Paul, Imperial Situation, and Visualization in the Epistle to the Colossians
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1. Paul and Empire

Throughout the past decade scholars of Christian origins have turned their attention increasingly to the relationship of emergent Christianity to imperial society.[1] Richard Horsley has observed that the "turn to Empire" amongst contemporary exegetes has enjoyed renewed attention as a consequence of the two Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003.[2] The present geo-political order often forms the backdrop to debates concerning to what degree Paul opposed, supported, or ignored Caesar and his imperial reign. It is sometimes argued, for example, that Paul was as stridently opposed to the *Pax Romana* as his American interpreters are opposed to what they label US foreign policy as a *Pax Americana*.[3] The themes taken up in fact echo ideas presented by New Testament exegetes over a hundred years ago, in the full flush of exciting new discoveries regarding the imperial cult by German archaeologists in Asia Minor. Adolf Deissmann, Adolf von Harnack, Ernst Lohmeyer, Karl Bornhäuser, to name only a few, were united in their view that the presence of so much imperial sounding language in the New Testament was on account of opposition of early Christians to persecuting emperors; they used imperial language to throw their persecutors to the cosmic lions.[4] The contemporary consensus from exegetes has been largely to rehearse these assertions: Paul was opposed to the Roman Empire; his attention was all but solely dedicated to resistance to Roman imperial ideas; his letters are peppered with recognizably political language whose purpose is to trump imperial political claims with Christian ones (allowing for the moment a straightforward and transparent notion of what "Christian" means in this period, an all but straightforward concept). What exactly constitutes Roman imperial ideas is often taken for granted: violence, pacification, subjugation, reception of tribute, etc. Paul has been championed in one popular formulation for opposing Rome's empire reign with God's

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[1] www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?articleId=388 (accessed 26 July 2013).
[2] Lull, 2010, 253-54.
[3] For review, Lull, 2010, 252-62.
[4] Deissmann, 1911; Harnack, 1906; Lohmeyer, 1919; Bornhäuser, 1938.

kingdom.[5] Central in this understanding is the role of the imperial cult in Asia Minor in forming popular expectations and dedication to imperial rule, orchestrated either from above by the emperor, or below by local aristocratic elites. Karl Galinsky has described the discovery of the imperial cult by New Testament scholars as a Columbus-like discovery of the new world.[6] New Testament scholars have found evidence of Paul's alleged opposition to the imperial cult in virtually every line of his letters, in every metaphor used to champion dedication to Christ's rule and his achievements, and in every polemical situation he addressed. N.T. Wright has argued that the imperial cult was the glue that held the Empire together; thus, it could hardly have been possible for Paul to have written his letters without opposing emperor worship.[7] This he argues despite the fact that the imperial cult spread unevenly and with differing motivations in the period under consideration.[8] Even where it appears to be a very remote possibility on account of the entire absence of any direct imperial reference in most of Paul's letters, that Paul was thinking to any degree about either Roman rule or the imperial cult, scholars have appealed to a notion of "hidden transcripts" (borrowing from the ethnology of James C. Scott who uses the phrase an analytical framework for investigating forms of social dissent by peasants under the thumb of landlords and other totalizing political regimes), to account for what seems at least agnostic about Roman claims.[9] That is, Paul was so frightened by Roman rule and its attendant terrors that he resorted to writing highly veiled letters in which he <u>meant</u> Roman rule even where he used language entirely devoid of imperial content to oppose those who promoted the circumcision of Gentiles as necessary for incorporation into God's Israel.

This paper is not a polemic but seeks an alternative, more nuanced account of "Paul and Empire." As Roman historians have noted for some time, "the Roman Empire" represents a conceptual abstraction to allow Classicists a means of periodization of data to develop models and historical studies to negotiate empirical evidence that would

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[5] Crossan and Reed, 2004.
[6] Galinsky, 2011, 1.
[7] Wright, 2000, 161.
[8] Miller, 2010, 324-32.
[9] Scott, 1990.

otherwise be overwhelming and make analysis and understanding impossible.[10] The imperial cult, for example, did not constitute a kind of glue to keep the Empire together; the emperor did not impose it unilaterally on far-flung subjects; it did not form a basis to assure the slavery of the millions of inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Rather it must be interpreted within a complex social dynamic of a shared honorific culture in which local elites exercised the prerogatives of giving acclaim as a paradoxical exercise of a degree of independence of Roman imperial control by taking initiatives in establishing local cults as a means of self-promotion. This formed the syntax of what Clifford Ando has called the communicative action of the periphery and the centre, of civic elites and central authorities.[11] This is not to deny the brutal realities of Roman power and dominion, but to assert that as in any every situation of domination, the power from below is as critical as the power from above in the exercise of authority. I hope to show that Paul represents another means of this complex negotiation of power. Paul showed himself to be a member of the Empire through his uses of political language and metaphor to convince his listeners of the benefits of Christ's rule. Inflecting slightly Lloyd Bitzer's concept of "rhetorical situation" I will describe Paul's uses of imperial imagery and vocabulary as a the creation of an "imperial situation." I will then turn to the importance of visualization in the task of rhetorical performance and Paul's appropriation of visual imperial and local civic honorific culture to create in his listeners' minds striking images of ideas to persuade audiences of his teachings. I will outline a model for using ancient visual culture in the interpretation of Paul's vivid speech. I will conclude with an application of the theory to the letter to the Colossians (which I treat as pseudonymous although authorship questions will not affect the outcome of the specific case argued here). Finally I will return to the question of Paul and Empire at the conclusion and make a case for the interpretation of Paul's relationship to the Roman Empire as manifesting cultural hybridity rather than a straight forward capitulation or resistance to Caesar's reign.

Lloyd Bitzer coined the phrase "rhetorical situation" in an essay written in 1968 to describe "A complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual

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[10] *Barret, 1997, 52.*
[11] *Ando....*

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."[12] Central to Bitzer's concept exigence – that is rhetoric responds to a real or potential challenge to which it addresses itself. "Rhetorical situation" describes a real setting that requires address: "What is a rhetorical situation? I want to know the nature of those contexts in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse: How should they be described? What are their characteristics? Why and how do they result in the creation of rhetoric?"[13] A rhetorical situation mirrors an empirical reality that merits a response: "The presence of rhetorical discourse obviously indicates the presence of a rhetorical situation."[14] Amongst other examples of rhetorical situation, he cites the occasion of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, and observes that "each is a clear instance of rhetoric and each indicates the presence of a situation."[15]

Bitzer's theory has been criticized because of a positivistic orientation of rhetoric to "real" situations. Reader response theory, poststructuralist criticism, as well as attention to the discursive creation of history, requires a cross-examination of Bitzer's empiricist orientation of "rhetorical situation" – a cross-examination, were I to undertake it, would take us too far afield from the present task. Two observations are germane to the discussion here. First, the value of "rhetorical situation" is that it describes well the discursive component of persuasion and the fact that persuasion reflects a given situation construed historically in the broadest form, however we may understand it outside of strictly rhetorical interests. And second, building on the first, persuasion, like all writing – even the most routine kind, like making a shopping list -- creates a situation; that is, it places its topic, its audience, its narrator, its exigence, and its successful outcomes in a culturally

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[12] Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation", Philosophy & Rhetoric 1, no. 1 (January 1968): 3.
[13] Bitzer, 1968, 1.
[14] Bitzer, 1968, 2.
[15] Bitzer, 1968, 2.

specific and constructed argument. Today when scholars write of "rhetorical situation" a host of literary and ideological tools come into play: the question of implied author and audience; issues of power and politics in the interpretation and creation of situations to which a piece of persuasion addresses itself, the history of reception of both before and subsequent to the appearance of a persuasive piece as hermeneutical horizon of meaning, and so on.[16]

A reconfigured model of rhetorical situation, disciplined by the methodological insights and tools just listed, offers a useful means to asses the role of "Empire" in Paul's writings. With a view to the frequent instances in the Pauline corpus to terminology at home in both Paul's larger imperial context and the specific civic contexts in which he lived, I use the phrase "imperial situation" to describe the ways in which Paul uses political language, metaphor, as well as narratives and ideals in his tactics of persuasion. "Situation" here refers both to the recurring Sitz im Leben of Paul's audiences as imperial city dwellers, as well as the way he situates his audiences with the uses of political language and images in civic contexts. The uses of political language such as saviour [σωτήρ], salvation [σωτηρία], Gospel [εὐαγγέλιον], peace [εἰρήνη], Son of God [υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ], Lord [κύριος], parousia [παρουσία], reconciliation and cognates [καταλλαγή], ambassador [πρεσβεία] and cognates, as well as the already mentioned terms, church [ἐκκλησία], body (of Christ) [σῶμα (τοῦ Χριστοῦ)], and citizenship [πολίτευμα], are but a few instances that reflect borrowing and application to his proclamation, instruction, and exhortation. Metaphors such as slave of Christ, [δοῦλος τοῦ Χριστοῦ], going out to meet the Lord [ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου], citizenship in heaven [τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς], lead in triumph [θραμβεύειν] reflect Paul's urban and Roman political context and are but a few of the instances of political images and vocabulary that pepper Paul's letters. In using such language and metaphor Paul of course reflected his social and cultural context. However,

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[16] For an overview with discussion of chief theorists, objections, and bibliography, David E. Aune, "Rhetorical Situation." Pages 423-25 in The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

when he applied such terms often at home in chancery vocabulary he also created his audiences and cast them as players in overarching political narratives. The brilliance of Paul in this regard is that he confers language reserved often for elites, military and imperial achievements by generals and emperors, and political actions like visitations and decrees to the crucified and raised Jesus and fledgling communities worshiping probably most usually in artesans' shops or on the second-floor living quarters of tabernae and popinae owners.[17] The power of civic language was that it represented a trans-cultural and global repertoire of terms and concepts to communicate communal ideals. Paul could assume knowledge of these terms and their place in larger idealized narratives of harmony, peace, and power amongst his listeners. They furnished for speaker/writer and a shared set of values conducive to the goals of good society and ethical living. The deployment of this language to describe the benefits of beliefs in a Christ whose coming would sweep everything away, including imperial powers, in a renewal of creation expresses the paradoxical quality of this language. Paul uses the Empire's language to describe a set of goods that belong to a new universal order. At the same time he uses that language he endorses the old order as a means of creating vivid analogies with what is to come. Imperial situation both casts listeners in and removes them from a well-known political order.

Paul's creation of imperial situations in which to place his audiences and invite them to see the world around themselves should not be understood as a purely textual exercise. Centuries of close lexicographical and grammatical study of the New Testament has made interpreters blind to the vividness of biblical language. As a rhetorician, Paul deployed vivid language drawn from the imperial world around him to create pictures of the benefits of Christ's reign and the obligations of Christ followers to honour Christ by placing their trust in him and honouring God through him. As he was communicating with audiences constituted by members whose literacy was probably marginal at best, Paul's letters were crafted in a way that assured immediate

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[17] For these settings, David Horrell, "Domestic Space and Christian Meetings at Corinth: Imagining New Contexts and the Buildings East of the Theatre." <u>New Testament Studies</u> 50.3 (2004): 349 - 369

recognition of their claims and teachings. The recent turn by scholars to ideals of vivid speech or ekphrasis represents a new field for exegetical exploration and understanding of Paul's cultural world. Ekphrasis was central in the Paul's configuring of his audiences in an imperial situation.

Vernon Robbins, Gregory Bloomquist as well as colleagues working in the study of the role of visualisaton and imagination in the task of persuasion have drawn attention to the importance of considerations of ekphrasis in understanding the persuasive strategies of early Christian writers. [18] A chief aim of ancient rhetors was to make visible before their listeners ideas declaimed upon. Ekphrasis describes the use of vivid speech in persuasion. Ancient rhetorical manuals, the Progymnasmata, furnish discussions of ekphrasis.[19] Their value is not only in their definition but that they are elementary: that is they represent a level of rhetorical training more or less consistent with what we find in most of the New Testament (save the Letter to the Hebrews), a low-grade entry level kind of ability. Each of the composers of these handbooks – Aelius Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius, Nicolaus, and Sopatros – dedicate a portion of their handbooks to the topic of ekphrasis, the use of vivid description as hortatory strategy.[20] Through a cultural development too complex to outline here, ekphrasis has come to mean an extended description of a work of art.[21] But a closer look at ancient definitions shows that it is not description but vividness of expression and speech that is the hallmark of ekphrastic speech. Thus Theon, for example, defines ekphrasis as "descriptive language, bringing what is portrayed vividly [*enargōn*] before the sight."

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[18] See the discussion and response by L. Gregory Bloomquist, "The pesky threads of Robbins's rhetorical tapestry: Vernon K. Robbins's genealogy of rhetorical criticism" and Vernon K. Robbins, Revised and Expanded Response to L. Gregory Bloomquist, "The pesky threads of Robbins's rhetorical tapestry: Vernon K. Robbins's genealogy of rhetorical criticism," both forthcoming in *Genealogies of Rhetorical Criticism*. Edited by Troy Martin. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

[19] For texts, their dating, and their function in elementary training, Webb, 2001, 289-316.

[20] Theon *Prog* 11 (Spengel, 1894, 118–20); Ps.-Hermogenes 10 (22–3); Aphthonius 12 (Kennedy, 2003, 117–20); and Nicolaus Rhetor 11 (Spengel, 1894, 67–71); Sopatros, On Commonplace 12 (Kennedy 2003, 218–21)

[21] For an account, Ruth Webb, "Ekphrasis Ancient and Modern: The Invention of a Genre," *Word and Image* 5(1999): 7-18.

The operative word here is not "descriptive language" but "vividly." Ekphrasis is *vivid* language.

Enargeia and cognates are the terms that dominate not only the definitions in the Progymnasmata, but also the discussion of Quintilian, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and Cicero, whom Quintilian promotes as a preeminent practitioner of ekphrastic speech.[22] Quintilian represents a much more elite appropriation of rhetorical training but his descriptions are instructive for an understanding of ancient psychological mechanisms of persuasion through vivid speech, a psychology shared by the writers of the handbooks. He cites the word *enargeia* in Greek in his discussion of the uses of images in declamation and then comments, "It is a great virtue to express our subject clearly [*clare*] and in such a way that it seems to be actually seen." Later, he makes "vividness (*inlustris explanatio*)" the critical feature: persuasion entails "setting forth our facts in such a striking manner that they seem to be placed before our eyes as vividly [*gerantur sub aspectum paene subiecto*] as though they were taking place in our actual presence."[23] In the ideal situation, Quintilian states, rhetors will vividly depict their topic and rely on listeners who are seeing the matter declaimed upon in their mind's eye, as it were, fill in their own details, and bring their own associations to the subject being considered. Quintilian places great emphasis on the shared world of rhetor and audience, that the speaker should presume the same set of shared expectations, cultural values, ethical norms, and experiences. The practiced rhetorician uses vivid speech carefully, to assure that listeners who are seeing things do not stray too far from the task at hand, but are reined in through strategic and well organized ekphrastic speech[24].

Quintilian offers us the best and most thorough account of the role of vivid speech in persuasion. He outlines not only the function of evocative language in hortatory practice, he also offers an important account of the role of memory in using visualization techniques in oral communication. As such, he offers us an

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[22] Cicero, *De Or.* 3.52.202; *Orat.* 40.139; *Rhet. Her.* 3.22.37; 4.34.45; 4.55.68; Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.2.63–5; 6.2.29–36; 8.3.62–72; 9.1.27; 9.2.40.
[23] *Inst.* 8.3.62; also, 9.1.27.
[24] *Inst.* 8.3.71.

invaluable window onto ancient understandings of vision, memory, and visual culture. As a consequence he is an instructive resource for recognizing visual aspects of biblical texts that are otherwise passed over in more traditional historical critical approaches to exegesis. As just indicated, Quinitilian draws attention to the importance of shaping and directing visualization in the act of persuasion. "A speech" he says, "does not adequately fulfill its purpose or attain the total domination it should have it if goes no further than the ears" (*Inst.* 8.3.62). He is speaking here of its importance in forensic rhetoric as a means of making a case as persuasive as possible before a judge, but the application is more widespread, as we will see. He describes the power of *enargeia* through which "[one] even imagines for oneself some of those things which are not even mentioned."[25] This, he argues, can occur through extended description as well as through passing embellishments. The point, he states is to awaken emotion. The rhetor directs visualization to assure that listeners' imagination is awakened such that they have an emotional response to the topic under consideration. As such, he indicates the importance of directing imagination carefully to assure that they see before them what the speaker wishes them to see. Thus Quintilian stresses that speakers should not depart too widely from commonplace associations and predictable outcomes. Rather they should use metaphor and other evocative devices that are close at hand and readily recognizable. "The mind finds it easiest to accept what it can recognize," remarks Quintilian in his discussion of the importance of drawing on commonplace visual experiences in ekphrasis.[26] "We shall succeed in making the facts evident, if they are plausible; it will even be legitimate to invent things of the kind that usually occur."[27] For Quintilian the speaker prompts images rather than creates precise portraits. The rhetor can rely upon the audience to furnish details not described, to fill in the gaps, to make the topic declaimed upon vivid in their own idiosyncratic ways. But again, Quintilian instructs, it is necessary that the speaker carefully direct the

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[25] *Inst.* 8.3.65.

[26] *Inst.* 8.3.71.

[27] *Inst.* 8.3.71.

listeners' eyes to see what he or she wants the audience to see, the kinds of details
to furnish, and hence the sorts of emotions to experience.

Behind Quintilian's account of the vivid or lucid speech lies an account of
cognition that is in many ways foreign to our own, though recent research on the
role of cognitive blending in communication and understanding has shown that
image and visualization are central to thought and communication.[28] Ancient
accounts of cognition link understanding and memory to *phantasiai*, or images,
believed to be inscribed by experience on the soul or in analogous ways.[29] Ruth
Webb has shown its connection with Aristotelian and Middle Platonic and with Stoic
epistemology. In the case of Aristotelian and Platonic theory, memory is understood
as created by sense perception that leaves its imprint or enduring image on the soul.
Central to persuasion is the drawing forth from the rhetor's imagination internal
images or *phantasiai* and through vivid language to impress upon his listeners
shared mental images and the emotions associated with them. "[W]hat lies behind
vivid speech is the gallery of mental images impressed by sensation in the speaker's
mind. The souls of both speaker an listener are stocked with internal images of
absent things, and these provide the raw material with which each party can 'paint'
the images the *ekphrasis* puts into words."[30] In Stoic theory, *phantasiai* are not so
closely linked to what is perceptible, but include more abstract phenomena. They
can be mental images derived from a real object, from reasoning (*katalēptikai*), or
from figments of imagination (*phantasmata*) that are obstacles to a true perception
of the world. In the Stoic theorization of vivid speech, rhetoric serves true
knowledge by removing from reasoning any impediment that would detract from
true knowledge.[31] In both Aristotelian-Platonic and Stoic theorization, vivid speech,
through the evocation of an image, awakens the sense perception associated with

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[28] For the theorization of cognition, Gille Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We
Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic
Books, 2002).
[29] For what follows, Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient
Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 107-30.
[30] Webb 2009, 113.
[31] Webb 2009, 115-19.

the imprinted image. With these images come a host of emotions. ."[32] Thus Longinus can stress the role of emotion in awakening imagination: phantasia or visualization occurs "when under the effect of inspiration and passion, you seem to see what you are speaking about and bring it before the eyes of your listeners."[33] Once thus awakened the imagination takes over and starts to fill in details not represented by the speaker.

Paul's letters cast their listeners in imperial situations not just through the deployment of political language and imagery, but also by using words and metaphors with a view to eliciting passion and emotion of a kind ancient theoreticians thought central to the act of persuasion. It is here that imperial iconography becomes particularly instructive for seeing along with Paul's listeners the kinds of things the apostle's letters intended to evoke. As chief challenge of the uses of visual data in the interpretation of Paul's letters has been the lack of theorization of the missing cultural link to draw image and text together. The typical juxtaposition of texts and images that one finds, for example, in New Testament introductory textbooks serves little more than to offer an interesting accompaniment to otherwise strictly text-based introduction to the tools of biblical exegesis. More recent studies of the ideological aspects of imperial art and their relation to Pauline theology, while valuable in alerting readers to the ideological aspects of Paul's letters and the reminder of their political dimensions with respect to issues of imperial violence and ideological constructions of gender, risk a too crude and anachronistic account of imperial imagery and its importance in interpreting Paul's letters. It is critical in drawing links between the visual world of the Roman Empire and its influences on Paul's theology to take account of the cultures of vision of the Roman Empire, both amongst its elites and its everyday viewers. Further, it is important to remember that the interpretation of what is seen is often an unconscious cultural act, and while demonstrably laden with political meanings obvious from a later vantage point, may not have been so visible to audiences inhabiting the social worlds in which interpretation was formed. Too often in political assessments of Paul's relationship to the Roman Empire it is assumed that Paul's use of political language and imagery signaled a

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[32] Webb 2009, 113.
[33] Longinus, _On the Sublime_ 15.1

confrontation with imperial realities. It is important to recognize that they also reflected his cultural location and the social world that formed his imagination and conceptualization of the environment around him.

A theoretician useful for the anthropological study of visual culture is Marcus Banks. Banks is important because he has studied the role of artefacts in the contruction of visual culture and the social creation of seeing. He distinguishes between external and internal narratives in visual culture. External narrative denotes the larger organization of visual reality shared by communities of viewers: the things they see when they look at an object like a religious object, an item of daily use, a monument, or a picture. This forms the larger cultural template that passes by usually unnoticed and which is reinscribed by regular usage as well as meanings promoted by tradition and by cultural elites like religious functionaries, political powers, and artists who produce images. The age of Augustus, the Julio-Claudians, as well as of the Flavians, Trajan, Hadrian and the Antonines is a period when enormous attention was given to the construction of a standardized external narrative of the sort Banks describes. The revival of classicism by Augustus and his dynastic successors intended its viewers to see the restoration of lost past of civic harmony brought about by the divine blessing of Augustus' reign. Under the Flavians imperial images were so standardized that they became iconic short hands of the blessings of their rule. These underwent further standardization through the second century. This external narrative was imported to far flung cities of the Empire through coinage, placards, games, processions, statues, reliefs and so on and filled cities with the same motifs and iconographical forms. It was further reinforced by local elites who took initiative in recreating such iconography as a means of honouring the emperor or his family.

Banks' understanding of the interior narrative of visual culture is that local and precise instantiation of the external narrative in a concrete form. The visual tokens of everyday life here take on their meaning by reference to the larger external narratives. For example a photograph of a birthday party only has meaning once it is related to larger customs and then take on particular meanings once one considers the particular composition of the birthday in question. Again, such representations are usually unconscious and invisible to the those making the images. This understanding of interior

narrative is especially useful in the interpretation of vivid speech in Paul's letters and the visualization it engendered because it offers a finer instrument for interpreting political language in the apostle's writings as simply for or against the Roman Empire, or as oppositional to ideological distortions of Empire. Rather one looks closely at the precise narrative (re)configurations of visual culture and then notes the ways in which Paul's vivid representations at once echo but also displace larger visual meanings. One might say that the interior imperial situation finds its meaning by reference to a larger external one, and that the interior one poaches upon and makes use of the external one for ends that are in complex ways at one with and a departure from larger meanings.

There is an important hermeneutical insight in Banks' account of external and internal narratives of visual artefacts. Recently Roman historians of imperial iconography have turned their attention to non-elite ways of viewing the world around them. While the focus of classical studies on art has often been on production of art for elites and by elites, this recent investigation has rather asked about the effect of elite art on non-elite populations. It seems that Paul's letters offer an excellent means of addressing this question precisely because they are so filled with imperial language and images but deployed with a view to persuading non-elites of certain religious truths and benefits. The fact that Paul describes Christ and his followers with the help of imperial narrative and metaphor offers great insight for how non-elites were taking up the visual world of elite culture around them and revising it for their own ends.

In what follows I take up a reading of Colossians with a view to appropriation by a non-elite follower of Paul of a the visual dimensions of his imperial world. I explore how thep letter to the Colossians creates an imperial situation through polemic and inserts its readers and opponents in an overarching imperial narrative. Colossians is filled with vivid imagery and political language and metaphor. It offers a test case for recognizing the uses of imperial military ideology and its reconfiguration for specific non-imperial religious ends. Further it invites observations concerning how best to assess the political location of Colossians a document of the Roman Empire. I am assuming in what follows that Colossians was written by a disciple of Paul, perhaps when the apostle was still alive, in the early 60s, to churches in the Lycus Valley (near modern Denizli, Turkey), at Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. Important, though not ultimately determinative for

the case that follows, is the visual evidence of the imperial temple to Augustus and the Julio-Claudians, the sebasteion at Aphrodisias, for which more follows directly. Colossians is polemical. It presents a description of communities of Christ followers who have either replaced or supplemented devotion to Christ with forms of rituals, prayers, and ascetical practices to those the writer names as "elemental powers."

It falls outside the limits of this discussion to identify either the precise nature of these practices or their object, topics to which have been dedicated thousands of pages of New Testament study.[34] My interest is rather in the ways the letter takes up imperial narratives of subjugation, defeat, victory, and triumph to describe its audience as the beneficiaries of Christ's rule. "Paul" casts his audience in an imperial situation of triumph and victory to persuade them to leave off devotion to other deities. He describes his audience as ideally entrusting themselves to the universal geo-political claims of his Gospel, that through the death and resurrection of Christ the hostile forces that had kept humankind in bondage had been vanquished and in its place has come a message of reconciliation to all, both Jews and Gentiles, in anticipation of the end of the age, when the powers of Sin and Death will be triumphed over once and for all. Now not only is there no longer Jew or Greek, there are no longer barbarians or Scythians, the latter being a vivid term that connoted in the Greek imagination a wild and exotic world of transgression and lack of civilization. Paul turned to political language and imagery because it was there that he could find a universal language to make persuasive the dramatic claims of his Gospel. His audiences had been well primed by his formulations through their experiences first of Hellenistic and Roman rule, each of which publicized universal claims in a variety of media extending from still surviving forms like coinage, monuments, and inscriptions, through to those that no longer survive such as games, processions, placards, spectacles in the arena, and so on. The Roman cities where Pauline formulations of the Christ cult emerged was literally stuffed with political imagery which was, like advertising, ubiquitous, inescapable and subliminally absorbed.'[35] That 'subliminal' message was critical in creating shared identity. As Jaś Elsner has argued, 'Images formed a potent means of "Romanization" – of bringing

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[34] Arnold, 1996, furnishes a survey.
[35] Whittaker, 1997, 145.

the still ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse communities around the Mediterranean into a single imperial polity.'[36] Paul's "Christianization" parallels this Romanization in that his Gospel similarly seeks to bring under one religious banner the diverse ethnes, languages, and cultures into one ecclesial order.

2. Victory in the Heavens

In order more fully to recognize the imperial situation in which Colossians places it audience it is necessary briefly to outline its representation of its opponents. It falls outside the limits of this study to identify the opponents Colossians describes. The main interest here is the way the letter locates them in an imperial narrative of victory and subjugation, in order to persuade its audiences to resist the beliefs and practices the author considers to be "empty deceit" (2.8). Col. 2.8-13 describes a series of beliefs and practices that might tempt Christ followers to submit by way of ritual and ascetical practices to what the author describes as cosmic "principalities and powers" (v. 15). Colossians' general strategy is to remind its audience that the principalities and powers were created through and for the pre-incarnate Son (2.16) and then spatially to invite them to imagine a "vertical" cosmic order in which the raised and enthroned Jesus reigns above all creation. Colossians represents Jesus' death as a victory over these same principalities and powers (2.15). Resonant with uncontested Paul's understanding of baptism as a ritual by means of which estranged Gentiles die the death of Christ and enjoy even now the fruits of his resurrection (for example, Rom. 6.3-5), Colossians presents baptism as a ritual of transfer out of the kingdom of the principalities and powers – the "dominion of darkness" -- to that of God's "beloved Son" (Col. 2.13).[37]

The present tense dominates Colossians. In the uncontested corpus resurrection is oriented to the future, but in Colossians the emphasis is on an action already complete.[38] "Since then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ

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[36]Elsner, 1998, 250.

[37] See the end of the essay for texts.

[38] Colossians does of course still retain a futurist eschatology inherited from the uncontested Paul – thus, Col. 3.3. But whereas for the earlier literature future expectation orients belief and practice in the present, in Colossians it is has all but lost its function in positioning Christ followers in anticipation of an order about to break in.

is, seated at the right hand of God" (3.1).[39] The shift in emphasis is to convince hearers that because in baptism they have already been raised with Christ, it is inappropriate to serve those principalities and powers vanquished by Christ on the cross. They are thus not below the principalities and powers, but as beneficiaries of Christ's resurrection, they reign with Christ as co-regents above them. Even as Colossians' Christology is thus cosmic, so is its ecclesiology. Again a visual metaphor dominates: Christ is the head of the resurrected body, which is the body of Christ, the church (1.18, 24). As he is "the head of all rule and authority (2.10), his body, the church, reigns alongside him. To put on the body of Christ thus indicates a ritualistic ascent in resurrection and the embrace of a new set of relationships steeped in a new ethos of love (3.12-17), and to put off the old self means to leave behind a life of the lower regions (2.20-22; 3.9-10). This secures for the hearers of Colossians a pronounced verticality: they are to set their minds on things above (3.2), the elemental spirits of the universe and their associated vices belong to what is below and left behind. And perhaps most important of all, the Household Code (3.18—4.1) establishes as the organizing principle of this new life of co-rulership with the raised Christ the right performance of duties arranged vertically: Husbands, wives, children, slaves, masters. "Wives be subject to your husbands" (Col. 3.18). However much the Colossian Household Rule encourages mutual relationships (husbands for example are to love their wives – 3.19), the hierarchical metaphor of above and below dominates and echoes that of the language of head and body that dominates Colossians.

The linchpin of Paul's argument is the victory that Christ brings his followers and the set of social relations and ethics that go along with it. At the heart of his letter is a theology that makes the death of Jesus a military victory over cosmic powers, through which they have been pacified and reconciled. "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing [θριαμβεύσας] over them in it [i.e. the cross]" (Col. 2.14). Triumph is the major key in which Paul composes his letter and the benefits of Christ's triumphal rule are the spoils the apostle promises his audience.

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[39] Interpreting conditional εἰ as a first class conditional, or as a statement with reference to a present reality (BDB 189 §372; Ledgerwood 1991, 99-118) and whose outcome is assumed.

Scholars have of course noticed that this is an imperial metaphor.[40] Few, however, have observed the ways in which such a highly charged image of Roman rule belongs with the other imperial vocabulary and imagery of the letter as a whole, and especially how this language evokes a whole series of visual associations.[41] Colossians describes the death of Christ as a triumph over "principalities and powers" (τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας) and in doing so it recalls the Son's creation of all things in heaven and earth: "visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities" (τὰ ὁρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι). These then comprise "the elemental spirits of the universe" (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου– 2.8,20) to which Colossians urges its audience not to submit.[42]

The image of triumph in Col. 2.15 develops the political language introduced earlier in the letter, in the so-called Christ Hymn of Col. 1.15-20. Here again the political language has been largely passed over in traditional exegetical treatments of the

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[40] Pre-eminently Carr 1981, 49-52, 58-66 and Yates 1991, 573-91; also Pokorny 1991, 141; Breytenbach 2010, 187-205; Kreitzer 1996, 123-44; Tanner 1980, 377-82; Yates 1991, 573-91.

[41] For a notable exception, Walsh and Keesmaat 2004, 49-64.

[42] Both Carr 1981, 61-6 and Yates 1991, 579-80, basing their interpretation of the description of the Roman Triumph by Versnel 1970, have argued that the principalities and powers of Col. 1.15 and 2.15 should not be conflated with the elemental spirits of 2.8,20, since, they argue, the victory reference of 2.15 does not describe a triumph over the principalities, but rather their presence in a joyous victory procession to acclaim Christ's victory. Col. 2.20 however links Jesus' reconciling death with the preceding verses, and specifically the "principalities and powers" with "all things in heaven." There is not then sufficient warrant to parse the "elemental spirits" from other cosmic powers. It is indeed the case that the conquered preceded the victor in the imperial Triumph, but the metaphor should not be pressed to literally (Beard 2007, 124-28; . The context speaks not of a joyous procession but the cancelling of a slave-debt (2.14) and the overcoming of enmity and hostility. Thus vs. 14 and 15 should be read as parallel not chronologically successive imperial descriptions. Further, Breytenbach's 2010, 201-202 and Hafemann's 1986, 33-39 proposal with reference to 2 Cor. 2.14-16a, where similar exegetical debates have arisen, is useful here: namely that the triumph is not at the same time as the defeat, but rather follows it as a celebration. Hence the verse means that Christ celebrated a triumph after defeating the principalities and powers by means of/ with the cross (taking the dative prepositional phrase ἐν αὐτῷ as instrumental (BDB §195).

passage.[43] After describing creation of the thrones, lords, principalities, and authorities by Christ (1.16), the hymn states that he has "reconciled" (ἀποκαταλλάξαι) all things (1.20,22) and "made peace" (εἰρηνοποιήσας – 1.20) by his crucifixion. The verbs ἀποκαταλλάσσειν ("to reconcile") and εἰρηνοποιεῖν ("to make peace"), and their cognates, have a strong imperial political valence. The former term with the prefix ἀπο– appears only once in Greek – here in Colossians -- but its cognates διαλλάλασσειν / καταλάσσειν are at home in Greco-Roman literature in ancient diplomatic and political contexts to describe the end of hostility and the start of diplomatic relations.[44] This is the meaning it has elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, specifically with reference to Rom. 5.10 and 2 Cor. 5.17-20, the latter passage where Paul also presents describes himself specifically as an ambassador.[45] Col. 1.20,22 invokes the language of political diplomacy but shifts the earlier Pauline usage toward the metaphor of imperial victory over once hostile enemies. The reconciliation Colossians describes comes about through subjugation. Their pacification concludes with an image of the triumph of Christ (2.15). In using this vivid metaphor, Paul invited his listeners to imagine a victory procession in which the principalities and powers were led as bound captives.

This interpretation is confirmed by the presence of the second term directly associated with victory, εἰρηνοποιήσας, used in 1.20 to describe the means of reconciliation. The Roman theology of imperial victory was one of the pacification (or threat of pacification) of enemies and conquered peoples.[46] Εἰρηνοποιεῖν ("to make peace"), expresses this notion of imperial pacification, both on a civic level, but more importantly with reference to Colossians, on a cosmic level as well. It was so widely used to describe Roman rule that by the time of the emperor Commodus it had become an

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[43] Overviews of the literature show no treatment of this aspect; see for example, Helyer 1992, 51-67; Benoit 1975, 226-63; Francis and Meeks 1979. This is not to deny other similarities with other literature as well, specifically Jewish texts, for which see Arnold 1996, 158-94; Dunn 1996, 92-3. My intent is draw intention to the imperial aspects of the language and imagery.

[44] For an encyclopaedic exploration of the semantic range of this terminology and its political uses and contexts, Breytenbach 1989, 68-187 as well as Porter 1994.

[45] Breytenbach 1989, 73, 79, 191-220; Eschner 2010, 321-35..

[46] Fears 1981, 740-52, 804-25; also with further reference to the imperial visual culture of victory, Kuttner 1995, 86-93.

imperial title.[47] In the theology of victory developed during the Julio-Claudian period, the peace Rome (*pax Romana*) brings mirrors the peace of the gods (*pax deum*). [48] The dependence of earthly on heavenly concord is a commonplace in Greco-Roman, as well as Near Eastern religion.[49] In the Lycus and upper Menander Valley of Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis in the second half of the first century, Colossians deployed it to show how the pacification of principalities and powers by the incarnate Son, Jesus, brought about a whole new order of peace and concord in his body the church. The difference between Roman pacification and the one envisioned by Col. 1.20 is that, in the latter instance, peace comes about through the death of Jesus, not the slaying of enemies. This same idea occurs in the vivid metaphor of Jesus as Triumphator in 2.15, where the cross is the site where Jesus has boldly displayed the principalities and powers, and, having subjugated them, now leads them at Triumphator.

When Paul used these metaphors to persuade his listeners to leave off participation in devotion to lower cosmic powers, the vivid language of pacification and reconciliation through subjugation would have prompted mental images of imperial victory, formed from daily visual experiences of the listeners' urban world. Following the visual anthropological methods of Marcus Banks, we can see how the inner narrative of Colossian's vivid imagery echoes larger socio-cultural visual narratives. Exegetical treatments of Colossians pass over the imperial and cosmic aspects of imperial rule, but once seen they cast into relief a host of other imperial echoes and associations. The imperial visual language of Roman Phrygia is particularly instructive for an understanding of Colossians strategies of persuasion. To explore this more fully we take up first the iconography associated with victory in heaven and the harmony of the gods. Then we will turn to a discussion of Roman imperial picture language that signals the benefits of heaven on earth, first, with the help of images of fertility and abundance and, second, in with depictions of worldwide concord and civic order. This will then set the

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[47] See Windisch 1925, 240-60 for what remains a thorough discussion.

[48] For their relationship in imperial ideology see Zanker 1988, 101-35; Galinsky 1996, 288-312; Fuchs 1965, 186-204; Weinstock 1960, 44-58; more recently, Rüpke 2007, 65-85 and Ando 2008, 120-48 outline the more general religious outlook and its working assumption, the latter with direct comparison to the cult of Israel.

[49] For an excellent overview, Breytenbach 2010, 299-309.

stage for a consideration of imperial iconography closer to Paul's audience at Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, at the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias.

3. Cosmic Harmony

A common theme in Greco-Roman literature roughly contemporary with Colossians is that the emperor's rule mirrors a concord of diverse, sometimes opposing, elemental forces. Philo, Plutarch, Seneca, the author of pseudo-Aristotle's _De mundo_, Dio of Prusa and Aelius Aristides describe the rule of Rome over competing nations as a mirror of the gods bringing order to chaotic elements and cosmic powers.[50] The "Roman Oration" of Aelius Aristides, delivered in 155 C.E., furnishes an instructive example of such a cosmic political theology. Aristides likens the imperial concord achieved by Antoninus Pius through his defeat of enemies to

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[50] For example, Philo reflects his imperial backdrop in his depictions of civil order mirroring cosmic concord (Decal. 178; Spec. leg. 2.188-92; De fuga et inv. 10 – here the Augustan order is transparent in celebrating God as "the giver of peace [εἰρηνοποιός], who has abolished all seditions in cities, and in all parts of the universe, and has produced plenty and prosperity" (192)" (cf. Leg. 8; 15-19 where the imperial application of cosmic harmony is explicit); for the imperial associations, Peterson 1935, 21-31. Plutarch, De fort. rom. 2.316e-317c, likens Roman imperial pacification of contending powers with a cosmic ordering of opposing natural elements; Ad princ. inerud. 5. 781f-782a likens the ruler governed by divine reason to the sun, the image of god, regulating the cosmos, free from chance and change. Seneca, De clem. 1.1.2; 1.3.3-4 conceives the Empire as a unity of diverse forces that would descend into chaos were it not for the emperor, the vicar of the gods, as its head, governed by divine reason, and regulating the body of his empire. Ps.-Aristotle, De mundo 5 396a 32 – 6 401a 11, betrays the imprint of its author's first century imperial culture in its representation of the absolute ruler as bringing about civic harmony mirroring the divine governance of conflicting natural and cosmic forces. Dio (Or. 40.35) urges his fellow citizens of Prusa to seek concord with the Apameans by asking them to consider the harmony of the heavens and the orderly relation of the elements (air, earth, water, and fire) as the model after which to govern their mutual well being. Aelius Aristides, Or. 23.76-78 likens the harmony of emperors with cosmic concord. For the eclectic philosophical backdrop to these ideas see Chesnut 1978, 1310-332 and Goodenough 1928, 55-102. For the image of the emperor as Jupiter's viceroy ordering the political realm after the Jovian example of heavenly rule, Fears 1977, 189-251.

Zeus' victory over the Titans.[51] Aristides' comparison represents a development of Jovian theology from the Julio-Claudian dynasty onward. It was a trope familiar in the Classical and Hellenistic periods. In the period of Augustus the imagery of Jupiter (thunderbolt, spear, eagle) and its associations with Olympian victory was adopted in imperial iconography. By the second century, consideration of the emperor's rule as parallel with Jupiter's governance of the cosmos was a stock feature of imperial political theology. When Aristides drew his comparison of the emperor with Zeus he could rely on the ability of his audience to create vivid mental images of the emperor's role in imposing peace and order over chaos.

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[51] *Or.* 26.1-2-5.

An important source for this iconography came from outer walls of the Great Altar of Pergamon. [52] The precise date, the occasion of the construction of, as well as the forms of religious ritual performed within the Great Altar of Pergamon remain topics of scholarly debate. The altar was erected sometime in the first half of the second century by the Attalid King, Eumenes II (ruled 197-159 BCE), perhaps on the occasion of the successful conclusion of a war with the Seleucids and the Galatians in 188 BCE, or maybe later as a monument to celebrate the final and decisive victory over the Galatians in 166 C.E.[53] Its external reliefs are of particular interest here

because they were readily visible to an illiterate general public and used well known mythology to communicate dynastic meaning and achievement – much as Aristides would do almost three centuries later in his celebration of Roman rule.[54] The north, south, east and west side of the lower perimeter wall of the Altar were covered with reliefs that depicted the victory of Zeus and the Olympians over the Giants. In the Hesiodic version of the myth, the Giants, who represent the forces of chaos, disorder, rose up against the Olympian gods who, led by Zeus, triumphed over them.[55] One striking relief on the Altar's east frieze shows the father of the gods, Zeus single-handedly vanquishing three giants who are falling before him.   The Pergamon Altar appropriates victory over rebellious powers to represent political order ordained by and reflecting the

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[52] For a discussion of the influence of the Pergamon altar, as well as the Pergamene Temple to Athena, on cosmic Augustan iconography, see Picard 1957, 289-91.
[53] For discussion of the various possibilities, with literature, Stewart 2000, 32-57; Sturgeon 2000, 72-75; Heres and Kästner 2004, 26-28.
[54] For evidence of the general Pergamene populace at the steps and before the external friezes of the altar, Stewart 2000, 49; Kuttner 2005, 136-201.
[55] Hesiod, Theogony, ll. 664-735.

divine governance of the cosmos. As such it offered what has been called "visual rhetoric" to publicize the success of the Attalid monarchy.[56]

Under the Participate, representation of the emperor as Zeus and in the company of cosmic deities became commonplace.[57] In addition to depicting him as vice-regent of Zeus/Jupiter, the *pax Romana* was likened the cosmic peace of the heavens. Both of these themes can be seen on the Gemma Augustea (c. 10 CE). In the upper register, on the right, Augustus is seated as Jupiter Capitolinus. Roma is to his right, and behind him are Neptune, Tellus with cornucopia, and Italia who crowns him. The emperor dispatches Tiberius, on his chariot accompanied by Victory behind him, to pacify Rome's enemies. The lower register shows Roman soldiers erecting a tropaeum and subjugating barbarians to bring about divinely ordained Roman rule and peace. Imperial cult inscriptions similarly liken the emperor to Jupiter/Zeus. A decree from Halicarnassus immediately after Augustus' death, which establishes a cult to the divine emperor, identifies Augustus as Zeus Patroos.[58] And an earlier (9 BCE) inscription from Priene uses Jovian imagery to celebrate Divine Providence for granting a "Saviour [Augustus] who has made war to cease and who shall put everything [in peaceful] order."[59] Fragments of similar inscriptions have been discovered in Phrygia, at Apameia, Eumeneia, and Dorylaion.[60] A later decree commissioned to thank Nero for his declaration to the entire province of Achaea of freedom from taxation, announces the establishment of an altar to Nero next to the

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[56] Kuttner 2005, 299-200.
[57] Fears 1977, 210-19; for a discussion of imperial Jovian iconography and its importance in signaling the link between cosmic and earthly rule, Alföldi 1970, 186-276.
[58] Ehrenberg and Jones 1976, 83-4, no. 98a, ll. 6-7 (*IBM* 4.1, no. 894).
[59] Ehrenberg and Jones 1976, 82, no. 98, ll. 37-38 (*OGIS* 458).
[60] For inscriptions MAMA 6.174, 175 (Apameia); CIG 3.3902b, CIL 3.12240 (Emeneia); CIL 3.13651 (Dorylaion); also Laffi 1967, 5-98 for discussion.

temple of Zeus Soter and celebrates Nero as "the lord of all the cosmos [ὁ τοῦ

πάντος κόσμου κύριος], Supreme Imperator." It directs that his altar be inscribed,

"To Zeus Liberator forever." [61] Similar affirmation of Nero's Jovian rule can be seen

on an inscription from a funerary monument in Akmonia in Phrygia, which

celebrates Nero as "father of the fatherland and of the cosmos."[62] Panegyric

deployed similar Jovian metaphor, as did Seneca when he likened Nero's earthly

rule, as vice-regent of the gods, to Zeus' heavenly rule of the gods.[63]

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[61] Smallwood 1967, 35-36, no. 64, ll. 31, 49 (*SIG³* 814 ll. 30-1). Wendland 1904, 335-53 offers further examples. For Helios and the Golden Age in imperial ideology, see Günther and Müller 1988, 121-55.

[62] MAMA 6.254.

[63] Thus, Calpurnius Siculus, *eclog.* 4.142 – Nero is Jupiter come down to earth; Seneca, De clem. 1.1.2, Nero having found favour in heaven has been selected to rule as vicar of the gods; for discussion of Jovian aspects of Nero's vicariate, Fears 1975, 486-96.

Imperial monuments represented the cosmic dimensions of this theology of military victory. For example, at Turbie, near Monaco, in 6 BCE the Roman senate inaugurated a monument to honour Augustus' subjugation of 46 tribes in the Alps. The so-called *tropaeum Alpium*, the "Victory of the Alps," was built as a rotunda divided by 24 columns on its upper level. According to Medieval and sixteenth century descriptions, a statue of Augustus, no longer extant, possibly represented as Jupiter, with bound figures at his feet, surmounted the rotunda.[64] The form of the monument in the round, as well as the twelve bound figures placed around its circumference, are suggestive of the celestial sphere and the zodiac. Augustus surmounted on the top likens Augustus' reign on earth to Jupiter's rule of the cosmos. Later, Nero likened his rule to the cosmic

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[64] Formigé 1949, 74-75, with sources.

governance of both Jupiter and Helios.[65] Lucan offers a probably ironic account of Nero's association with Helios when he depicts Nero's inevitable apotheosis as the sun under whose bright sky all earthly conflict comes to an end (*Civil War* 1.57-63). Seneca satirizes Claudius with a similar representation in *Apocolocyntosis* 4.[66] The emperor's self-stylized cosmic associations with Helios were reflected in a wide iconographic repertoire, including, perhaps, numismatic images of him with a radiate crown (an image usually reserved for emperor's posthumously deified; BMC 1.56).[67] The throneroom of Nero's famous Golden Palace, (Suetonius, *Nero* 31), has been interpreted as a visual expression of the emperor's cosmic/political power as incarnate Helios governing the heavens and the earth.[68] Part – 4.

It was through such imagery that viewers were to be persuaded that they were living as the beneficiaries of a concordat between the gods and their earthly vicar. It communicated to diverse peoples that they belonged to a greater trans-ethnic, global order, and that this order was established thanks to a divinely elected nation and its emperor, Jupiter's vice-regent or in some cases embodiment to meld otherwise competing nations into a harmonious order.[69] Upon an emperor's accession, one of his first acts was to disseminate his images across the Empire. Amongst these were images of his military victories, and specifically victory in the company of the gods. These included of course monuments, such as the one at Aphrodisias, which we will discuss directly. But they also included military standards, trophies, and panels depicting decisive victories.[70] Trophies in the provinces presented emperors as gods or their regents. Emperors celebrated triumphs in Rome, but they also advertised their achievement by posting images of their

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[65] For a renaissance in Jovian imagery under Nero, Fears 1975, 486-96; 1981, 69-74.
[66] Grimal 1971, 205-17; Arnaud 1987, 167-93; L'Orange 1982, 57-63.
[67] Fears 1977, 235-37.
[68] L'Orange 1953, 28-34.
[69] Ando 2000, 206-73 offers an excellent account of emperors' uses of iconography as a means of persuasion, as well as the various urban locations images of the emperor and his achievements were displayed.
[70] Picard 1957, 285-342.

successes at the circus, hippodrome, and theatre. In the arena, gladiatorial combat advertised imperial victories by pitting barbarian captives against wild animals. Under Nero, the Senate voted that feriae, or festival days, be held to commemorate the day decisive military victories were achieved or announced. There is good evidence that these were observed outside Rome, especially by the army, of course, whose official calendar is exemplified by the third-century *Feriale Duranum*, and that they were also celebrated in the provinces by the local populace who enjoyed them in the arena.[71] Bakers' moulds from the Danube survive for flat cakes with the legend VICTORIA AUGUSTI for the celebration of these days, as well as board games replaying on conquests over barbarian nations.[72] In Pompeii, a mosaic from the Macellum or meat market, perhaps from the end of Nero's reign, portrays a prince alongside a trophy, seated on military arms and crowned by victory.[73]

There are no surviving examples of the type just listed from the cities Colossians names, but the evidence that does survive is consistent with this general pattern. Less than 100 kms away from Colossae, at Aphrodisias, at the imperial temple dedicated to the Julio-Claudian emperors and their families, the statues and reliefs of the Sebasteion or imperial temple translated into stone the cosmic rule of the emperors and its benefits for the world's inhabitants. The site of Aphrodisias for a temple dedicated to the worship of the Julio-Claudians was important because they traced their ancestry to Venus/Aphrodite. Completed at precisely the time Colossians was composed, the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias represents the fullest surviving programme of Roman imperial art dedicated to the cult of the emperor from the first-century.[74] As such it is especially instructive for helping to capture the kind of imperial imagination Colossians triggered in its audience when it celebrated the triumph of Christ over the principalities and powers, his heavenly reconciliation of them, and for helping to recognize the visual aspects of the imperial metaphor the letter adopts and adapts to persuade Christ followers to accept its teachings.

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[71] Thus McCormick 1986, 31-37.
[72] McCormick 1986, 32-34.
[73] Picard 1957, 338.
[74] See Smith 1987, 88-13 for reproductions and discussion.

The temple was built on an east-west axis, and organized around a rectangular paved temenos or courtyard, (approximately 14 X 90 metres). Three tiers (c. 12 metres high) formed the north and south side of the courtyard. The ground level on each side comprised an evenly divided set of empty porticos. Sculptural reliefs comprised the second and third stories of both the north and south side. At its eastern end was a temple (no longer surviving)
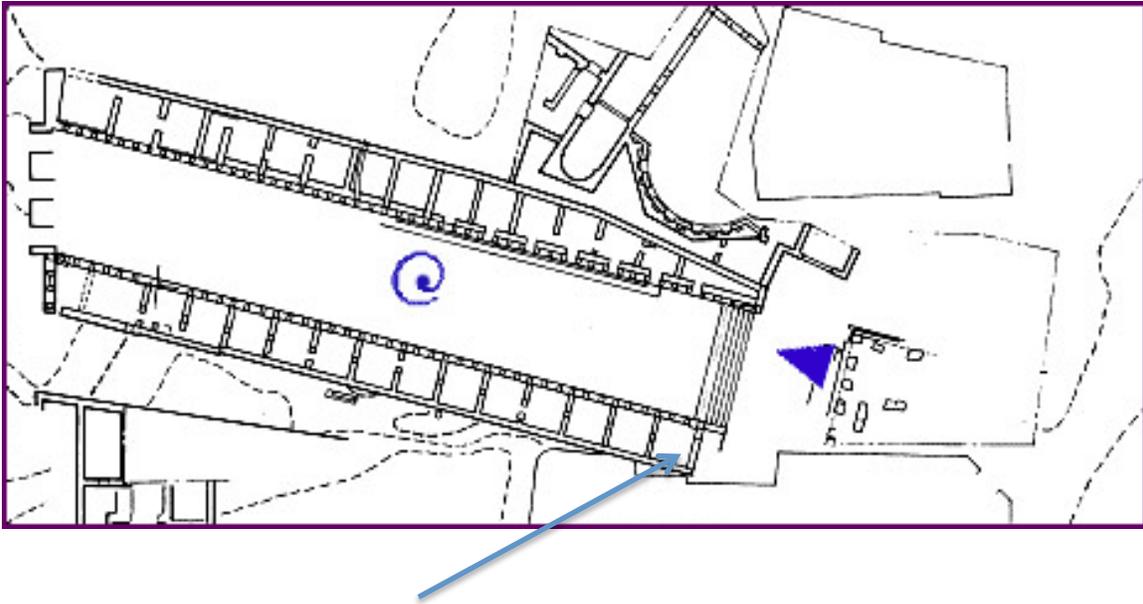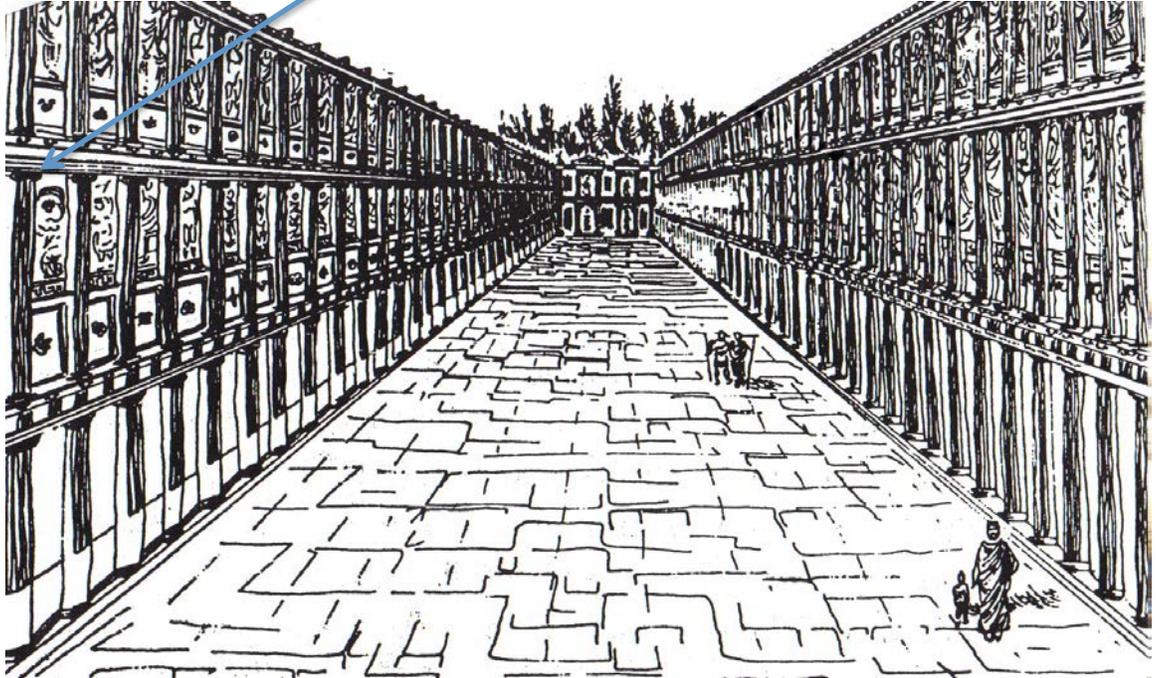
built on top of a flight of stairs. The first impression one gains when beholding the site is its vertical programme. The three stories draw the eye upward even as the long and narrow temenos draws it eastward, where prayers and sacrifices were made to the emperor and his family. Thus the vertical and the horizontal merge; the architecture brings ritual and the gods together with their focal point set on the celebration of Julio-Claudian rule. As a whole the iconographical programme was designed to demonstrate that the inhabitants of the Roman Empire owed whatever benefits of peace and prosperity they enjoyed to the Julio-Claudian dynasty, which the gods had appointed to pacify the nations and bring order to the world. Our interest falls first on the third tier of the north side and the second and third tiers of the south side. Here we see the emperors associated with earthly and cosmic power, and with heavenly concord.

The North and South side of courtyard on the third and second tiers comprised a sculptural programme that included representations of emperors and their family members depicted as Olympian deities associated with reliefs of personified nature and cosmic powers, female representations of conquered nations, and sculptural reliefs dedicated to scenes from Greek mythology and the story of

Aeneas. Only three of the 50 panels from the third tier of the north side have survived, but they are nonetheless instructive. Two represent allegories of Day and Ocean, Hemeros and Okeanos; alongside these probably stood allegorical panels representing their respective opposites: Night and Earth.[75] The third presents the enthronement of Nero. Bathed by light from the rising and setting son, the allegories express the global reach and cosmic dimensions of Julio-Claudian rule -- over earth and sea, from rising to setting sun.[76] On the second south-facing tier of the Sebasteion were 50 female statues, each representing a different nation or people conquered by Augustus and added to the Empire.[77]

On the north-facing side of the courtyard, on the second tier, were reliefs clustering around episodes from Greek myths. The third tier reliefs depicted Roman emperors and their victories. Interspersed among them were panels given over to Olympian gods represented as individual figures. Surviving reliefs depict the emperors in the company of the gods, with divine qualities, or in association with Greco-Roman

myths. One (left) depicts Augustus with a Victory, a bound captive, and a tropaeum. To his right, symbolizing Jovian power, is a large eagle; the spear or scepter Augustus holds similarly evokes themes associated with Jupiter/Zeus. This is reinforced by the tropaeum to Augustus' immediate left, behind the head of the bound captive below. Beside the tropaeum stands a Victory. Thus even as the relief invokes military victory on earth, it recalls mythology associated with heavenly rule.

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[75] For a discussion of these allegorical features, Smith 1990, 91-92.
[76] For discussion of the cosmological affirmations of this portraiture, Rose 1997, 168.
[77] Thus Reynolds 1981, 317-27; Smith 1988, 58-59 notices that the nations personified represent those conquered by, added to, or reconquered by Augustus.

Another relief (below left) invokes both mythic and cosmic elements together. Here a nude Augustus in forward stride is flanked by personifications of earth and sea. A cornucopia at his right symbolizes the abundance of harvest. A prow in his left hand designates his power over the sea. Here, Augustus is a divine figure that has his place

alongside the gods who govern the cosmos, to rule land and sea, as well as usher forth their abundance. Other reliefs signify association with divinity in more subtle but equally instructive ways. They represent the emperors in heroic nudity in order to assimilate them to heroes, as in the case of Germanicus (lower left) who stands in a classical pose beside the trophaeum and bound barbarian child at his right. Or (lower right) their achievements are represented as the deeds of heroes, such as in the case of Claudius, again a classical nude, crowned by a personified Senate or Roman people to his left, and a bound female captive below a trophy to his right.

Aphrodisias was not, of course, in the Lycus Valley, and, though, relatively proximate to Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, it is impossible know whether the author of Colossians ever saw the Sebasteion or was directly influenced by it. The argument here is not one of cause and effect, but to help locate Colossian imagery and metaphor in its contemporary visual world. Evidence from the cities Colossians names as well as other cities of Roman Phrygia is fragmentary but complementary with imperial cult imagery from the Sebasteion.[78] A cult of Roma was present in Laodicea at least from the late second century BCE, and there is reason to believe another was present in Hierapolis.[79] The most common coin issues from Laodicea associate Nero with Zeus Laodiceus, perhaps on account of his reconstruction of the temple to Zeus destroyed in an earthquake in 60 CE.[80] Direct association of Nero with Olympian deity has Nero obverse with the inscription ΝΕΡΩΝ Σ[ΕΒΑΣ]ΤΟΣ ΘΕΟΣ and Zeus Laodiceus reverse.[81] Hierapolis issues present Nero, obverse, with Apollo on horseback, reverse, or again with Zeus, with eagle and sceptre.[82] Nero's mother, Agrippina Minor appears on the obverse of a coin from Eumenia, near Hierapolis, with, on the reverse, Cybele enthroned holding patera and cornucopia, symbols of agricultural plenty. The association of empresses iconographically with divinities signifying fertility and agriculture was commonplace in provincial issues.[83] The association of emperors with local deities represents evidence of the assimilation of traditional religious devotion to imperial culture. Again near Hierapolis – at Siblia – images of Augustus and Tiberius, obverse, with, on reverse, the Phrygian deity, Men, have been discovered.[84] Similar issues have been found further

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[78] For an overview of the numismatic evidence from Phrygia, Armstrong 1998, 155-78; Mitchell 1993, 1.80-117 presents an overview of the steady Roman urbanization and growth of the imperial cult in Anatolia more generally.

[79] Mellor 1975, 75-76.

[80] RPC 1.1, 2917-2919, 2926, 2928.

[81] RPC 1.1.2923.

[82] RPC 1.1, Apollos: 2975-76; Zeus: 1978.

[83] Rose 1997, 75-76. Parallel, though earlier, is a coin published under Gaius (37-41 CE) from nearby Apameia. On the obverse are Drusus and Nero; reverse are the emperors's sisters Agrippina, Drusilla, each with cornucopia (www.asiaminorcoins.com ID # 1644, access 29 June 2013).

[84] von Aulock 1980, 152-53, nos. 876-886; for Nero and Men, 112, nos. 320-21.

afield, at Julia, where coins representing Agrippina with an enthroned deity (perhaps Zeus) were discovered. Elsewhere, at Julia, issues associating Nero with the Phrygian deity, Men, have been discovered, as well as Agrippina with an enthroned divinity (perhaps Zeus).[85] Perhaps most instructive, though as yet still unpublished, is a report from the excavations at Laodicea of the discovery of a statue of the deified Augustus, in the prima porta manner, with Aphrodite.[86] This is consistent with Laodicea's (unsuccessful) bid in 29 CE, alongside eleven other cities, to build a temple dedicated to worship of Tiberius.[87]

These examples offer us a repertoire of imagery to help understand the ways in which Colossians, through vivid language, invited its first-century listeners to imagine and "see" Christ's cosmic power and his victory over the principalities and powers, and the reconciliation that has come about through his pacification of them. This is not to deny other influences on this imagery, specifically Hebrew Bible ones, but it is instructive to consider the way Colossians draws from the visual culture and beliefs embedded in the social world of its audience, in order to persuade listeners of Christ's supreme authority and the benefits that have come from his victory.

4. Hybridity, Paul, and Empire

The foregoing shows how difficult it is to compose simplistic formulation of emergent Christianity, and Pauline Christ-followers, as for or against the Roman Empire. What we discover in the appropriation of vivid imagery consistent with iconography celebrating the benefits of and achievements of imperial rule is a complex negotiation of political commonplaces. Post-colonial study offers some insights for the interpretation of emergent cultural and religious identity in a new movement that was expanding through the Roman Empire. At one level it is hardly surprising that a ubiquitous picture language should have been appropriated to make universal claims for an eschatologically oriented religious movement that had drawn on Jewish apocalyptic motifs to conceive of a

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[85] von Aulock 1980, 1.119, nos. 401-414; Agrippina, nos. 395-400.
[86] Simsek 2010, 34-35; www.world-archaeology.com/features/laodicea/ (accessed 29 June 2013).
[87] Friesen 1993, 17-18.

universal end to history. Indeed, prophetic and apocalyptic writers of the Hebrew Bible did the same when they drew upon Ancient Near Eastern motifs and images to represent Israel's/Judah's national hopes and beliefs about its ultimate destiny.[88] What is more surprising is the way in which the imperial motifs of victory has been ascribed to crucifixion, and that triumph over enemies, the parade of the Triumphator, is pictured as coming about through a tragic death God has used to create an over turning of all expectations. Hybridity describes a productive liminal space, not quite one thing and not quite the other, but both together, in the formulation of identity, practices, and ideals.[89] According to Homi Bhabha, central to hybridity is the notion of mimicry, the imitation of a dominant cultural script so as to make it one's own, but in a highly inflected manner. Hybridity, he argues, describes a process of self-identification whereby "`denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rule of recognition."[90] "In mimicry, the representation of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonymy" writes Bhabha.[91] The "denied knowledge" that the crucified pacifies, reconciles, integrates is suggestive of a metonymous mimcry which enters upon a dominant discourse and estranges the very foundation of its authority. For here the way of crucifixion, of love for others, disrupts even as it borrows from a dominant discourse. We cannot and should not argue that the political situation of the Lycus Valley under Roman Rule was one akin to the colonization of modern imperial powers. Still, appropriation of another's narrative configurations of what constitutes success, victory, divine achievement, subordination, pacification and so on does express a potent form of precisely the metonymous form of rearticulation Bhabha's quotation suggests. Heuristically, hybridity offers a good tool for the analysis of an emergent Christian religious identity in the urban contexts of the Roman Empire. Critical here is the tension of not quite one thing or the other. To resolve this liminal identity to either one thing (opposition) or the other (accomodation) is to misrepresent the dynamic social reality of

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[88] A much studied phenomenon; for literature and discussion, Collins, 1998, 17-33.
[89] See especially Homi Bhabha's notion of colonial mimicry, 1994, 121-31.
[90] Bhabha, 1994, 162.
[91] Bhabha 1994, 90.

Paulinism as represented both in the earlier and the later New Testament letters. Nor, with Jaś Elsner, should we locate the imperialisation of Christianity in a later Constantinian period when Christian Triumph and Imperial Triumph were equated with one another.[92] If the preceding argument shows anything, it is that from as early as a decade after the death of Jesus the paradoxical equation of Jesus' death as a form of imperial triumph was already well established. Were there space, we could show that this was indeed formulated before the earliest Pauline letters, in the productive Synoptic tradition, where the Passion narratives represent Jesus' death as the crucifixion of a king, a configuration that just possibly had its origins in a kind of gallows humour, for which Philo offers us a striking account.[93] If then we wish to speak of processes of individualization in this early period of emergent religious formulation, we should imagine them as including unique reconfigurations of a larger visual political culture, by way of imagination, toward self-recognition as part of a movement centred on beliefs about what God has done with a tragic death to bring about a new reality that is breaking through in the hearing of Christ-followers. Paul in Colossians speaks of his Gospel growing and spreading throughout the whole world, a Gospel that is like its companion imperial one, removing distinctions in a geographical embrace, whose ending has been divinely appointed (Col. 1.6). The visual and the imperial conspired to create a unique imperializing religious formulation, which, once canonized, would spill over the texts that hallowed it, into a culture where it can still be found today, if anonymously, in our day-to-day familiarities.

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[92] Elsner, 1998, 259.
[93] Flac. 6.