Salutaris at Ephesus.

## 8.2) Engaging with Rome's Cosmology in the Province of Asia

While the Roman Empire is clearly an important subject in the study of Revelation, it must be noted that the book was most likely written in the province of Asia and for an Asian audience.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it is appropriate to analyse the rhetorical function of Revelation's cosmology in relation to and in the context of local engagement with Roman imperial ideology and its associated cosmology. This has been recognised by several scholars, such as Friesen who says that John's criticism of the imperial cult was directed towards local enemies and not the emperor and Rome itself.<sup>33</sup> Friesen also identifies the local impact of rhetoric against Rome, saying, 'John not only prophesied against imperial power; he also declared illegitimate the presuppositions of the local élite's claim to authority and condemned the local population for their compliance. If the author's trip to Patmos was punishment, it occurred because John was a nuisance to the province rather than the empire.'<sup>34</sup> Section 8.2 will explore the significance and implications of Revelation's cosmological engagement with Roman imperial ideology by comparing it to the strategies employed in the cities of the province. The section will begin with some comparisons of the cosmology of Revelation and the cosmology of the *poleis* of Asia and then look at the characterisation of the province itself in the narrative of Revelation. Finally, the rhetorical function of Revelation's cosmology will be discussed in the context of the province of Asia.

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<sup>32</sup> Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 28.

<sup>33</sup> Friesen, 'Cult of the Roman Emperors', 250; see also, Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The Book of Revelation', *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism; Volume 1: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. John J. Collins; New York: Continuum, 2000) 384–414.

<sup>34</sup> Friesen, 'Cult of the Roman Emperors', 250.

### 8.2.1) *Comparing the Cosmology of Revelation and the Cosmologies of the Poleis of the Province of Asia*

The major focus of the present thesis is the cosmology of Revelation and the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology. There has been no thorough investigation of the various cosmologies that existed in the province of Asia in the late first century. However, elements of the cosmology of the residents, and especially the elites, of the cities of the province have emerged in considering the manifestation of Rome's cosmology in the province.<sup>35</sup> Some of these elements contribute to an understanding of the contrasting ways in which the text of Revelation and the cities of Asia engaged with Rome's cosmology. Firstly, in the cities of the province the political and social dimensions of life were centred on the polis and civic identity was an important element of personal identity.<sup>36</sup> Each city had its patron god or gods and the special relationship between those gods and the city established a connection between the heavenly world (in cases where that was the domain of the god) and the city on earth. However, as there were numerous gods in heaven the significance of the earthly site was only of relative importance alongside other cities which had their own divine associations. Unlike Roman imperial ideology, the relationship between heaven and earth in the cosmologies of the *poleis* of Asia did not lead to the concept of a single cosmic centre on earth. Consequently, there was no cosmic periphery either; instead, the barbarians could be considered those peoples who did not belong to a polis.<sup>37</sup> The resulting cosmology is one in which diversity in the pantheon of heaven corresponded to multiple centres of importance on earth, which were generally constituted as *poleis*. Also, just

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<sup>35</sup> See section 6.4.

<sup>36</sup> For example, Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 44.1, 6, said he cherished his citizenship of Prusa above all the admiration and praise the Greek or Roman world could offer. For discussion of the importance of the polis in civic identity, see Wallace-Hadrill, 'Creation and Expression of Identity', 357–60; Whitmarsh, "'Greece Is the World'", 271; and Zuiderhoek, *Politics of Munificence*, 71–2.

<sup>37</sup> Hansen, *Polis*, 37–8.



as there could be tension and competition between the gods there was competition between the cities on earth to display their superiority in the region.

The cosmology outlined for the cities of Asia may be labelled ‘civic’ because of the importance of the polis. The city is also a significant motif in Revelation.<sup>38</sup> It is addressed to seven cities in Asia and the final judgment narrative revolves around the fall of Babylon and the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven to take its place on earth. Revelation’s exclusive monotheism which has a single throne in heaven leads to a cosmology involving a single legitimate cosmic centre and universalistic claims for the extent of rule from the centre. In Rev 4–5, the centre is the throne room of heaven and from there God is worshipped from every part of the cosmos. In Rev 21–2, the centre is the New Jerusalem to which the heavenly throne is relocated. Revelation 21.24–6 describes the nations coming into the city and finding access to divine blessing such as the fruit of the tree of life. It is also stated that the unrighteous are kept outside the walls of the city. Revelation’s cosmology in this section of the text amounts to visionary hyperbole; for example, the ‘patron god’ of the New Jerusalem does not protect and prosper the city from the heavenly realm but in fact resides within the city. Consequently, no cult is required as the people have unmediated access to God. And the New Jerusalem does not rule to the ends of the earth but contains all nations within its walls. In Revelation’s ideal cosmos, the New Jerusalem is not simply superior to all other cities but renders them obsolete.

Comparison of the cosmologies of Revelation and the cities of Asia suggests an explanation for the different responses of the two to Rome’s cosmology. The civic cosmology of the cities of Asia may be contrasted with Rome’s cosmology, which supported the formulation of its identity as the ultimate and supreme world empire. In contrast, the cities of the province were primarily concerned with their relative importance in the region.

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<sup>38</sup> For a substantial treatment of the motif, see Räßle, *Metaphor of the City*.

This difference made the two systems compatible, and as was suggested in section 6.4, a mutualism operated by which the cities of the province of Asia could elevate themselves in the province through honouring Rome and endorsing its cosmology. To illustrate the point, a relief from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias shows *Roma* crowning the personification of the city.<sup>39</sup> The greater the prestige of *Roma*, the greater the honour of receiving a crown from her. It should also be noted that while the cities accommodated Rome's conception of empire, Rome also accommodated the Greek conception of civilisation centred on the polis.<sup>40</sup> That is, the existence of ordered, self-governed communities scattered throughout its provinces served the purposes of Rome, which did not possess the resources to directly govern all its provinces.

For the cities of Asia, conceding the existence of a greater city, that is, Rome, did not compromise the pursuit of honour for the city but the situation was different for those that adopted a cosmology like that espoused in Revelation.<sup>41</sup> Revelation's cosmology is like Rome's cosmology in that both recognised a single central legitimate authority and both aspired to universal and eternal rule (*imperium sine fine*), as Rev 11.15 illustrates, 'Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever."' Noting the similarity in ideological frameworks, Stephen Moore states that Revelation 'counters empire with empire' and observes that the attributes and activities of God on the throne are like those of an emperor expanding his dominion through war.<sup>42</sup> It is understandable that a cosmological narrative about God establishing control of the world would need to account for the presence of Rome which then occupied that position. At least,

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, 'Imperial Reliefs', 133.

<sup>40</sup> Fears, 'Cult of Jupiter', 7.

<sup>41</sup> Hansen, *Polis*, 64–5, notes that it was not uncommon for one polis to be dependent on another to maintain its status, which indicates a city could acknowledge another's superiority where it benefited the city.

<sup>42</sup> Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 118–20.

that is, if John wanted his audience to imagine his visions as pertaining to the material reality in which they lived. It is imaginable that conflict could have been avoided by explaining, as Jesus did before Pilate, that the kingdom of which he spoke was ‘not of this world’. But this was not John’s intent because it seems he wanted his audience to believe that the events which were soon to take place would have dramatic consequences for the Roman Empire and those whose livelihood depended on it. In conclusion, it is proposed that the differences between the cosmologies of the cities of Asia and Rome made them compatible and so accommodation was a viable strategy for the *poleis*. On the other hand, the similarity of Revelation’s and Rome’s cosmologies set them in competition.

#### 8.2.2) *The Province of Asia in the Narrative of Revelation*

Having compared the cosmologies of Revelation and the cities of the province of Asia, the occurrence of the province in the narrative of Revelation will be discussed to provide a foundation for understanding Revelation’s rhetorical strategy in its provincial setting. The province of Asia is first connoted by the reference to seven cities of its southwestern region, including Ephesus, the capital of the region (Rev 1.11; 2–3). The oracles addressed to the churches of the seven cities describe various struggles faced by Christians. They portray the cities as difficult and sometimes hostile environments which require perseverance on the part of the saints if they are to be among those who conquer (νικᾶω). Overall, the cities are represented in strongly negative terms. It is likely that those who would soon imprison some of the saints in Smyrna were local officials (Rev 2.10) and it is possible that Antipas was killed in Pergamum either by a local mob or following local officiation.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 1087, suggests that Antipas was executed by beheading. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 37, raises the possibility that Antipas was killed by a mob. Jones, ‘Roman Imperial Cult’, 1034, thinks it reasonable to suppose that Antipas’s death was a response to refusal to worship the emperor, though there is nothing in the text to support this. This view was previously asserted in A. G. Russell, ‘The Jews, the Roman Empire, and Christianity, A.D. 50–180’, *GR* 6 (1937) 176.

Pergamum is said to be the location of ‘Satan’s throne’, which may refer to the altar of Zeus and Athena or the temple of Augustus and Rome, and it is also stated that Satan lives there (Rev 2.13).<sup>44</sup> Finally, the common social customs of eating sacrificial meat and of participating in cultic worship are characterised as fornication.<sup>45</sup> In summary, the cities of the province are portrayed as places of moral corruption, of hostility to the saints, and of opposition to God. As Friesen states, ‘The text was seditious not because it attacked the emperor, but because it indicted the emerging social order in Asia as a blasphemous force that deceived all people and spilled the blood of saints.’<sup>46</sup>

The province of Asia, or some aspect of it, is represented by the Beast from the Earth, which exercises authority, ultimately derived from Satan, on behalf of the Beast from the Sea. In addition to deceiving the people to worship the image of the Beast, the Beast from the Earth regulates commerce by requiring those who buy and sell to be marked with the name/number of the Beast. The Beast from the Earth, which is also called the False Prophet, is a satanic instrument of deception which corrupts the religious and economic dimensions of life in the province by co-opting Rome in both. Various referents for the Beast from the Earth have been proposed, including: local priests, or the high priest, of the imperial cults in the province; the *commune Asiae*; the local Roman governor; provincial elites; and more broadly as either the imperial way of life and its institutions or even Greco-Roman culture in general.<sup>47</sup> What is important for the present discussion is, firstly, that the great majority of

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<sup>44</sup> On interpretations of ‘Satan’s throne’, see Aune, *Revelation*, 183–4; and Friesen, ‘Satan’s Throne’, 356–67.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Rev 2.20.

<sup>46</sup> Friesen, ‘Cult of the Roman Emperors’, 250.

<sup>47</sup> Priesthood of the imperial cult – Bousset, *Die Offenbarung*, 365–6; Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (London: SCM, 1955) 178; Barnett, ‘Polemical Parallelism’, 111–12; Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 215; Aune, *Revelation*, 756; and Steven J. Scherrer, ‘Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13–15’, *JBL* 103 (1984) 599; the *commune Asiae* – Ramsay, *Letters*, 94–100; Hemer, *Letters*, 12; and Oliver O’Donovan, ‘The Political Thought of the Book of Revelation’, *TynB* 37 (1986) 68; provincial elites – Adela Yarbro Collins, ‘“What the Spirit Says

interpretations see the province of Asia in the figure of the second Beast, and secondly, that the objection relates to the active role played by certain figures in the province in influencing people to engage in worship of Rome and to rely on Rome in commerce.

The political and commercial dimensions of the province of Asia are also represented in two groups that appear in close association and in alignment with the Beast; that is, the kings of the earth and the merchants of the earth (Rev 18.3, 11, 15, 23). While the reference to the kings and merchants of the earth includes provinces and regions outside of Asia, the Asian audience of Revelation is led to identify their political leaders and wealthy traders with the two groups.<sup>48</sup> In support of this, Aune notes that the major trade items of the province included many of those listed in Rev 18.12–13.<sup>49</sup> The kings and merchants mourn when Babylon falls because their source of wealth and luxury has been removed, though in fact, as the ὅτι clause which opens Rev 18.3 suggests, Babylon's desolation is explained as punishment for the 'fornication' of the kings and merchants with Babylon, 'For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury.' The implication is that while Rome is culpable for its corruptive influence on the earth, the province of Asia also experiences judgment because of its corrupt desire, such as greed, which prompted it to form political and economic ties to the satanic empire for the benefits that ensued.<sup>50</sup> The representation of the kings and merchants of the

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to the Churches": Preaching the Apocalypse', *QR* 4 (1984) 82; and Carey, 'Counter-Imperial Script', 166; Roman imperialism in general – Friesen, 'Beast from the Land', 62–3; Greco-Roman culture in general – Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 114.

<sup>48</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 25, 69, claims that merchants made up a significant proportion of Christian communities in the first century and that Jezebel's followers, who were wealthier than John's, included merchants. If this is correct, the audience may have identified certain Christians within their group, or certain churches within their city, with the merchants aligned to the Beast.

<sup>49</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 980.

<sup>50</sup> The charge of fornication is symbolic here and is a development of the usage in the HB, which was largely applied to Israel for its unfaithfulness to God through participation in idolatry, see Jer 2.20; Hos 1.2; 4.15. In Isa

earth further contributes to the negative portrayal of the province. In section 8.2.3, it will be seen how this negative portrayal contributed to the rhetorical deployment of Revelation's cosmology.

### *8.2.3) The Rhetorical Function of the Cosmology of Revelation in the Context of the Province of Asia*

In section 3.4.3, one of the commonly identified rhetorical situations for Revelation was outlined, namely, pressure on Christians to assimilate. The social practices that appear to be of concern are eating meat sacrificed to idols, other forms of participation in cultic activity, probably including imperial cults, and the pursuit of material prosperity. According to Rev 2–3, such activities had to be avoided for a person to be among those who conquer and are rewarded in the coming age. In response to this threat to the integrity of the churches' identity, the cities of the province are criticised for their engagement with Rome and an alternative cosmology is provided to warrant the action the audience is exhorted to take which would distance or exclude them from the societies in which they lived. Revelation's alternative cosmology was centred on God and Christ as well as the New Jerusalem, and not the polis and Rome as it was in the cities of Asia. It will be demonstrated that Revelation's cosmology functioned to redefine the place of the polis in the identity of the faithful in the churches (section 8.2.3.a) and to provide warrant for deviant social conduct (section 8.2.3.b).

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23.17, Tyre is said to engage in fornication through trade with other nations. In the NT, greed and adultery are associated in Eph 5.3 and 2 Pet 2.14, and in Col 3.5 greed is equated with idolatry. It may be that John uses fornication symbolism because economic ties necessarily required engagement with Rome's idolatry, as Beale, *Revelation*, 895–7, suggests, or that the lust for wealth itself was a form of 'fornication'. On the concept of greed as idolatry, see Brian S. Rosner, *Greed as Idolatry: The Origin and Meaning of a Pauline Metaphor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

### 8.2.3.a) *Redefining the Place of the Polis in the Identity of the Churches*

The rhetoric of Revelation aims to reformulate the identity of those in the churches of Asia not only by contesting the position of Rome in the cosmos but also the significance of the *poleis* of the province. If the polis was of prime importance to the identity of the typical resident of the cities, it was not to be so for the faithful of the churches. One strategy employed to achieve this was to denounce civic identity for its incorporation of Roman imperial ideology. In Revelation's rhetoric, the cities were complicit in and contributed to the moral corruption of Rome. Furthermore, the cities had foolishly aligned themselves with an empire which was destined to fall and was in fact the product of Satan who was defeated in heaven and soon to be defeated on earth. Revelation 2–3 establishes the theme of victory and the key exhortation of the chapters is to be ὁ νικῶν – one who is victorious. The rhetoric of Revelation indicates that if the audience identifies with their polis, they are among the soon-to-be vanquished and not the victorious. They will soon be filled with grief at the demise of their mistress, Rome. Therefore, the audience is encouraged to see themselves apart from society at large.<sup>51</sup>

The rhetoric of Revelation amounts to a criticism of the Asian cities' ideological engagement with Rome, which was to reformulate civic identity in a way that incorporated elements of Rome's cosmology. As Collins explains, 'A major purpose of the book of Revelation is to discourage its audience from accepting the ideology of the provincial elite, which involved a pyramid of power and patronage with the emperor at the pinnacle.'<sup>52</sup> There were significant social implications in Revelation's rhetoric. The strongly negative representation of the cities aimed to problematise feelings of civic pride and potentially affected the audience's engagement with a range of cultural activities and artefacts which might elicit civic pride, such as temples, statues, inscriptions, and festivals and games. For

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<sup>51</sup> Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos*, 216.

<sup>52</sup> Collins, 'Book of Revelation', 398.

example, by the rhetoric of Revelation, the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias and the parade of Salutaris in Ephesus become tributes to the debasement of the city through its endorsement of Rome. It has been argued that the monumental architecture of Ephesus in the Flavian period was dramatically developed to reflect the importance of Rome to Ephesus as well as the world.<sup>53</sup> It is possible to imagine that a person under the influence of Revelation would have an entirely different experience from a typical resident in passing through the upper agora and on to the lower city. Rather than instilling in them a sense of pride, security, and hope of prosperity, it would remind them of the corruption of their world and its impending doom when the existing sociopolitical order was overthrown in judgment. The effect on the individual is to encourage a formulation of identity detached from or opposed to the polis and at odds with the citizen.

In addition to denigrating the province of Asia, Revelation presented the audience with an alternative cosmology centred on God and Christ and the coming kingdom manifest in the New Jerusalem. The qualities of the alternative cosmology contrast with that of the cities of Asia. It was centred upon the true throne of God in heaven which established legitimate worship as opposed to the ‘fornication’ of idolatry. It was founded upon the divine power which was victorious in heaven and not the defeated earth-bound power. In summary, it represented true cosmic order. The city is a central vehicle used to explicate the concept of this ideal cosmology, especially in Rev 17–22 where there are contrastive parallel descriptions of Babylon and the New Jerusalem.<sup>54</sup> Though, it should also be noted that the city, and the cities of Asia in particular, are a significant feature of the opening chapters of Revelation and so the motif of the city bookends the entire narrative. This structural

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<sup>53</sup> Rubina Raja, *Urban Development and Regional Identity in the Eastern Roman Provinces, 50 BC–AD 250: Aphrodisias, Ephesos, Athens, Gerasa* (University of Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2012) 52, 75–86; and Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 90, 142.

<sup>54</sup> See section 3.3.



arrangement suggests certain lines of enquiry, such as the significance of the development from multiple churches in multiple cities to a single community in the one, all-encompassing cosmic city – the New Jerusalem. And also how civic allegiance might operate in the present, while the New Jerusalem exists, presumably, only in heaven. For example, while Christians had their citizenship in heaven was it nonetheless possible for them to possess ‘dual-citizenship’; that is, belong to both the New Jerusalem *and* Ephesus, for example. Exploring these questions may be worthwhile but are beyond the scope of the present thesis. Instead, the rhetorical function of Rev 1–3 and Rev 17–22 will be considered in the context of the social setting in the province of Asia where the polis was of great importance ideologically and in the formation of identity.

After seven cities of the province are listed in Rev 1.11, the churches of the cities feature in the vision of the Son of Man as seven lampstands around his feet, which have corresponding stars representing the angels of each church held in his right hand. The vision is pivotal in the following chapters in which the Son of Man addresses each church via its angel. Both the vision of the Son of Man at the centre of the seven churches and the issuing of oracles from him at the centre to the churches at the periphery establishes a cosmic order that rivals the one that appears later in the text which has the earth-dwellers drawn to Babylon/Rome in awe of its power and compelled by the allure of wealth. Revelation 1–3 may be construed as a polemic against the civic ideology of the province of Asia. In section 6.4 it was argued that Rome was a common point of reference as the cities vied for prestige in the region, which resulted in a cosmic landscape in which numerous interconnected regional centres were ultimately focused on Rome. Revelation envisions another cosmic order coordinating the cities, or at least the Christian churches within them. The very existence of this rival cosmology questions the validity of the cosmology of the cities and

aims to create a fissure in their societies by supporting the existence of groups within the cities which reject the majority perspective on power and authority.<sup>55</sup>

James Rives has provided valuable insights into the identity of Christians and Jews in the early Roman Empire through a study of embassies to the emperor from representatives of these communities.<sup>56</sup> He observes that embassies were typically received from a polis or a regional assembly of *poleis* and so Jewish embassies were exceptional because they were sometimes made on behalf of all Jews throughout the Empire.<sup>57</sup> This is explained by recognition of the Jews as an *ethnos* which extended beyond Judea and had an organising centre in the Jerusalem temple, which was reinforced by ritual activity such as payment of the temple tax and pilgrimage. This conception of the Jewish people is expressed in Philo, *Legat.* 281–282, where Jerusalem is likened to Rome in having ‘colonies’ throughout numerous regions. Elsewhere, Rives suggests that the existence of the Jerusalem temple as an alternative ‘centre’ was one of the reasons Vespasian destroyed it and then introduced the *fiscus Iudaicus* which collected money for the temple of Jupiter in Rome.<sup>58</sup> In the second century, petitions to the emperor made by Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Tertullian, and Athenagoras, like Jewish diplomatic efforts, presented the Christians as a unified people in diverse localities.<sup>59</sup> The implication was that the Christians had a corporate identity which transcended the location of particular churches. While Revelation belongs to the late first century, this identity is suggested by the vision of the churches in Rev 1–3, in which the

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<sup>55</sup> Lightstone, ‘Urbanization’, 236, states that Christians claimed to be a spiritual kind of ‘neo-Judaic ethnos’ and says, ‘I cannot imagine this position as being anything less than a direct challenge to the Roman imperial civic class structure’.

<sup>56</sup> Rives, ‘Diplomacy and Identity’, 99–126.

<sup>57</sup> Rives, ‘Diplomacy and Identity’, 99–105, who also discusses embassies from associations of athletes, artists, and performers, which were represented by members in various locations.

<sup>58</sup> James Rives, ‘Flavian Religious Policy and the Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple’, *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (ed. Steve Mason, Jonathan Edmondson, and James Rives; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 163.

<sup>59</sup> Rives, ‘Diplomacy and Identity’, 111–14.

function of the Jerusalem temple is carried out by the Son of Man.<sup>60</sup> For the Jews, the supreme significance of Jerusalem diminished the importance of the local city in which they lived, and along with Jewish refusal to participate in other cultic activity, this sometimes resulted in overt conflict between Jews and other residents of the city, for example, during the first century in Alexandria, Jamnia, and Ephesus (Philo, *Legat.* 134, 201–202; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.257–260; 19.278–285).<sup>61</sup> The rhetorical function of John’s cosmology is to establish a similar civic identity for the Christians of the province of Asia; that is, one with an alternative centre, in this case Christ in heaven, and one which valued another city over the local place of residence, that is, the New Jerusalem.

In the opening chapters of Revelation, the churches are identified by their location in a city of Asia but in the concluding vision, the people of God are identified as those within the vast walls of the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is the supreme and ultimate city which draws the nations (the righteous thereof) into itself through its gates. There is no mention of other cities outside the walls of the New Jerusalem but Rev 21.24–7 provides a basis for imagining them,

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

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<sup>60</sup> Note the use of temple imagery in the vision of the Son of Man (Rev 1.12–20).

<sup>61</sup> See also the discussion in McLaren, ‘Jews and the Imperial Cult’, 262–6, and on Ephesus, Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 10. There is also evidence of Jews accommodating other cultic activities; for example, James S. McLaren, ‘Searching for Rome and the Imperial Cult in Galilee: Reassessing Galilee-Rome Relations (63 BCE to 70 CE)’, *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult* (ed. Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011) 112, notes that Herod the Great provided space in Judea for the imperial cult and that in Alexandria, Dora, and Jamnia statues of the emperor were placed inside synagogues.

The cities outside the New Jerusalem may be imagined to be deserted, subsumed in darkness, their glory carried off as plunder by the kings of the earth just as the Hebrews plundered Egypt in the Exodus.<sup>62</sup> All that remained in the cities would be uncleanness, abomination, and falsehood. While Rev 17–22 is ostensibly about the fall of one city – Babylon/Rome, and its replacement by another, there are implications for all cities of the world which ultimately share the same fate as Babylon; that is, desolation. The difference being that Babylon is overthrown while all others are rendered obsolete and consequently abandoned. Like Rev 1–3, Rev 17–22 can be taken as a polemic against the province of Asia because it suggests its great cities will be supplanted and surpassed by the New Jerusalem. Furthermore, the eschatological transition from a multiplicity of cities to a single universal one conflicts with the traditional Greek notion of civilisation based on the *poleis*. Whereas Rome accommodated this Greek concept in its understanding of empire, in Revelation the universal kingdom of God and Christ has a single centre at the throne and one set of massive walls to define its domain. Revelation’s cosmology emphasises the temporality of the cities and so reduces their importance in the formation of identity.

To conclude, a rhetorical function of Revelation’s cosmology is to provide an alternative cosmology to that which prevailed in the cities of the province of Asia. DeSilva states that Revelation’s ‘counter-cosmos’ displaces the centre of the public cosmos in favour of the Christian cosmos.<sup>63</sup> Revelation denies that both Rome and the local polis are legitimate centres and posits in their place God and Christ at the throne in heaven in the present, and in the world to come, in the New Jerusalem. Anatheia Portier-Young comments that alternative cosmologies, which redefine the location and legitimation of power, allow groups or

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<sup>62</sup> While this imaginative exercise may be considered an interpretation of the text’s silence regarding cities apart from the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and earth, it draws attention to the fact that those at home in the New Jerusalem once belonged to other places, presumably including cities.

<sup>63</sup> DeSilva, ‘Construction and Social Function’, 55.

individuals to resist social pressure by contesting the prevailing cosmology.<sup>64</sup> In section 8.2.3.b, it will be seen how the rhetorical function of Revelation's cosmology justifies deviant social conduct. While the present section has focused on the concept of the centre, in the following section the importance of the periphery and boundaries will be explored in relation to cosmology and social identity.

#### *8.2.3.b) Cosmological Legitimation of Deviant Social Conduct*

It has been suggested that the admonition to 'come out' of Babylon (Rev 18.4) implied that the churches should forge an identity distinct from that of the cities in which they resided. The rhetoric of Revelation clearly aims to affect the social conduct of its audience and so a change of social conduct is also required in 'coming out'. While it cannot be discounted that John imagined the faithful of the churches migrating from their home cities to join him on Patmos, or some other remote location, it is more likely he envisaged them abstaining from social practices which could have identified an individual/group with the culture of their polis. According to Collins, this aim reflects John's form of Christianity which involved extracting its members from the 'social fabric' of their communities.<sup>65</sup> Pressure to assimilate to society is a widely acknowledged rhetorical situation for the text of Revelation.<sup>66</sup> An element of the rhetorical response to this situation was the formulation of a deviant cosmology to justify deviant social conduct.<sup>67</sup> Revelation's cosmology provides such warrant through the symbolism of cosmic dualism and by a narrative in which beings are assigned to their proper place in the cosmos as the plot develops and tension is resolved. A

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<sup>64</sup> Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire*, 27.

<sup>65</sup> Collins, 'Book of Revelation', 404; and Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation', *HTR* 79 (1986) 317.

<sup>66</sup> See discussion in section 3.4.3.

<sup>67</sup> DeSilva, 'Social Setting', 301; and Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 181.

cosmos in which clear boundaries exist between types of beings is designed to warrant the formation of clear social boundaries in the cities of the province.

The deviant social conduct, which is one of the rhetorical aims of Revelation, included non-participation in local cults including the imperial cults, abstaining from meat sacrificed to idols, and some form of distancing from commercial activity and the associated accrual of wealth. It is difficult to be precise about the last of these, and to say, as Hansen does, that John urged his audience towards ‘self-extraction from the economy’ in general, can only be maintained if it is argued that John wanted his audience to leave the cities entirely.<sup>68</sup> A more reasonable supposition is that John was particularly concerned about commercial activity like that of the merchants who traded with and through Rome, and so prospered directly through the opportunity provided by the Empire. It should also be noted that non-participation in cultic activity, if strictly applied, required exclusion from multifarious social activities which were often perceived to be crucial expressions of civic unity and identity, including festivals, feasts, games and competitions, and involvement in *collegia*.<sup>69</sup> Involvement in these activities expressed belonging to the wider community, and conversely, non-participation could be taken as anti-social behaviour reflecting disregard of the city and the gods.<sup>70</sup> Social conduct of this kind could even be construed as potentially harmful to the common good as it was believed that the prosperity and welfare of a city was assured by proper communal devotion to the gods.<sup>71</sup> It is therefore understandable that such behaviour could elicit animosity in fellow residents of the city, which John seems to have observed or

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<sup>68</sup> Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 9–10.

<sup>69</sup> Zuiderhoek, *Politics of Munificence*, 76, 91. Stephen Mitchell, ‘Festivals, Games, and Civic Life in Roman Asia Minor’, *JRS* 80 (1990) 192, suggests that in the early imperial period the primary function of such events shifted from expression of civic pride to expression of devotion to the emperor.

<sup>70</sup> Goodman, ‘Trajan’, 12, states that gentile Christians were viewed as deviant polytheists who refused communal worship out of misplaced loyalty to Christ.

<sup>71</sup> Price, ‘Gods and Emperors’, 89; and Strelan, *Paul, Artemis*, 29–31. See also Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter*, 255–8.

anticipated because he presents the cities of Asia as hostile environments for the saints. It is because the social conduct Revelation encouraged was likely to result in personal hardship that it required warrant and so Revelation presented the audience with a cosmos in which the conduct and anticipated hardship were legitimate and worthwhile.

Cosmological dualism is one device of the text of Revelation which provides warrant for social conduct which distinguished the churches from their society.<sup>72</sup> Roberts has stated that dualism, which he defines as the belief that the universe involves a conflict between the forces of good and evil, is important to social groups which hold deviant worldviews.<sup>73</sup> This is the case because the group representing the deviant position can justify rejecting wider society, and possibly being rejected by it, by connecting it with the force of evil and themselves with the force of good. Schüssler Fiorenza has noted that the dualism typical of apocalypses appears in Revelation as tension between God and Satan manifest on earth in conflict between Christians and Roman civil religion.<sup>74</sup> It has been argued in the present thesis that Rev 12 establishes the cosmology currently existing for the audience in which there is conflict between God and Satan. The earth is divided between those aligned to Satan on earth and those aligned to God in heaven. To the former category belong the beasts, the earth-dwellers, the kings of the earth, and the merchants of the earth; to the latter the saints and prophets. The distinct groups are further polarised by the confluence of religion and morality with commerce and politics. The merchants' trade and the kings' alliances with Babylon/Rome amount to fornication and the saints' worship of God is contrasted with the earth-dwellers' worship of the Beast/Rome. Revelation's cosmology invites the audience to identify with the saints and to recognise those outside the church as earth-dwellers who in the

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<sup>72</sup> On dualism and the sociorhetorical situation of Revelation, see Robert M. Royalty, Jr., 'Etched or Sketched? Inscriptions and Erasures in the Messages to Sardis and Philadelphia (Rev. 3.1-13)', *JSNT* 27 (2005) 456.

<sup>73</sup> Roberts, *Religion*, 171.

<sup>74</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 124.

religious, commercial, and political dimension of their lives betray the fact that they have been deceived and co-opted by Satan. The effect of this absolutism is the bolstering of social boundaries between those inside and outside the church. For those that adopted Revelation's cosmology, such deviant social practice was the only valid option if they were to avoid allegiance to Satan and the judgment that would follow. Another consequence was that fellowship could not continue with any within the church who persisted in 'satanic' activity. Accordingly, the church at Ephesus is praised for not tolerating evil and the Nicolaitans, whereas the church at Thyatira is criticised for tolerating Jezebel (Rev 2.2, 6, 20).

It was argued in section 7.3.1 that the cosmos is characterised as territory to provide a setting for a narrative centred on the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. As the plot unfolds, cosmic realms transition from being occupied by a mix of good and evil characters to being solely occupied by one or the other. As God enacts judgment and is victorious over Satan there is a sorting of space in the cosmos such that by the end of the narrative all things have been assigned their proper place. First heaven is cleansed of Satan and his angels and then the earth, initially for the millennium as Satan is confined to the abyss and then permanently when he is defeated in the final battle. The ultimate cosmos has God, Christ, and the saints on earth, and Satan, the Beast and all the unrighteous of the earth in the lake of fire. Alternatively, the spatial separation is expressed in the vision of the New Jerusalem by those within its walls and those shut out. A rhetorical function of Revelation's cosmological narrative is to invite the audience to associate God's engagement with the cosmos in judgment with their own acts of judgment/decision within their society. God is victorious and renews or even re-creates the cosmos by assigning things to their proper place and separating them by impermeable boundaries.<sup>75</sup> Likewise, to be victorious the churches are to establish

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<sup>75</sup> In theological terms, there is a parallel between God's creative work and his work in judgment as both bring order out of chaos by demarcating space and filling it with the proper kind of being. Thompson, 'Mapping an



clear social boundaries such that behaviours and persons aligned to Satan only exist outside the community. In doing so, the churches are in harmony with the order of the cosmos and its exclusionary activity parallels the divine transformation of the cosmos. Revelation's rhetorical deployment of cosmology is a case of what Berger calls 'cosmization', only it does not legitimate the power and authority of the ruling group but the decision of a group on the periphery to deny that power.<sup>76</sup>

#### 8.2.4) *Conclusions: Rome's Cosmology in the Province of Asia*

The local setting is crucial to properly understanding the cosmology of Revelation and its relationship to the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology. While John clearly has deep objections to the Roman Empire, he is primarily concerned with local responses to Roman authority and its ideology. The cosmology espoused in Revelation contrasts with what we can surmise about the cosmology associated with civic ideology in Asia. The similarly universalistic claims of the cosmologies of Rome and Revelation created tension between them. And on the other hand, the focus upon the polis and the region in the cosmology of the cities of Asia meant that it was not in competition with Rome's cosmology and consequently elements of the latter could be adapted to the local context and represented in the cities' ideological discourse. Revelation rejected this accommodationist approach to Roman imperial ideology and advanced an alternative cosmology. The alternative cosmology was one centred on God and Christ in heaven and their kingdom to appear as the New

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Apocalyptic World', 116–17; and Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 87, notes the permeability of boundaries in Revelation but not the change from permeable to impermeable boundaries with the arrival of the new creation.

<sup>76</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 27; and see the brief discussion in Tim MacBride, 'Aliens and Strangers: Minority Group Rhetoric in the Later New Testament Writings', *Into All the World: Emergent Christianity in Its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context* (ed. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017) 311–12, 328–31, where the concept of worldview is used instead of cosmology.

Jerusalem. This displaced both Rome and the local polis in the cosmos and abnegated their role in the formation of identity.

John's apocalypse suggests that God will soon dispatch his plan to overthrow the Empire but in the meantime John is concerned about maintaining the distinct identity of the churches through the prohibition of conduct that reflected the ideology of the cities of the province. As Mikael Tellbe notes, the maintenance of social boundaries supports the formation of group identity.<sup>77</sup> Revelation's cosmology reinforced social boundaries by representing a dualistic world in which God was at work to fix impermeable boundaries distinguishing good and evil, and the righteous and the wicked. The boundaries of the church are to preserve its distinctive social conduct but are also to separate the saints from those aligned to Satan. Further discussion on the latter point will be made in the section to follow which will consider how Revelation's cosmology also contended with rival factions within the churches. Roberts has commented that when a group's worldview becomes unconvincing, the social values of the group are weakened and may be compromised.<sup>78</sup> The general prosperity and stability of Roman Asia in the Flavian period, which ostensibly corroborated Rome's cosmological claims, potentially challenged John's cosmology. To ensure his cosmology remained compelling and the churches' social values were upheld, John presented his audience with an engaging vision of the cosmos in which a dramatic reversal of fortune would soon occur along with God's judgment of the world.

### 8.3) Engaging Christian Rivals in the Churches

Recent scholarship on the book of Revelation has highlighted the significance of internal tensions in the churches of Asia in the text's rhetorical situation.<sup>79</sup> This is a helpful

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<sup>77</sup> Tellbe, *Christ-Believers*, 57–8.

<sup>78</sup> Roberts, *Religion*, 92.

<sup>79</sup> Especially, Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*; and Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*.

corrective to the earlier emphasis on conflict between the churches and Rome. In Rev 2–3, it appears that rivalry existed between John and other prophets or leaders in the churches, with the two groups competing for influence. In sections 8.1 and 8.2, the cosmology of Revelation has been analysed firstly regarding its engagement with Roman imperial ideology and secondly in comparison to the civic ideology of the province of Asia. In the present section, the cosmology of Revelation will be analysed as a rhetorical response to the challenge to John's authority. A plausible cosmology will be proposed for John's rivals to facilitate a comparison with the cosmology of Revelation. It will be argued that Revelation presents a contrasting cosmology to that of his rivals who were more positively disposed towards Rome than John. Revelation's cosmology characterised Rome as an agent of Satan, not God, and hence foe not friend to the churches. It also located Satan in the earthly domain rather than placing the powers of evil in the heavenly realm. The rhetorical function of this cosmology was to foster a view of society which required clearly defined and strictly observed social boundaries in response to the present earthly conflict between good and evil. The section will involve a brief discussion of diversity in first-century Christianity in the province of Asia (sections 8.3.1 and 8.3.2), the proposal of a plausible cosmology for John's rivals (section 8.3.3), and finally a discussion of the rhetorical function of Revelation's cosmology in the context of contested leadership in the churches (section 8.3.4). It will be seen that Revelation can be interpreted as evidence of competing Christian cosmologies in first-century Asian Christianity.

### *8.3.1) Diversity and Divisions in First Century Christianity*

Diversity in early Christianity was pluriform, including in geographic, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and theological dimensions. It is the last of these that will be the focus of the present discussion. In 1934, Walter Bauer published his ground-breaking study *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, which established the theory that early Christianity was composed of various competing forms which over centuries were

reduced to a dominant variety. The dominant version defined itself as orthodoxy and the others as heresy.<sup>80</sup> Bauer's thesis has remained influential and continues to generate discussion.<sup>81</sup> His theory has been criticised from the time of its publication to the present day, especially for his approach which involved excessive conjecture and argumentation from silence but also regarding some of his key suppositions, such as that 'heretical' Christianities were the dominant form in all locations but Rome.<sup>82</sup> While such criticism is valid and the theory requires refinement in its detail, it has made a valuable contribution to the study of early Christianity and the NT through recognition of diversity in theology and praxis in the early centuries (as there also was thereafter).<sup>83</sup> The NT documents themselves evidence the existence of diversity. For example, there is the circumcision group, which Acts 15.1–5 says derived from the sect of the Pharisees and which is opposed in the Pauline writings in particular; as well as scattered references to various false teachers and teaching.<sup>84</sup> In 1

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<sup>80</sup> Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1934), and English translation, Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel, trans. Georg Strecker; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

<sup>81</sup> A recent proponent of the thesis is Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 172–9, and an edited work which both critiques and refines Bauer's thesis is Paul A. Hartog, ed., *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christian Contexts: Reconsidering the Bauer Thesis* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015).

<sup>82</sup> Such criticisms were first made in a review of Bauer's publication, Walther Völker and Thomas P. Scheck, 'Walter Bauer's *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*', *JECS* 14 (2006) 399–405, first published in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 54 (1935) 628–31. A recent critical review of Bauer and Ehrman is Michael J. Kruger and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), which argues that not all variants which appropriated the name 'Christian' are rightly deemed to belong to early Christianity.

<sup>83</sup> While Bauer's title refers to 'ältesten' Christianity, the study did not cover the first century but focused on the second and third. Nonetheless, the concepts developed in the theory may be applied to the first century in which the NT was produced.

<sup>84</sup> On the circumcision group: Gal 2.12; Phil 3.3; Tit 1.10; on the issue of circumcision in general: Rom 2.25–3.1; Gal 5.6; 6.15; Col 2.11; and on false teachers/teaching: Col 2.16–23; 1 Tim 1.6–7; 4.1–3; 2 Pet 2.1–22; 1 John 2.19; 2 John 7–11; Jude 4–19.

Corinthians, there is an indication that factions were developing within the churches of the city centred on the association with a key figure, such as Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ himself (1 Cor 1.12; 3.4–9). While such diversity may not have been manifest in the existence of separate groups and so diversity need not imply division, the admonitions in NT texts to reject and disassociate from false teachers/teaching provide a basis for the development of separate Christian groups. The NT provides evidence of numerous issues of theology and praxis in which there were diverse positions. They include:

- The eating of sacrificial meat (Acts 15.28–9; Rom 14.1–23; 1 Cor 8.1–13; 10.19–31);
- Involvement with idolatry more generally (1 Cor 5.11; 10.14–22; 2 Cor 6.16; 1 John 5.21);
- The role of the Law (Rom 3.19–7.25; Gal 3.1–25; Phil 3.1–11; 1 Tim 1.6–11);
- The character of leadership (1 Cor 9.1–27; 2 Cor 11.1–12.21);
- Gender roles in the church (1 Cor 11.3–16; Eph 5.22–33; 1 Tim 2.11–15);
- The practice of marriage (1 Cor 7.1–40; 1 Tim 4.3);
- Submission to governing authorities (Rom 13.1–7; 1 Tim 2.1–3; Tit 3.1–2; 1 Pet 2.13–17).

Apart from the Law and gender roles, all these issues feature in Revelation and it is possible to interpret the perspective advanced in Revelation as being in tension with other NT writings.

The implication of the diversity of early Christianity for the study of Revelation is that the original audiences of the apocalypse, both those within the seven churches of Asia and others, may have identified with various strands representing differing and even conflicting teachings, traditions, or personalities. While the oracles are addressed to the angel of the church in a city in the singular (For example, Rev 2.1, Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας), it is likely that the church was composed of numerous small gatherings meeting in houses of wealthy members, and it is possible that different households represented

different strands of Christianity. Wayne Meeks even suggests the household structure may have created the potential for internal tensions in the church and proliferated diversity in early Christianity.<sup>85</sup> Regarding Ephesus, Trebilco states, ‘Thus, one continuing element in the life of Christians in Ephesus was conflict between Christians, and the presence of differing strands of Christian faith.’<sup>86</sup> To continue with Ephesus for illustrative purposes, scholars have attempted to describe the profile of Christianity in the city during the first century based on the NT and other early historical sources. Bauer proposed that there was an early Pauline strand of Christianity in the city which was replaced by one associated with John the Presbyter late in the first century.<sup>87</sup> Koester, followed by Trebilco, argued against consecutive strands of Christianity in favour of coexisting and competing variants, including a Pauline-Lucan strand, a group centred on John of Patmos, the Nicolaitans, and, according to Trebilco but not Koester, a Johannine strand.<sup>88</sup> For the argument to be developed in the present section it is not necessary to determine with precision the profile of Christianity in first-century Asia. The scholarship establishes the plausibility of a social setting for Revelation in which conflicting traditions, theologies, and *praxeis* existed in proximity to one another. Revelation is to be seen as part of a conversation, or dispute, regarding matters that defined Christian group identity.

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<sup>85</sup> Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 76; also stated in Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 97–9.

<sup>86</sup> Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 716. Tellbe, *Christ-Believers*, 47, agrees though he questions the extent to which the differing strands were identifiable.

<sup>87</sup> Bauer, *Orthodoxy*, 83–7.

<sup>88</sup> Helmut Koester, ‘Gnomai Diaphoroi: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity’, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (ed. James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 155; Helmut Koester, ‘Ephesos in Early Christian Literature’, *Ephesos Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture* (ed. Helmut Koester; Pennsylvania: Trinity, 1995) 133–8; Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 5, 68, 139, 152–3, 311, who also thinks it likely Apollos spent time in Ephesus and a strand of Christianity may have developed around him; and on the forms of Christianity in the wider region, Paul Trebilco, ‘Christians in the Lycus Valley: The View from Ephesus and from Western Asia Minor’, *Colossae in Space and Time: Linking to an Ancient City* (ed. Alan H. Cadwallader and Michael Trainor; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011) 194.

### 8.3.2) *Revelation and Rivalry in the Churches of Asia*

The process of constructing a profile of opponents to an author from the author's writing is fraught with complexity. The characterisation of the opponents and their beliefs and behaviours serves the rhetorical purposes of the author and the extent to which this has shaped their representation is difficult to discern, especially when there are no other available sources of information on the opponents as is the case with Revelation. Put simply, in Revelation we see John's opponents as he wants them to be seen by the audience and not necessarily as they were seen by others, and almost certainly not as they would have seen themselves. Nonetheless, John is probably portraying actual persons and having his perspective on them allows something to be said of them.<sup>89</sup> It will be argued that John's perspective suggests that he distinguished himself from his opponents regarding the kinds of social engagement that were permitted. A sympathetic reading of John's opponents will be attempted by relating their beliefs and behaviours, as suggested by John, to positively framed teachings in other early Christian literature. In this way, they can be conceived of as lying along one of the trajectories that developed out of the Pauline tradition.<sup>90</sup> This will culminate in a hypothetical construction of their cosmology based on Pauline writings.

Of the seven churches featuring in Rev 2–3, false teachers are mentioned in three – Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira. The oracles to Smyrna and Philadelphia describe

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<sup>89</sup> Adolf von Harnack, 'The Sect of the Nicolaitans and Nicholas, the Deacon in Jerusalem', *JR* 3 (1923) 413–14.

<sup>90</sup> The trajectories model of early Christian diversity established by Robinson and Koester has been critiqued in Larry Hurtado, 'Interactive Diversity: A Proposed Model of Christian Origins', *JTS* 64 (2013) 445–62, for the potential of oversimplifying diversity to definable unilinear developments. The concerns identified legitimise caution in applying the model but do not necessitate abandoning it altogether. To illustrate, Hurtado, 'Interactive Diversity', 459 n. 36, himself affirms Trebilco's discussion of trajectories. Furthermore, as Bradley J. Bitner, 'Unity and Diversity in Emergent Christianity', *Into All the World: Emergent Christianity in Its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context* (ed. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017) 84, notes, the usefulness of Hurtado's alternative model, labelled 'interactive diversity', is yet to be demonstrated.

opposition from ‘so-called’ Jews, the ‘synagogue of Satan’, though these groups represent a threat from outside the community rather than the challenge of false teaching from within.<sup>91</sup> Ephesus is commended for not tolerating evil-doers and for testing those who claimed to be apostles (τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους) and finding them false. So it seems these false teachers were in Ephesus for a limited time only, enough for the period of testing to take place. Revelation 2.6 also praises the Ephesians for hating the works of the Nicolaitans. Bousset suggested the false apostles of Rev 2.2 are to be identified with the Nicolaitans mentioned in verse 6.<sup>92</sup> However, Bousset’s high degree of certainty is unwarranted since it is entirely possible that there were groups apart from the Nicolaitans that John considered to promulgate false teaching.<sup>93</sup> The history of the Nicolaitans is also uncertain and it is possible that John himself invented the name for these opponents, though there is a scholarly consensus on the general nature of their teaching. The word ‘Nicolaitan’ (Νικολαΐτης) may be roughly translated ‘he has consumed the people’ and so may be a symbolic name. There is an understanding in the literature going back to the eighteenth century that the name is an etymological equivalent to ‘Balaam’.<sup>94</sup> Aune finds the connection overly speculative and also notes that while Balaam was a pejorative the name Nicolaus was an honorific; however, it is possible that John attached new symbolic significance to the name and so a connection need not be dismissed.<sup>95</sup> There is some early Christian evidence to suggest the name relates to a founding figure, or a figure adopted by the group as its figurehead, that being Nicolaus of

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<sup>91</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 117–18.

<sup>92</sup> Bousset, *Die Offenbarung*, 204; so too Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1.50.

<sup>93</sup> Hemer, *Letters*, 40. Aune, *Revelation*, 143, argues that the use of an aorist verb in relation to the false apostles and the present tense for the Nicolaitans in these verses indicates they are not the same groups; however, it is possible the Ephesians continued to hate the works of the Nicolaitans in the present even though they were expelled from the community in the past.

<sup>94</sup> Maurice Goguel, ‘Les Nicolaïtes’, *RHR* 115 (1937) 10. Also, Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1.52–3.

<sup>95</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 149.



Antioch who is mentioned in Acts 6.5 as a deacon appointed by the apostles.<sup>96</sup> Irenaeus, *adv. Haer.* 1.26.3, makes this claim, and in *adv. Haer.* 3.11.1 adds that the Nicolaitans were forerunners of Cerinthus and an off-set of the Gnostics. Adolf Harnack gives some credence to the evidence, though he contends the Nicolaitans misunderstood and misrepresented the historical figure's teaching.<sup>97</sup> Most recent scholarship is doubtful of the reliability of the evidence as Irenaeus may have drawn upon the name in Acts to provide an origin for the group mentioned in Revelation.<sup>98</sup>

Various theories have been propounded regarding the form of the Nicolaitans' teaching. The Tübingen School claimed they were followers of Paul's teaching.<sup>99</sup> While Aune claims there is no evidence for connecting the Nicolaitans and Paul, in support of the Tübingen view is the fact that Paul conditionally allowed eating sacrificial meat.<sup>100</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza nuanced the Tübingen view by suggesting there were parallels between the Nicolaitans and 'the strong' whom Paul corrects in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 8.1–13; 10.23–11.1).<sup>101</sup> This view was suggested earlier by Goguel who argued that the Nicolaitans represented '*un ultra-paulinisme*'.<sup>102</sup> Bauer claimed the Nicolaitans were unmistakably

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<sup>96</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.28.1–4.

<sup>97</sup> Harnack, 'Sect of the Nicolaitans', 418–22.

<sup>98</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 149; Hemer, *Letters*, 88; and Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 310.

<sup>99</sup> See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Apocalyptic and Gnosis in the Book of Revelation and Paul', *JBL* 92 (1973) 571, for discussion and detailed references. A version of the Tübingen view is recently presented in Tellbe, *Christ-Believers*, 195, who focuses on differences between John and Paul regarding the structure of church leadership. Strelan, *Paul, Artemis*, 114, and Royalty, *Origin of Heresy*, 148, also think there were tensions between Pauline teaching and John of Patmos.

<sup>100</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 123–4, also observes the Nicolaitans seem to have been influenced by Paul.

<sup>101</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Apocalyptic and Gnosis', 572–3; see also Collins, 'Vilification', 317; Philip A. Harland, 'Honouring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast: Participating in Civic Life among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John', *JSNT* 77 (2000) 120; Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 331; and Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 116.

<sup>102</sup> Goguel, 'Les Nicolaïtes', 11.

Gnostic, a position followed by Harnack.<sup>103</sup> However, there is little evidence to connect them to the Gnostics and it is uncertain whether Gnosticism even existed in the mid-90s.<sup>104</sup> Finally, Koester proposed that the Nicolaitans were a Judaizing group since he identified them with those who call themselves Jews (Rev 2.9; 3.9).<sup>105</sup> This view can be dismissed as there is no valid basis for connecting Rev 2.9; 3.9 to the Nicolaitans.<sup>106</sup> While the available evidence is scant, the most plausible proposal is that the Nicolaitans represent a Pauline trajectory, though possibly one that Paul may have contested given the opportunity.<sup>107</sup>

While the Ephesians rejected the Nicolaitans, some in the church at Pergamum had accepted their teaching and there is a teacher (or teachers) who are part of the church and are propagating the teaching. This teacher is given the name Balaam to associate him with the notorious false prophet of the HB who led Israel into idolatry (Num 22–4).<sup>108</sup> The conjunction *καί* in Rev 2.15 need not imply that the Nicolaitans represent a teaching distinct from that of Balaam. The verse begins with the adverb *οὕτως* which makes it a consequent of the preceding verse so it could mean that there were some in Pergamum who held to the teaching of the Nicolaitans *through* the influence of Balaam.<sup>109</sup> If so, Balaam belonged to the Nicolaitans or at least had similar teachings to them.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, as both Jezebel, who we are told resides in Thyatira, and Balaam either permitted or encouraged eating sacrificial

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<sup>103</sup> Bauer, *Orthodoxy*, 78; and Harnack, ‘Sect of the Nicolaitans’, 417. Also supported by Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 87, while Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Apocalyptic and Gnosis’, 574, states that they were ‘on the way to gnostic libertinism’.

<sup>104</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 148–9; and Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 331–2.

<sup>105</sup> See also the discussion in Koester, ‘Gnomai Diaphoroi’, 148–9.

<sup>106</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Apocalyptic and Gnosis’, 571–2; Aune, *Revelation*, 148; and Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 332–3.

<sup>107</sup> Coutsoumpos, ‘Social Implication’, 25.

<sup>108</sup> See also 2 Pet 2.15; Jude 11.

<sup>109</sup> Aune, *Revelation*, 188. Royalty, *Streets of Heaven*, 28; and Friesen, ‘Satan’s Throne’, 355, think that Balaam and the Nicolaitans should not be identified.

<sup>110</sup> Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 213; Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1.52–3; Goguel, ‘Les Nicolaïtes’, 9; Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Apocalyptic and Gnosis’, 567; Aune, *Revelation*, 148, 188; and Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 311.

meat and engaging in fornication, it is likely that she too was associated with the Nicolaitans. A possible distinction between them is that the Nicolaitans, like John, were itinerants while Balaam and Jezebel were local leaders who advocated Nicolaitan teaching.<sup>111</sup>

While there is a degree of uncertainty about the historical identity of John's opponents there is consensus on the nature of their teaching and how it differed from John's. The key point of contention between John and his opponents was the eating of meat which had been sacrificed to idols and practising fornication (Rev 2.14, 20).<sup>112</sup> While the opponents are presented as actively promoting these practices, it is possible that they actually tolerated them to allow Christians to engage with their society to a greater degree.<sup>113</sup> Accordingly, Trebilco comments that the practical issues only represent the surface level of the conflict, underlying these issues is the matter of cultural and religious accommodation.<sup>114</sup> In contrast to his opponents, John promoted a social exclusivism which distinguished Christians from their communities.<sup>115</sup>

Schüssler Fiorenza provides a succinct description of John's opponents that captures much of the discussion so far,

We can therefore summarize: The Nicolaitans are according to Revelation a Christian group within the churches of Asia Minor and have their adherents even among the itinerant missionaries and the prophetic teachers of the community. They claim to have insight into the divine or, more probably, into the demonic. They express their

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<sup>111</sup> Goguel, 'Les Nicolaïtes', 9; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung*, 31; and Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Apocalyptic and Gnosis', 568.

<sup>112</sup> Whether fornication is intended literally or metaphorically has been discussed in section 3.4.3.

<sup>113</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 58; and Duff, 'Wolves in Sheep's Clothing', 68.

<sup>114</sup> Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 319; similarly, Aune, 'Social Matrix', 28; Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 120; Klauck, 'Die Johannesoffenbarung', 206; and Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 137.

<sup>115</sup> Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung*, 31; and Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 320–4, who also suggests the Nicolaitans may have supported some participation in imperial cults.

freedom in libertine behavior, which allows them to become part of their syncretistic pagan society and to participate in the Roman civil religion.<sup>116</sup>

The only qualification of this summation is to note that labels such as ‘libertine’ serve modern-day categorisations but may not reflect how the opponents viewed themselves or how they were viewed by those in the churches. Similarly, statements such as this by Hemer, ‘The root of Nicolaitanism may be found in the misrepresentation of Pauline freedom’, should not be taken to mean that in the first century there was a consensus on how Paul’s teaching should be interpreted and applied.<sup>117</sup> As Trebilco observes, the opponents probably thought they were faithfully representing Paul and convinced some that they did.<sup>118</sup> In the next section, a Pauline cosmology will be outlined to contrast with that of Revelation.

### 8.3.3) *The Cosmology of John’s Rivals*

Trebilco seeks to understand John’s rivals by considering how they might have justified their stance towards society and arrives at a list of NT passages, largely Pauline, that they potentially drew upon.<sup>119</sup> Building on the relationship between cosmology and social identity which has been stated in the present thesis, John’s rivals may be further understood by reflecting upon a cosmological framework in which the rivals’ engagement with society made sense.<sup>120</sup> It is plausible that if John’s rivals were influenced by Paul’s teaching on sacrificial meat, they might also have been influenced by his cosmology. In the present

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<sup>116</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Apocalyptic and Gnosis’, 570.

<sup>117</sup> Hemer, *Letters*, 92, 94, and similar statements in Coutsoumpos, ‘Social Implication’, 25. See Royalty, *Origin of Heresy*, 66–7, for a warning against presuming that a unified understanding of Paul existed before the introduction of deviant teaching.

<sup>118</sup> Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 222.

<sup>119</sup> Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 321, those being: Mark 12.13–17; Rom 13.1–7; 14.13–23; 1 Cor 5.10; 8–10. Carter, ‘Roman Imperial Power’, 146, states that Jezebel’s reasoning need not have been simplistic and could have involved subversion, such as arguing that idols are nothing and so participation in idolatry is morally neutral.

<sup>120</sup> See section 4.2.

section, the Pauline cosmology which was outlined in section 5.3.1 will be compared to the cosmology of Revelation. It will then be demonstrated how such a cosmology could legitimise the engagement with society advocated by John's rivals, and in the following section, how these conflicting cosmologies illuminate the rhetoric of Revelation.

A Pauline cosmology was outlined in section 5.3.1 and so at this point the task is to highlight its similarities to and differences from the cosmology of Revelation, especially those that relate to the matters disputed by John and his rivals. The structures of the cosmos according to John and Paul are both derived from the ancient tripartite cosmos as it appears in the HB, the difference being that Paul focuses primarily on heaven and earth whereas John utilises other dimensions of the cosmos, such as the underworld and ends of the earth.<sup>121</sup> Another difference is that Paul frequently uses κόσμος to denote the cosmos as a whole and less frequently uses the merism 'heaven and earth'.<sup>122</sup> Whereas in Revelation, cosmic tension exists between God in heaven and those that oppose him on earth, in Paul there is a tension between God and the κόσμος. For example, 'Now we have received not the spirit of the world (κόσμος), but the Spirit that is from God' (1 Cor 2.12) and 'So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world (κόσμος)' (Gal 4.3). In Paul's theology, the physical order is corrupt and contains elemental principles (στοιχεῖα) in conflict with God's order. Nonetheless, as Adams has shown, Paul also depicts the cosmos in line with the Greek philosophic tradition which sees it as the manifestation of divine, good order.<sup>123</sup> Along with this comes the moral imperative to live in harmony with that order. The goodness of the created order also underlies Paul's argument permitting in principle the eating of sacrificial

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<sup>121</sup> This observation is strengthened by the fact that Phil 2.6–11, where the tripartite cosmos is most clearly stated in the Pauline writings, is probably pre-Pauline; see section 5.3.1.

<sup>122</sup> Paul contrasts heaven and earth in 1 Cor 15.47 and the present Jerusalem with the Jerusalem above in Gal 4.25–6.

<sup>123</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 156–66.

meat.<sup>124</sup> In 1 Cor 10.25–6 he writes, ‘Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, for “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.”’<sup>125</sup> While in Revelation God is hailed as the maker of the earth (Rev 14.7), the earth is predominantly depicted negatively as the realm opposed to God, as a place of chaos and disorder, and as the place where Satan operates. These verses from 1 Corinthians suggest there may be a connection between the differing conceptions of the earthly realm and the differing points of view about whether eating sacrificial meat is permissible.

An element of the good order of the world, according to Rom 13.1–7, is the earthly authorities established by God for the administration of justice on earth,

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God’s servant for your good ... For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them – taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.<sup>126</sup>

Paul does not identify particular authorities but nor does he qualify his statements to restrict its application and the fact that the epistle was addressed to the church at Rome would suggest that Roman authorities, up to and including the emperor, were intended.<sup>127</sup> The contrast with Revelation is stark. Paul says God gave authority to the earthly rulers whereas in Rev 13.4 Satan bestows authority on the Beast. Paul says the authorities punish the wicked

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<sup>124</sup> Adams, *Constructing the World*, 208.

<sup>125</sup> The quoted words are Ps 24.1. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003) 492 n. 6, the quote is introduced by γάρ to indicate it is the premise of the previous clause.

<sup>126</sup> Other NT texts with a similar view include 1 Tim 2.1–2; Tit 3.1; and 1 Pet 2.13, 17.

<sup>127</sup> Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 106, thinks it is functionaries of the Roman Empire rather than local magistrates that are intended.

whereas in Revelation they persecute the saints. Paul encourages submission to authorities whereas John warns of imminent judgment on those who accept the number of the Beast. In summary, Paul positions Roman authority within God's design for order in the world whereas in Revelation it is part of Satan's plan to oppose God's order.<sup>128</sup> Some scholars interpret Paul as a polemicist against Roman imperialism, detecting in his writings 'hidden transcripts' which subvert the ideological claims of Rome.<sup>129</sup> However, Paul's rhetoric is better understood as supra-imperial than anti-imperial, a view which allows for Paul's teaching on submission to authorities to be read in a more straightforward fashion.<sup>130</sup>

Christ's heavenly dwelling and heaven as the locus of hope and eschatological restoration are crucial elements of the cosmologies of both Paul and John.<sup>131</sup> For example, in both cosmologies Christ will return from heaven to bring salvation to his people (1 Thess 1.10; 4.16; Rev 19.11–21). A development in Ephesians and Colossians is that living followers of Christ participate in the heavenly order in the present with Christ; for example, Eph 2.6 says that God 'raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus'. In Revelation, heaven is the place of refuge and vindication for deceased saints and there is no suggestion of the living saints dwelling there.<sup>132</sup> In Ephesians and Colossians there is also the idea that evil spiritual forces occupy the lower heavenly realm; for example, Eph 6.12 says, 'For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the

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<sup>128</sup> See Charles H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Collins, 1959) 208–9.

<sup>129</sup> See discussion in section 1.1.

<sup>130</sup> Galinsky, 'In the Shadow (or Not)', 215–25. Christopher Bryan, *Render to Caesar: Jesus, the Early Church, and the Roman Superpower* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 78–80, rightly points out that a supra-imperial view of Rome's authority still limits and relativises that authority.

<sup>131</sup> M. C. de Boer, 'Paul and Apocalyptic Eschatology', *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism; Volume 1: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. John J. Collins; New York: Continuum, 2000) 354–5.

<sup>132</sup> For a rejection of the idea that Rev 13.6 refers to the spiritual heavenly dwelling of the saints, see Yeates, 'Blaspheming Heaven', 35–8.

spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.’<sup>133</sup> This cosmology contrasts with Rev 12 which establishes that earth, and not heaven, is the domain in which Satan and his cohort operate. The location of evil spiritual forces in heaven rather than on earth reinforces the notion that Christians are not in an essential conflict with political authorities.<sup>134</sup> Both John and Paul envisaged a cosmic conflict between God and Satan at work in the world but for Paul, Christ must overcome ‘every ruler and every authority and power’ in the cosmos before he returns to establish God’s kingdom (1 Cor 15.24–6). In the meantime, there is a spiritual battle within Christ’s followers to resist Satan and these evil forces while they live as peaceably as possible in their societies under Roman rule. In Revelation, John envisages the battle between God and Satan taking place in the political domain making society the battlefield in which allegiances are declared and enacted. As van Kooten concludes, Paul cosmologised and depoliticised the eschatological opponents, that is, Christ was primarily in conflict with the cosmic powers which had bound the world to death and decay, and not the Roman Empire.<sup>135</sup>

The positive view of earthly authority and the imperative to submit to it is also found in other NT texts and early Christians writings, including 1 Clement in which it coincides with the depiction of a good and orderly cosmos.<sup>136</sup> It is plausible then that John’s rivals were influenced by the same teaching about society and the cosmos. It is therefore suggested that by embracing a Pauline cosmology John’s rivals could defend a degree of involvement in

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<sup>133</sup> In Rom 8.38; 1 Cor 2.6; and Gal 4.3, cosmic powers are mentioned but not given a location. For arguments that they are to be imagined in the lower heavens, see Martin, ‘Angels’, 674, and Wasserman, ‘Gentle Gods’, 732–41. See also the discussion on the presence of evil in heaven in Lincoln, *Paradise*, 171–3, 187.

<sup>134</sup> Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 106, notes that in this the Pauline groups differed to both Qumran and the book of Revelation.

<sup>135</sup> Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 129–34, 209; see also Royalty, *Origin of Heresy*, 159. Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Apocalyptic and Gnosis’, 576–80, says that Paul had a cosmological view of Christ’s lordship over the powers of evil whereas for John it was a political one. This suggests that, against Kallos, ‘Romans xiii.1–7’, 368–70, Paul’s cosmology was compatible with support for Roman authority.

<sup>136</sup> For example, 1 Tim 2.1–2; Tit 3.1; and 1 Pet 2.13, 17. See also section 5.3.3.



cultic activity, including eating sacrificial meat, by arguing that it enabled them to participate in the good order of society and at the same time to avoid displaying disrespect to authority which God had instituted. This stance towards society enabled them to ‘lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity’ (1 Tim 2.2). It is possible to imagine John’s rivals drawing on Paul to oppose and undermine John; for example, denying that he was on Patmos for his faithful testimony to Christ by asserting, ‘John is on Patmos because he resisted the authorities that God established for the good order of society, he brought this punishment on himself.’ A Pauline cosmology provides a plausible and useful framework for conceptualising John’s rivals in Revelation.

#### 8.3.4) *The Cosmology of John’s Rivals and the Rhetoric of Revelation*

It has been established that an important element of Revelation’s social setting was a diversity of beliefs and practice within the churches of Asia and tension between leaders who rivalled for influence within the churches. It has also been stated that John and his rivals represented opposing positions, which had their adherents, but that between them was a group which either forged a mediating position or which wavered between opposing views.<sup>137</sup> In Revelation, John’s rhetorical aim was to undermine the authority of his rivals and thus their influence over the churches while simultaneously increasing his own authority and influence so that he might retain his followers and possibly increase their number.<sup>138</sup> Before considering the rhetorical strategy John employed to achieve this aim there will be some consideration of the strategy employed by his rivals in formulating an identity with respect to the Empire and the *poleis* of the province.

John’s rivals confronted a situation common to Christians in various regions of the Roman Empire, that is, the need to understand their identity as Christians in the context of a

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<sup>137</sup> Goguel, ‘Les Nicolaïtes’, 21; Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 59; and Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 327–8.

<sup>138</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 72.

range of possible factors influencing identity. These factors included the local polis, the region, Hellenistic culture, the Roman Empire, and their ethnicity, which for some involved engaging with Jewish tradition.<sup>139</sup> It has been argued in the present thesis and elsewhere that one strategy they employed was to draw upon the teaching of Paul as an authority to legitimate a positive view of Roman authority and an open stance towards society more generally. Second Peter 3.15–16, which was probably written at the end of the first century and was addressed to churches in Asia, acknowledged Paul as an authority and suggests that others, whom the author considered false teachers, did likewise.<sup>140</sup> It is proposed that John's opponents also used Paul's teaching, in this case to validate an accommodationist approach to Roman imperial ideology akin to that of the civic elite. They could still maintain, like John, that God and Christ ruled in heaven and were the ultimate authority in the cosmos. They may have also expected a future transformation of the cosmos with the return of Christ which would precipitate the direct rule of Christ.<sup>141</sup> However, until that time God's rule was at least partly manifest through earthly authorities such as the Roman emperor and local officials. This is an adaptation of one cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology; that is, that the rule of Rome is the will of the gods and was given by the gods. According to this Pauline cosmology, God and Christ ruled in heaven, and while the church empowered by the Spirit was their servant on earth, so too was Rome. If John's rivals observed the practice of praying for authorities, as urged in 1 Tim 2.1–3, then they had a way to corporately affirm Rome's place in the world.<sup>142</sup> They could also affirm the element of Roman imperial ideology which claimed its rule was for the benefit of the world, though perhaps with the

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<sup>139</sup> Collins, 'Vilification', 309–10, 319–20.

<sup>140</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco: Word, 1983) 157–9, 331–4.

<sup>141</sup> Knight, *Ascension of Isaiah*, 43, suggests Paul and Peter urged submission to authorities because they expected their imminent overthrow with Christ's coming kingdom.

<sup>142</sup> Though de Ste. Croix, 'Early Christians', 27–8, suggests that in Hellenistic culture a sacrifice would be more appropriate and the inability of Christians to do so explains their persecution.

qualification that the peace and security achieved was valuable for the leading of a quiet and godly life and for the promotion of the gospel of Christ. It cannot be said whether the concept of Roman rule to the ends of the earth was supported by John's opponents or other Christians but if it was believed that Christ's kingdom was not of this world (John 18.36) then there was no necessary conflict between recognising Christ as Lord and Rome as ruler of the world. Writing approximately a century after the book of Revelation, Athenagoras of Athens, addressing the emperor, reported that Christians 'pray for your reign that the succession to the kingdom may proceed from father to son, as is most just, and that your reign may grow and increase as all men become subject to you'.<sup>143</sup> While it cannot be denied that Athenagoras's report may be driven by expediency, it is possible that early Christians came to prayerfully support Rome's notion of rule to the ends of the earth. Other cosmological aspects of Roman imperial ideology were problematic to Christians, such as the divinity of the emperor and his heavenly dwelling after death. While there is less accommodation of Rome's cosmology by John's rivals than by the civic elites, by affirming Roman authority their cosmology legitimised a level of engagement with society which enabled Christians to remain integrated in their society, avoid hostility, and possibly benefit from the opportunities to prosper through commercial activities. In terms of group identity, it allowed for multiple co-existing identities. A Christian could be, for example, a follower of Christ *and* a proud citizen of their polis *and* enjoy the benefits available because of Rome's empire.<sup>144</sup> In terms of social practice, they could attend a Christian gathering on the Lord's day, watch on with pride as a procession, like that sponsored by Salutaris, went past on another, and some other

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<sup>143</sup> Athenagoras, *Leg.* 37.2, and discussion in Rives, 'Diplomacy and Identity', 117. Also, Tertullian, *Apol.* 30.4, says, 'Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish.'

<sup>144</sup> In comparing Revelation and Philo's *Legatio ad Gaium*, Gradl, 'Kaisertum und Kaiserkult', 135, observes that Philo thought it possible to maintain his Jewish identity while also belonging to the polis and the Roman Empire.

time enjoy the festivities associated with local games in honour of the emperor, including eating the sacrificial meat on offer. By applying Paul's teaching in this way, they preserved their Christian identity while simultaneously retaining a capacity to belong to their city and live comfortably under Roman *imperium*.

John's rhetorical response to his rivals was to reposition Rome in the cosmos and thereby align his rivals to Satan. He also created the impression of a looming crisis to prompt his audience to take decisive action. The logical outcome of his rhetorical strategy was the formation of a single identity centred on Christ and belonging to the church to the exclusion of the polis and Roman Empire. John repositioned Rome in the cosmos by envisioning the Empire and emperor as the Beast that is brought out of the sea and given authority by Satan. In the introduction to the present thesis it was stated that it is important to consider which elements of Revelation's cosmology would stand out to his audience. In response, it is suggested that the alignment of Rome with Satan would be one of those elements. John heightened the impact of this association by delaying its revelation until chapter 13 by which time the audience has received the more acceptable visions of God's judgment on the world in general and against Satan. It may be surmised that John's rivals anticipated a coming, divine judgment and cosmic renewal but did not think the collapse of the Roman Empire was requisite to its arrival. John also characterised Rome in strongly negative terms for rhetorical effect. While there was a Christian tradition, seen in Luke-Acts for example, of presenting Rome as the protector of Christians, John revealed that Nero, whose brief persecution of Christians might otherwise have been construed as anomalous, in fact represented the 'heart and soul' of the Empire – his name was the number of the Beast.<sup>145</sup> John's rhetoric

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<sup>145</sup> Collins, *Combat Myth*, 186. Representing Rome as friend and protector was also a strategy used by Jewish writers such as Josephus and Philo to achieve the aim of preserving Jewish privileges in the Empire; see Philo's *Legatio ad Gaium*; Josephus, *Ant.* 14.267; and discussion in Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 38; Gradl, 'Kaisertum und Kaiserkult', 116–38; and Rives, 'Diplomacy and Identity', 109. In contrast, Harrison, 'Persecution', 283 notes examples of anti-imperial rhetoric in Luke.

problematised activities which potentially displayed allegiance to Rome. For example, it is hard to imagine John praying for the emperor, unless it was for his downfall along the lines of the martyred saints in heaven, ‘Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?’ (Rev 6.10). So too any other displays of honour to Rome or the emperor could only be construed as allegiance to Satan and betrayal of Christ. Likewise, to benefit economically or socially from the system upheld by Rome would be to take part in a system which was ultimately a diabolic stratagem.

By repositioning Rome in the cosmos John aligned his rivals, along with Asian society in general, with Satan.<sup>146</sup> He thereby imposed a dualistic framework on the complex process of negotiating social engagement in a situation involving multiple identities, value systems, and practical concerns. While individuals within the churches may have recognised a spectrum of behaviours which operated between rejecting their society and fully embracing it, John’s rhetoric sought to categorise all behaviour as either of God or of Satan, as representative of the earth-dwellers or of those oriented towards heaven, as displaying allegiance to Rome or to Christ. John offers his audience two alternatives alone; to worship the Beast and share in both its prosperity and its demise, or to worship God and be persecuted by the Beast but then ultimately be vindicated. To apply a metaphor, John takes a grayscale image and converts it to black and white.<sup>147</sup> Philip Harland captures the import of John’s rhetoric well when he states, ‘He attempts to convince his readers that what at first appears to be normal practice is in fact (at a more profound, cosmic level) an utterly unacceptable compromise with evil.’<sup>148</sup> And by heightening the sense of crisis by envisioning an imminent war against the saints orchestrated by Rome, he created the impression that the audience

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<sup>146</sup> DeSilva, ‘Strategic Arousal’, 107; and Duff, ‘Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing’, 77.

<sup>147</sup> See David Starling, ‘The Ethics of the Earliest Christians’, *Into All the World: Emergent Christianity in Its Jewish and Greco-Roman Context* (ed. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017) 129–30, for a similar articulation of the issue.

<sup>148</sup> Harland, ‘Honouring the Emperor’, 118.

urgently needed to make certain their allegiance to the side that would be victorious.<sup>149</sup>

John's rhetoric pressed the audience to consider their own engagement with society but also to question the legitimacy of the Christian teachers who advocated a certain level of compromise to enable the churches to remain integrated in their local cities and the Roman Empire.

Where the theology of John's rivals permitted the churches to uphold multiple identities, John's rhetoric promoted a single exclusive identity. This was the necessary result of abstaining from all forms of cultic activity and from participation in events and dealings which explicitly or implicitly honoured Rome. The members of the churches were to base their identity on their spiritual connectedness to Christ within the context of their church and were not to identify with their polis and certainly not with the Empire. In formulating identity in this way, John sought to define the churches in a way that necessitated the exclusion of his rivals. As has been argued, Revelation's cosmological narrative involves a process of spatial sorting as beings are put into their proper place. The social correlate of this narrative was the sorting of the Christian community and construction of social boundaries so that just as God cleansed heaven and earth so that no place was found for Satan (Rev 12.8), so too the churches should make no room in their community for the Nicolaitans, for Balaam, and for Jezebel. John sought to achieve this by inviting his audience to experience his vision of the cosmos which not only contrasted with that of Rome but also with that of his rivals. Revelation should be interpreted not only as a clash between a cosmology centred on Christ and another centred on Rome but also in terms of competing Christian cosmologies which conflicted primarily at the position of Rome in the cosmos.

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<sup>149</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?*, 72.

#### 8.4) Conclusions: Revelation's Cosmology and Rome, the Province, and the Churches

Chapter 8 has demonstrated that Revelation's cosmology may be analysed with respect to the Roman Empire, the cities of the province of Asia, and the churches of Asia. The analysis presented suggests that these various levels of engagement are inter-related in John's rhetorical strategy. In engaging with the Roman Empire and its cosmology, John is fulfilling the role of the apocalypticist in relating the eschatological coming of God's kingdom to present political realities. In doing so, he contributes to the rhetoric of Revelation by characterising Rome as profoundly corrupt and evil. That then relates to the engagement with the cities of the province of Asia, who are revealed to be complicit with Rome and thereby to share in its corruption and its destined downfall. Finally, John's rivals are condemned because their behaviour associated them with the society of their *poleis* and because they had taken an approach akin to that of the civic elites in accommodating Roman power in their theology. In the introduction of the present thesis the question was raised as to why Rome has a prominent place in the narrative of Revelation if the concerns John addressed were foremost related to the local churches. The following reasons are proposed in response: firstly, the genre of Revelation prompted John to identify an empire with opposition to God's kingdom; secondly, Roman culture and diverse manifestations of its ideology pervaded local culture and local civic elites utilised Roman imperial ideology in legitimating their civic ideology; and thirdly, the position of Rome in the cosmos and in the eschatological unfolding of God's plans was a key point of contention between John and his rivals.

## **9) Conclusions: Cosmology in the Book of Revelation, Roman Imperial Ideology, and in the Province of Asia**

The significance of the cosmos in the narrative and rhetorical strategy of the book of Revelation has been noted in previous scholarship, especially regarding the concept of cosmological transformation and the rhetorical function of Revelation's 'counter-cosmos'.<sup>1</sup> It is also commonly recognised that an important feature of the text is its critical engagement with the Roman Empire, which appears in the narrative as the diabolical Beast, the great prostitute, and the corrupt city Babylon. The present thesis has contributed to the study of Revelation by analysing the cosmology of Revelation in relation to the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology. It has been demonstrated that an understanding of Rome's cosmology based on historical sources provides a valuable context for the development of a refined and nuanced explication of the function of cosmology in Revelation. The thesis has also highlighted the importance of reading Revelation's cosmology in the local context, that is, in the cities of the province of Asia and in the churches addressed. Adopting a localised approach avoids simplistic constructions in which Revelation's discourse is pitted against Roman imperial ideology without consideration of the rhetorical aims for its intended audience. The thesis has also demonstrated that the study of cosmology provides valuable insights into early Christianity, especially regarding the formation of Christian identities over against the local polis and the Roman Empire. The thesis set out to determine the rhetorical function of Revelation's cosmology. In brief, the thesis has shown that the cosmological narrative functioned, firstly, to persuade the audience to form a Christian identity involving a fundamental antipathy to Rome and the polis, and

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<sup>1</sup> For example, on cosmological transformation, Stephens, *Annihilation or Renewal?*, and on the idea of a counter-cosmos, DeSilva, 'Construction and Social Function', 47–61.



secondly, to abstain from behaviours which might suggest allegiance either to Rome or the polis.

### 9.1) Overview of the Thesis

In the introductory chapter of the thesis it was noted that while cosmology is an important topic in the study of Revelation and apocalypses in general, it has received limited scholarly attention.<sup>2</sup> There is an extensive body of literature on Roman imperial ideology and to a lesser extent on cosmology in the Roman Empire, yet only the monograph of Hansen has sought to combine that research in a substantial study of Revelation's cosmology. The scope of the present thesis was differentiated from that of Hansen by being primarily historical rather than theological and in aiming to address the local manifestation of Roman imperial ideology in the province. Chapter 2 outlined a methodology tailored to the characteristics of the text of Revelation. In brief, the thesis was identified as a literary and historical study focusing on the ideological and social dimensions of the text of Revelation. A combination of literary and material artefacts was analysed to determine the key cosmological concepts attached to Roman imperial ideology and these were then related to the cosmological narrative of Revelation. The study also utilised sociological concepts developed by Bergmann and Luckmann which connected cosmology, ideology, and social identity.

Chapter 3 established the historical and social setting of the text of Revelation, concluding that it was written by an otherwise unknown itinerant Christian prophet late in the reign of Domitian at a time when general prosperity in society was a greater issue for Christians than was persecution, which in keeping with scholarly consensus, was deemed to

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, eds., 'Introduction', *Cosmology and New Testament Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2008) 1, and notably, McDonough, 'Climax of Cosmology', 178–88, describes Revelation as 'the climax of cosmology'.

be limited, local, and sporadic in nature.<sup>3</sup> The major social ‘crisis’ for the churches, at least as perceived by John, was the pressure to assimilate to society and compromise Christian values through participation in cultic activity and the pursuit of wealth. Differing views on proper social engagement was the underlying issue in contested leadership within the churches, which the rhetoric of Revelation addressed by presenting John as the messenger of Christ and his rivals as false prophets. A structure for the text was outlined which was distinguished from previous structures by the identification of an eighth vision in an unnumbered series which starts in Rev 21.1 and announces the appearance of the new heaven and new earth. It was argued that the structure of the text highlights the importance of cosmic renewal in the narrative and is a rhetorical device that heightens the audience’s engagement with the visions.

The relevance and interconnectedness of cosmology, ideology, and social identity was explored further in chapter 4. The closely related concepts of ‘cosmization’ and ‘legitimation’ were shown to be relevant to the thesis. The concepts describe the way that groups and individuals develop an account of power and authority in the world to establish their place within it. Cosmization is especially pertinent as it involves ascribing the sociopolitical order to the structure and nature of the cosmos itself. Chapter 4 also provided definitions of cosmology and ideology. Regarding the former it was significant that the thesis adopted a broad definition which included the structure, composition, and interactions between components of the cosmos but also representations of power and authority in the cosmos. The second of these elements of the definition was crucial to the thesis as key differences emerged in the cosmologies discussed with respect to the location and character of political power in the world; for example, whether Rome’s *imperium* was in harmony with or opposition to the heavenly order. Finally, two frameworks for the analysis and comparison

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<sup>3</sup> Kraft, *Die Offenbarung*, 10–11; and Thompson, ‘Sociological Analysis’, 159–60.

of cosmologies were outlined, the above–below and the centre–periphery frameworks. These were used to highlight differences between the cosmologies of Revelation and Rome.

In chapter 5, a range of ancient cosmologies from the ancient Near East as well as the Judaeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions were described. This facilitated a contextualised analysis of the cosmologies of Revelation and Rome. In the discussion of cosmology in apocalyptic literature it was observed that cosmology and eschatology were often combined in the anti-imperial rhetorical strategy of texts.<sup>4</sup> For example, cosmic renewal at the eschaton was precipitated by the overthrow of an earthly empire opposed to God.<sup>5</sup> This provided evidence of a literary convention that John observed when he cast Rome in the role of the imperial adversary. The analysis of the Ascension of Isaiah revealed a rhetorical situation like that of Revelation involving tensions within the communities addressed but also between those communities and Roman authorities. Also like Revelation, it employed cosmology to address the situation. This suggests that the approach of the present thesis, which related cosmology and social setting, may be profitably applied to other early Jewish and Christian texts. First Clement was another text written a short time after Revelation which related cosmology to the sociopolitical order; however, in this case the text provided a stark contrast to Revelation because it emphasised cosmic harmony and the goodness of the sociopolitical order under the Roman Empire. First Clement may be set within the Pauline trajectory and against Revelation to illustrate the diversity in early Christianity regarding both the function of cosmology and perspectives on society in general. Finally, in chapter 5 there was an overview of Greco-Roman cosmologies and one observation was that Stoic philosophers, including Cicero and Seneca, used cosmology to critique elements of Roman imperial ideology, for example, the scale, permanence, and ultimate importance of the

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<sup>4</sup> See Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, for a full treatment of the relationship between the two.

<sup>5</sup> Examples include Daniel and 4 Ezra.

Empire. Therefore, it must be recognised that there was diversity amongst the Romans themselves in the way *imperium* was related to the cosmos and that cosmologies could be contested even within the established authority. This was highlighted again in chapter 6, which commented on the existence of ‘dissonant voices’ in the articulation of Roman imperial ideology. The dissonant voices within Rome may be both compared to and contrasted with the criticism of the Roman Empire in Revelation. John and writers such as Ovid, Seneca, Lucan, and Juvenal, did criticise Rome in similar ways, for example, for the moral corruption arising from prosperity and for misrepresenting the scale and permanence of its empire. However, the difference was that while John considered Rome to be fundamentally corrupt through its allegiance to Satan, the Roman critics sought to reform Roman politics and society by exposing corruptive elements.

The analysis of the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology in chapter 6 identified three major themes. Firstly, that under Roman *imperium* heaven and earth were aligned bringing the cosmos into harmony, peace, and prosperity. This aspect of Roman imperial ideology has often been commented on in previous scholarship though in the present thesis the typical articulation was nuanced with the recognition that there remained a sense of expectancy regarding the cosmic harmony depicted and so it is incorrect to say that Rome thought its empire was utopia realised.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, Rome claimed it was a universal empire with the city positioned in the centre of the cosmos and its *imperium* reaching to the ends of the earth. Thirdly, through the apotheosis of the emperor Rome was depicted as ruling in heaven and from heaven. This final theme completed the totalising cosmological claims of Roman imperial ideology and implied that the Empire was secure and stable. For the province of Asia, along with other peoples of the Empire, the implication was that if they were to accept Rome’s authority and influence in their region they would also need to find

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<sup>6</sup> Building on Galinsky, *Augustan Culture*, 91.

their place within the cosmos as defined by Rome. In section 6.4, evidence was presented from the cities of Asia that demonstrated that the residents, and especially the civic elites, accommodated Rome's cosmology and positioned themselves within it in a way that affirmed Roman imperial ideology while also elevating the status of the polis in the region. There was a compatibility in the cosmological frameworks of the province, which was centred on the polis, and that of the Empire, which was universalistic in nature, with the result that Rome's cosmology could be adapted and adopted in the province. A mutualism operated through the negotiation of imperial and civic ideologies.

Chapter 7 described the cosmology of Revelation and its function in the narrative of the text. It was seen that Revelation portrays a comprehensive cosmology including most features of the cosmology that can be assembled from the HB, though in contrast to other apocalypses there is a single heaven rather than multiple heavens. It was noted that the cosmos was the main setting of the narrative and that the structuration and characterisation of the cosmos supported a significant aspect of plot development, that is, the competition for space between God and Christ and Satan and the Beast. The characterisation of the cosmos produced 'territory' and the coming of God's kingdom was told in terms of God first establishing heaven as his exclusive territory and then the earth, which corresponded to the expulsion of Satan from heaven and then earth. Ultimately, the resolution of the plot occurs with the renewal of the cosmos and the foundation of a cosmic city, the New Jerusalem. The suggestion that John envisaged the merging of heaven and earth in Rev 21–2 fails to recognise that in these chapters the narrative transitions from an above–below to a centre–periphery perspective. The latter is focused on the earth which accounts for the lack of interest in heaven after Rev 21.10.<sup>7</sup> The concept of the union of heaven and earth is an

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<sup>7</sup> Deutsch, 'Transformation of Symbols', 126; Schellenberg, 'Seeing the World Whole', 471; Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 87; Thompson, 'Mapping an Apocalyptic World', 119; Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 116; and McDonough, 'Climax of Cosmology', 188.

appealing one but the more natural reading of the text is that the renewed cosmos remains bipartite, as Rev 21.1 suggests, only with God's rule now centred on earth rather than heaven. The focus on the New Jerusalem as the ultimate cosmic centre brings to the fore the political and social dimensions of John's rhetoric which aims to persuade his audience to form and maintain a Christian identity based on his vision of the cosmos and not that of Rome, the cities of Asia, or his Christian rivals.

Chapter 8 sought to understand John's rhetorical deployment of cosmology by determining how it engaged with the cosmologies of Rome, the cities of Asia, and his rivals. In comparing the cosmologies of Revelation and Roman imperial ideology, some similarities were noted, such as the use of the 'mythological' cosmos, though a crucial difference was the identification and location of powers and authorities in the cosmos. For example, Rome claimed to have divine support in heaven and to occupy that realm through its divinised emperors whereas Revelation emphatically denied Rome a place in heaven. For both Revelation and Rome, cosmology was employed to propagate a concept of cosmic order that cohered with the understanding of their identity. While the cities of Asia could accommodate Roman imperial ideology and find a place for themselves in its cosmos, John could not, and instead of positioning the churches in Rome's cosmos he forced Rome into his own cosmological narrative, distorting its self-representation in the process. This distortion provided the vehicle of the anti-imperial rhetoric of the text.<sup>8</sup> Rome became the ally and servant of Satan on earth and was only to hold the world in its sway momentarily before defeat and destruction in the lake of fire.

While it was found that there was a compatibility in the cosmological frameworks of the cities of Asia and the Roman Empire, similarities in the cosmologies of John and Rome created the potential for conflict. John's Christian worldview and Rome's imperial ideology

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<sup>8</sup> Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse*, 105–6; and Sánchez, *Subverting Imperial Myths*, 12–45.

were both universalistic in nature and therefore competed for space in the cosmos at an ideological level.<sup>9</sup> This conflict distinguished John's position in Asian society and by contesting Roman imperial ideology he implicitly criticised those who accommodated Roman imperial ideology. Therefore, John's anti-imperial rhetoric also targeted the civic elite and other residents of the cities of Asia. Beard *et al.* make a comment on social identity in the Roman Empire which illuminates the point, 'Not to place oneself within the set of relationships between emperor, gods, elite and people was effectively to place oneself outside the mainstream of the whole world and the shared Roman understanding of humanity's place within that world. Maintenance of the social order was seen by the Romans to be dependent on maintenance of this agreed set of symbolic structures, which assigned a role to people at all levels.'<sup>10</sup> They continue by stating that if subjects of Rome did not wholly adopt its symbolic structures the alternative was to accommodate them within their own.<sup>11</sup> While the cities of the province generally took the second approach, John rejected both alternatives by subverting Rome's symbolic structures in his cosmology thereby positioning himself and his adherents as social deviants. Revelation's cosmology provided warrant for deviant social conduct, such as abstinence from all cultic activity, by positing a cosmos in which the social ramifications were justifiable, that is, because the behaviour displayed allegiance to God and because there would be vindication and reward following death.

In section 8.3, the discussion revolved around a social setting in which there were co-existing 'trajectories' of Christian belief and practice which approached the issue of engagement with society in different ways. A plausible cosmology was proposed for John's rivals which legitimised the social practices they supposedly endorsed, such as eating sacrificial meat. The cosmology was derived from Pauline writings and the crucial feature

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<sup>9</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 219–20.

<sup>10</sup> Beard *et al.*, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1*, 361.

<sup>11</sup> Beard *et al.*, *Religions of Rome: Volume 1*, 362.

which distinguished it from John's was that Rome's authority was given by God for the good of society (Rom 13.1–7; Tit 3.1). It was argued that the rhetoric of Revelation may be analysed in relation to a competition between Christian cosmologies wherein the key point of contention was whether Rome was a servant of God or a servant of Satan and whether the battle between God and Satan was at work in earthly political realities or was embedded in the nature of the cosmos itself.<sup>12</sup> The decision of the audience would determine whether their identity should be rooted solely in Christ and the New Jerusalem or whether there was also a place for allegiance to the polis and the Roman Empire. John's rhetoric influenced that decision by presenting only one valid option, to 'come out' of Babylon and to reject the Nicolaitans, Balaam, and Jezebel. A feature of the cosmological narrative of the text was the formation of cosmological boundaries which separated beings and kept them in their proper place in the cosmos. In the rhetoric of Revelation this textual feature had a social correlate which was that the churches form boundaries to separate themselves from the false prophets within the church and from those in society at large who also accommodated Rome's cosmology.

## 9.2) Principal Findings

The first key finding of the thesis is that to adequately describe the rhetorical function of Revelation's cosmology it must be analysed in the local context. Of all the texts of the NT, it is in Revelation that the Roman Empire is most clearly addressed and so it is not surprising that many scholars have understood Revelation's rhetoric to be primarily targeting Rome.<sup>13</sup> For example, Barr says its rhetorical aim was to resist Roman dominion and culture and

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<sup>12</sup> Koester, 'Ordinary Empire', 14.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 111; Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Eschatology and Composition', 539; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 6–7; Aune, 'Court Ceremonial', 5; DeSilva, *Seeing Things*, 90; and Hansen, *Silence and Praise*, 48, 154.



distance the audience from Roman values.<sup>14</sup> The present thesis has found that there is anti-imperial rhetoric in Revelation and that cosmology is instrumental in that rhetoric. However, while Revelation speaks *about* Rome it is not speaking *to* Rome but to the churches of the cities of Asia. The crux of interpretation is the significance of John's rhetoric about Rome in the context of the *poleis* and the churches. Accordingly, it was not Rome's culture and values, or even its political power, which was John's primary concern but the culture and values of the residents of the polis and their potential to adversely impact upon the conduct and identity of the saints. This approach was applied in the present study by analysing the cosmologies of the cities of Asia and of John's rivals regarding their engagements with Rome's cosmology. For future study on empire in the NT, this thesis suggests that a valuable line of enquiry is to explore the local social implications of anti-imperial or pro-imperial rhetoric identified in the text.

The thesis tested the supposition that the cosmological dimension of Roman imperial ideology provided a valuable context for the study of Revelation's cosmology. It has been demonstrated that a historical construction of Rome's cosmology provides insights into the rhetorical dimension of Revelation's cosmology. Firstly, identifying the key tenets of Rome's cosmology reveals that John does not subvert Roman imperial ideology by representing the demolition of its cosmos, as Hansen proposed, but by recasting Rome in the cosmological narrative of the text. Comparing the position and role of Rome in the cosmology of Revelation and in Roman imperial ideology reveals the anti-imperial rhetoric of the text. For example, in Revelation Rome is granted *imperium* by Satan who is contained to earth whereas in Roman imperial ideology it is bestowed by Jupiter in heaven. Secondly, establishing Rome's cosmology primarily on sources associated with Rome at the centre of the Empire allowed for a comparison with the occurrence and function of cosmological

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<sup>14</sup> Barr, *Tales of the End*, 169–71, 178.

concepts in the province of Asia. This established a context in which Revelation's cosmology could be viewed alongside other responses to Rome in the province. The provincial context exposed unnoticed rhetorical dimensions of the text; for example, the coordination of the seven churches around Christ as a polemic against the coordination of the cities of Asia around Rome. Also, the progression in the narrative from the saints associated with the seven cities of Asia to their incorporation into the single cosmic city, the New Jerusalem, contests the notion that the local polis was of prime importance for individual and group identity in the province. Finally, the contrast between accommodation of Rome's cosmology in the province and John's subversion of it suggested the possibility that John's rivals had taken an approach akin to that of the polis. The proposed cosmology of John's rivals accommodated some elements of Rome's cosmology, such as that Rome had a divinely appointed role in bringing order and justice to the world, which can be viewed as a strategy to achieve a degree of social integration for Christians.

Another key finding of the thesis is that recognising the inter-connectedness of cosmology, ideology, and social identity can enhance the study of early Christianity. In Berger's sociological theory, ideology was thought to be projected onto the cosmos in a process he labelled 'cosmization'. He also described three other processes which related cosmology, ideology, and social identity. One of these is 'internalization', by which the structures of the constructed world are absorbed into the human consciousness and so shape roles, relationships, and behaviours in society.<sup>15</sup> A way to approach the question of the rhetorical function of Revelation's cosmology is to consider what the effect would be of 'internalizing' the 'cosmization' of the text. In other words, how might a group or an individual be impacted by Revelation's cosmology if they were to fully integrate it in their self-understanding and understanding of the world. The findings of the thesis suggest the

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<sup>15</sup> Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 9–25.

cosmology of Revelation potentially influenced the audience regarding their identity and conduct with respect to Rome, the polis, and the church.<sup>16</sup> The audience was exhorted: firstly, to adopt a stance of hostility towards Rome; following on from this, to conceive of themselves as people set apart from the polis because its political, economic, religious, and social institutions were tied to Rome; and lastly, to separate themselves from Christian groups like the Nicolaitans which accommodated Rome and the polis. The internalisation of Revelation's cosmology would also exhibit certain social conduct, which is indicated in Rev 2–3. The audience could not set out to gain financially or in social status through means attributable to the Empire. They could not honour the emperor through ritual acts or even pray for the emperor's wellbeing, which was to become common Christian practice.<sup>17</sup> This would require them to refuse to participate in a wide range of communal civic activities which often signified devotion and belonging to the polis in addition to displaying honour for Rome. Non-participation in such events would have produced distrust and animosity towards the Christians. In terms of groups such as the Nicolaitans or leaders like Jezebel and Balaam, Rev 2.2 indicates these rival leaders are not to be tolerated, which effectively means the audience was either to expel them from the community, or if that were not possible, to leave the community themselves. In summary, the internalisation of Revelation's cosmology would result in the formation of an exclusive identity and the adoption of behaviours which expressed and reinforced that identity.

Berger's sociological concepts may be improved by recognising that individuals and groups can operate with multiple or hybrid identities.<sup>18</sup> For example, it is possible to imagine a Christian whose identity was based not only on their Christian beliefs but also their Jewish

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<sup>16</sup> Collins, 'Vilification', 314–16, who relates the 'symbolic universe' of Revelation to Christian identity and social engagement.

<sup>17</sup> Harland, 'Honouring the Emperor', 99–121.

<sup>18</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 'Creation and Expression of Identity', 356.

ancestry and being a citizen of Pergamum or even Rome. These identities could co-exist with a greater or lesser degree of integration. As Christianity developed in distinction from Judaism in the first two centuries it needed to forge an identity for itself in relation to its roots in Judaism but also in relation to the Roman Empire and to the cities throughout the Empire in which it was established.<sup>19</sup> The cosmologies of Revelation and others in early Christianity, such as that in the Pauline trajectory, arose in response to this need to articulate an identity and just as there were diverging views within early Christianity on social and political engagement, so too there were differing cosmologies corresponding to these views. The rhetoric of Revelation indicates that at times these cosmologies were in competition.

Revelation engages with an enduring question faced by Christians as well as other religious communities – is it possible to maintain a distinctive identity and also belong to society? John appears to be a dissonant voice in early Christianity who perceived the political order to be fundamentally opposed to God and who did not permit any form of participation with cultic activities which pervaded social life in the cities of Asia as well as other parts of the Roman Empire. Consequently, for John Christian identity excluded other identities; for example, a Christian living in Pergamum belonged to the church which was aligned to Christ in heaven and could not also maintain a sense of belonging to the polis because it was aligned to Rome. John's exclusivist social stance correlates with his cosmology in which the judgment of God will cleanse the cosmos of spaces in which good and evil are comingled to put all things in their proper place. The New Jerusalem represented the ideal cosmos in which the people of God could fully embrace their polis (now truly a 'cosmopolis') as a fundamental element of their Christian identity because it was the city founded, inhabited,

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<sup>19</sup> Reidar Aasgaard, 'Among Gentiles, Jews, and Christians: Formation of Christian Identity in Melito of Sardis', *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (ed. Richard S. Ascough; Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005) 156.

and ruled by God.<sup>20</sup> The kind of cosmic order which Rome claimed it would establish John revealed to be the work of God and Christ. John contested the cosmology of Roman imperial ideology to persuade his audience that their societies were foolish and corrupt in accommodating Rome's ideology and that those in the churches who wished to belong to those societies were deceivers who must be shut out from the churches just as God had shut out Satan from heaven and would soon banish him and his Beast from the earth. John also contested civic ideology in the province of Asia by presenting a cosmic order in which the role of the polis in the formation of social identity was supplanted by Christ and the heavenly throne of God in the present, and by the true cosmopolis, the New Jerusalem, in the future.

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<sup>20</sup> To use a term applied to Rome in Edwards and Woolf, 'Cosmopolis', 1–20.

## Appendix 1: Diagram of the Structure of Revelation

*Epistolary frame – introduction* (1.1–8)

I.a.i) Opening vision of Christ (1.9–20)

I.b) Oracles to the seven churches of Asia (2.1–3.22)

II.a) Vision of the throne, the Lamb, and the scroll (4.1–5.14)

II.b) Vision of the **seven seals of the scroll** (6.1–8.1)

*Seals 1–6*

[Vision of the saints secure on earth and in heaven (7.1–17)]

*Seal 7 – II.c) Vision of the **seven trumpets*** (8.2–11.19)

*Trumpets 1–6*

[Vision of prophecy and witness leading to the end (10.1–11.14)]

*Trumpet 7 – The open temple*

[First two **great signs** in heaven – the Woman and the Dragon (12.1–13.1a)]

(1) Sea Beast (13.1b–10)

(2) Land Beast (13.11–18)

(3) The Lamb and the 144,000 (14.1–5)

(4) Three angels of proclamation (14.6–13)

(5) Three angels of judgment (14.14–20)

(6) Third **great sign** in heaven – introduction to the vision of the seven bowls (15.1, 5–16.1)

(7) Heavenly song of victory (15.2–4)]

II.d) Vision of the **seven bowls** (16.2–21)

Vision of the Great Prostitute (17.1–19.10)

(1) Rider on the white horse (19.11–16)

(2) Angel in the sun (19.17–18)

(3) Beast and kings gather for war (19.19–21)

(4) Angel binds Satan in the abyss (20.1–3)

(5) Thrones of judgment (20.4–6) and Satan’s final defeat after 1000 years (20.7–10)

(6) White throne (20.11)

(7) Final judgment (20.12–15)

(8) New heaven and earth (21.1–8)

Vision of the Bride (21.9–22.11)

I.a.ii) Final vision of Christ (22.7, 12–20)

*Epistolary frame – blessing* (22.21)

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