The Parousia of Paul at Iconium

Trevor S. Luke
Department of Classics, 205A Dodd Hall, Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-1510, United States of America
tluke@fsu.edu

Abstract
This article explores the parousia reception, instead of the arena, as a locus for spectacle production in the Roman Empire, specifically in certain passages of early Christian literature. Not only did Christians apply the familiar image of parousia to their eschatology, but they also produced new truths about empire and the location of legitimate authority through their creative production of distinctive parousia spectacles. Through these literary spectacles, old truths about the body and authority were challenged as Christians developed a cosmology for the parousia spectacle that both transformed parousia and also served as a new hermeneutic for interpreting such ceremonies. The arrival of Paul at Iconium represented a radical reinterpretation of parousia in that it shifted the locus of speciation from the emperor to the individual Christian. In producing and consuming their own parousia spectacles, Christians participated in imperial discourse.

Keywords
parousia, adventus, spectacle, eschatology, imperialism

1. Parousia as Imperial Spectacle

In recent scholarship on Flavian Rome, the arena has been treated as a 'master-metaphor' of Roman imperialism, 'an image that allows for the production and propagation of other truths.'

The Roman Empire is regarded, in other words, as a 'society of the spectacle.' In the arena, the emperor is the ideal


2 G. DeBord, Society of the Spectacle (Detroit, Mich.: Black & Red, 1983). I follow Gunderson (‘The Flavian Amphitheater,’ 649, note 27) on the use of the term 'society of the spectacle,' when he writes, 'To my eye the spectacle serves best as an extended development of ideas already latent in the idea of commodity fetishism qua idea as per Marx (1906) and it should not be tightly yoked to moments within the specific history of the evolution of the commodity form.... Moreover, I prefer to find "fetishism" or, rather, the mystified relationship between persons as mediated by things, as itself an active principle in periods where a strict reading of Marx (e.g., Marx [1906] 69) would hesitate to see it.'
producer and consumer of the spectacle of Roman Empire as it is presented to itself through his mediating gaze. It is in the arena that the unity between emperor and empire is performed as the reality upon which all else is contingent. The totalizing nature of this fiction, however, was localized within the arena, and there were, after all, other loci in which the empire was performed. While they do not replace or fundamentally challenge the role of the arena, they give place for different kinds of negotiations, which played their own role in constructing empire from the provincial perspective. Such was the spectacle of the παρουσία (hereafter parousia) reception in the regions of the empire where the Hellenistic polis was the dominant cultural institution. The parousia reception was the celebration of the arrival of a ruler or the ruler’s appointed representative at the city. Parousia became a major theme in the discourse of Christianities beginning with Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians and continuing up to the present, eventually coming to refer almost exclusively to the eschatological arrival of the Christ.

In this article, I am less interested in the eschatological Parousia in isolation than in the development of parousia spectacle (parousia here referring to all ritualized arrival performances) as an expression of imperial discourse in Christian literature. Here I examine the arrival of Paul at Iconium in the Acts of Paul and Thecla (hereafter Acts Paul Thecl.) as one instance of this discourse with an eye toward understanding how Christians participated in imperial discourse and yet managed to carve out their own identities in the process. I will argue that the arrival of Paul at Iconium shifts the dominant perspective from the arriving figure, Paul, whose role is analogous to that of imperial authorities, to Onesiphorus, who stands in the place of all Christians who must discern wherein reliable authority resides. Such a radical shift throws into question the daily assumptions that defined the workings of imperial authority, and offered a more reliable alternative to imperial standards for establishing authority through the presence and performance of the body.

It is first important to take a brief overview of the practice of parousia (also ἐπιστολή before exploring its significance in the Acts Paul Thecl. The parousia reception was a ritualized performance that effected or recognized the place of a ruler within the Hellenistic city and the city’s place in an imperial order.

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3 I deliberately use the term parousia reception in favor of adventus, the usual Latin term used by Roman authors to describe the emperor’s arrival at the city, in order to give precedence to the practice’s development in the Hellenistic Period in the Greek East, where the city of Iconium was located, and because the bulk of this discussion deals with Christian literature in Greek. Certainly, the practice evolved as Romans instead of Hellenistic kings and their envoys became the object of the reception, but in many ways it remained fundamentally unchanged.

4 For a brief discussion of the history of such ceremonial arrivals, see S.G. MacCormack, Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 17–22; for
Like the performances of the Roman arena, it was a grand spectacle. The Hellenistic city prepared itself to welcome a ruler by taking on a festival atmosphere. Garlands were hung and the people dressed in white, festal finery. The city elites headed up a procession of the associations of the city, bearing statues of the gods and their own standards, to a designated meeting place outside the city (ἀπάντησις). There, formal speeches and acclamations were offered, and the ruler was conducted back into the city where he would tour its important monuments, sacrifice to its gods, and meet with its ruling assembly. In rhetoric and image, the spectacle produced was one of consensus naturally reached in response to the divine boon of the ruler’s arrival. According to this rhetoric, the gods facilitated the ruler’s arrival at the city in order to bring order, plenty, and perhaps freedom where past, tyrannical regimes had left chaos and poverty. Like other imperial spectacles, the parousia reception ‘reveals and makes present’ truths about the empire, and as in the arena, the eyes of Caesar, either personally or through one of his representatives, mediate the spectacle.

And yet the parousia reception offers a fundamentally different metaphor for empire from the one proffered in the arena. In the arena, the mastery of empire is revealed in the efficacy of games of death to realize the tautological connection between virility and virtue as is also manifested on the field of battle by soldiers. The point at which these truths are effected and realized is in death. The fiction or truth of parousia’s spectacle is that empire, in the person of the arriving ruler, is a divine force rejuvenating the city such that it can realize an almost utopian state. The point at which its truths are most realized is in the exchange of benefactions for honors. While the arena works from the analogy of the military, wherein mastery is evidenced in the death of one’s opponent, the parousia reception adopts the analogy of the theater, wherein different parties unite under the aegis of the outsider par excellence, Dionysus,

another description of the practice, see idem, ‘Change and Continuity in Late Antiquity: The Ceremony of Adventus,’ Historia 21 (1972), 723.
5 For adventus as the performance of a consensus omnium, see P. Brown, The Cult of the Saints (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 98–100.
8 Athenion’s address to the Athenians, for example, promises that the arrival of king Mithradates Eupator will bring about an end to the chaos of life as it was under Roman rule and bring about a revival of democracy and a revitalization of Athenian religion. See Posidonius F253 100–103.
to produce a spectacle that allows the city to imagine itself anew in almost limitless ways. 10

Although the spectacle of parousia was not violent in the same way as the arena, it too was fundamentally agonistic in the way it cast as inferior other options to the order represented in the arriving ruler. If the reality of life under the new ruler is utopian-like, then other options become, at the risk of anachronism, dystopian. Athenion, envoy of king Mithradates Eupator, in an address to the Athenian people, described Athens under the Romans in dystopian terms, while life under Mithradates, so he forecasted, would revitalize the city and its institutions. 11 The former ruler, who was once lauded in idealized terms, becomes almost an inversion of his former self. At the installation of Tiridates in Armenia under the authority of the emperor Tiberius, the people of Seleucia welcomed the arriving Tiridates as a god-king and cast aspersions on his predecessor Artabanus II, who was abused for his shortcomings and whose lineage was denigrated. 12 The practice of slighting the predecessor in favor of the new ruler even carried over into situations where both men represented the same imperial power. Thus in the Late Empire, the rhetorical handbook of Menander recommends that orators depict the arrival of a new imperial governor as bringing about the passing of difficulties and dangers. 13 Such arrival speeches also incorporated weather metaphors that suggested the connection between cosmic disorder in the past regime and a restoration of order under the new one. The performance of the parousia reception ritual produced and manifested these truths about the order represented by the ruler who was present. The truths of the old order were swallowed up in the new, and the representation of that past order became what it needed to be for the sake of a new consensus. Competition was thus produced and used to create consensus.

10 The arrangement of different groups in the city's procession to meet the ruler is reminiscent of societal divisions in the theater. Furthermore, the relationship between dramatic performances and arrival in the Greek city is very ancient. C. Sourvinou-Inwood (Tragedy and Athenian Religion [Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2003], 73–89) has argued that the Great Dionysia, during which tragedy was performed, was a celebration of the god Dionysus' arrival from elsewhere in the ritual of xenismos. Tragedy might be thought of 'entertainments on the god's arrival' (Sourvinou-Inwood, Tragedy and Athenian Religion, 73). From there it is a very short step to incorporating the arriving Hellenistic rulers worshiped in cult in such observances, as happened in the case of Demetrius Poliorcetes in Athens (Plutarch, Dem. 12). The association between welcoming ritual and drama persisted into Late Antiquity. Menander Rhetor (381.7–23) uses the image of a chorus of women in a play to describe the provincial cities' united expression of gratitude upon the arrival of a governor. Plutarch (Ant. 24.3) opened his account of Antony's Dionysiac reception at Ephesus with a quote from Sophoclean tragedy.

11 Posidonius F253 100–103.
12 Tacitus, Ann. 6.42.1–3
While the truths of the parousia reception included the consensus of putative insiders and outsiders in the Roman imperial project, it remained a thoroughly imperial enterprise (wherein both insiders and outsiders were actor-participants) inasmuch as the spectacle presented was still an image of consensus organized behind the emperor and mediated through the emperor's eyes. The Christianities and Judaism of the first and second centuries operated within and as part of this Roman Empire. The master-metaphors/spectacles of empire produced their knowledge as much as they did for other inhabitants of the empire. Yet these movements created their own spaces through which they could participate in and challenge the truths of the Roman Empire by offering their own visions and interpretations of these spectacles. This was achieved not by reinventing the wheel, but instead by shifting the mediating perspective. In Christian depictions of the arena, the apparent victims of Roman mastery were shown to be the true masters through Christian eyes. Likewise, in certain Jewish and Christian eschatological prophecies, the parousia of worldly rulers was overwhelmed by the power of the parousia of God in the person of one of his messianic figures. Such prophecy worked on the pre-existing rhetorical logic of parousia, wherein there was always implicit competition between the newly arrived ruler and all other options. By shifting the mediating perspective, the promises of imperial parousia were turned on their heads.

In the next section, I will review some New Testament passages in which the parousia theme plays a major role. Then I will proceed to re-examine the parousia narrative of Paul's arrival at Iconium in the Acts of Paul and Thecla in order to illustrate how a Christian author might re-imagine both the parousia spectacle and the significance of the body as a locus of both speculation and performance therein. Up to now most treatments of the arrival of Paul have been specifically concerned with examining the description of Paul in terms of ancient physiognomy: the art of reading the inner character and destiny of the individual through the characteristics of the physical body. Certainly the

14 Consider especially the dream of Perpetua (Passio Perpetuæ 10.9–13), wherein she rushes to the arena and, in the form of a man, defeats her Egyptian opponent and receives a prize. She comes to understand her victory in the dream to symbolize her defeat of Satan (Passio Perpetuæ 10.14), which only occurs in her actual death in the arena later. Thus the ultimate defeat and humiliation in Roman terms is rendered, through the re-imagining of the spectacle, a victory. See discussion in J. Perkins, The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era (London: Routledge, 1995), 109–11.

15 Cf. 2 Thess 2:8; Rev 19:19–20.

detailed and idiosyncratic physical description of the apostle in the Acts Paul Thecl. invites a physiognomic interpretation, but the results of attempts at pinning down the precise physiognomic message of this description have been contradictory. Somewhat predictably, it turns out that the description of Paul is favorable or unfavorable depending on the eyes and aims of the interpreter. Recently, the description has been generically re-contextualized in line with recent scholarship on the genre of Acts literature. If Acts literature is closely related to the novel, then its constituent elements might be usefully examined in the context of their counterparts in ancient novels. Betz, taking this approach, has argued that Paul's description is an inversion of the description of the romantic hero of the ancient novel. My purpose is not to take issue with this interpretation, but instead to provide commentary on the scene in which this gesture unfolds with an eye toward adding to the richness of this view.


In order to understand the production of parousia spectacle in the arrival of Paul at Iconium within its broader Christian context, it is important to briefly revisit the theme as it appears in earlier Christian literature. Due to constraints of time and space, examples from the New Testament will have to suffice, albeit with the understanding that the various parousia narratives therein do not represent instances of a single, normative perspective. Instead they offer examples of how different authors in the first and early second century, i.e., in a time dating before the composition of the Acts Paul Thecl., participated in the production of parousia spectacles as eschatological narratives. At least two strategies emerged for doing so. In the first, as represented by 1 Thessalonians, the arrival of the Christ was of concern principally for members of the communities of Jesus followers, and the Roman Empire was largely ignored.

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19 I do this for the sake of convenience and not to privilege New Testament writings above other early Christian or Jewish literature. When I use the term 'canonical,' it is, once again, only for the purposes of limiting the scope of the discussion. Surprisingly little work has been done on the arrival scenes of Early Christian literature. Jesus' so-called 'Triumphal Entry' at Jerusalem has received the most attention. On this parousia, see B. Kinman, 'Parousia, Jesus' 'A-Triumphal' Entry, and the Fate of Jerusalem (Luke 19:28–44), Journal of Biblical Literature 118, no. 2 (1999): 279–94.
although always implicitly present in the parousia metaphor. In the second strategy, as represented by 2 Thessalonians and Revelation, the parousia of the messianic figure was depicted as being in direct competition with the arrivals of eschatological opponents of a decidedly Roman imperial cast, who would prove inferior to God’s power as manifested in the messianic figure’s arrival.

As Koester argued, the earliest extant example of Christian appropriation of the imagery of political parousia is found in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians.\textsuperscript{20} Paul wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians from Corinth in 50/51 C.E.\textsuperscript{21} Its essential purpose was to strengthen the faith of recent converts to Paul’s message.\textsuperscript{22} In this letter, Paul used the term parousia four times, or, in other words, more than he did in any other canonical work attributed to the apostle (1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23). The application of this term of Hellenistic political ritual within a Christian eschatological context may have been a Pauline innovation.\textsuperscript{23} Intimately connected with the use of parousia was Paul’s concern that the community of believers be united. At 1 Thess 3:12 he admonishes the believers to be united in love directly before he mentions the parousia of Christ at 3:13.\textsuperscript{24} This concern for unity is consistent with the image of imperial consensus that comprised one of the most important byproducts of the parousia reception ritual.\textsuperscript{25}

When the Christ comes, so Paul writes in 4:17, the community of believers, both living and dead, will participate in a heavenly version of the apantēsis, the meeting of the arriving ruler with city inhabitants at a designated place outside of the city.\textsuperscript{26} Just as the arrival of a new ruler often resulted in an abrogation of the old order and the institution of a new one, Paul declares that the day of the Christ’s coming will be disastrous for those who proclaim peace and security (ἐιρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια, or, in Latin, pax et securitas). Pax et securitas was, of course, a piece of Roman ideology, and Paul seems to intend to identify the coming of the Christ with the dissolution of the Roman order.\textsuperscript{27} The believers, however, are to take up a defensive posture, armed only with a breastplate of


\textsuperscript{22} Malherbe, Letters to the Thessalonians, 77–78.

\textsuperscript{23} Koester, ‘Imperial Ideology,’ 158–9.

\textsuperscript{24} At 1 Thess. 5:13 he admonishes them to be at peace among themselves.

\textsuperscript{25} See n. 5.


\textsuperscript{27} For εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια as imperial ideology, see E. Bammel, ‘Ein Beitrag zur paulinischen Staatsanschauung,’ Theologische Literaturzeitung 85 (1960), 837.
faith and love and a shield of the hope of salvation.28 As Koester argues, the posture of the community in the present makes the timetable of the Christ’s arrival irrelevant inasmuch as the benefits of belief are already present.29 The only people who need to fear the arrival of the Christ are those implicated in the Roman imperial order.

Through an adept use of the imagery and narrative of parousia, Paul is able to conjure its spectacle in an innovative way. In his parousia spectacle, the Christ and his believers participate in their own version of the imperial ritual to the benefit of the believers, both living and dead, and the overturning of the Roman imperial order. Yet Paul deliberately avoids placing Christians in a position of aggressive opposition to that imperial order in the present. The spectacle of the future parousia becomes instead an accomplished reality through its literary representation. In other words, the counter-spectacle of Christian parousia displaces the truth of the Roman imperial order through its own truth. In this truth, the Roman order is shown to be inefficacious. Its promises of peace and security are something that it will ultimately be unable to fulfill. Imminent in the letter’s present time is a larger cosmic order that the Roman order remains ignorant of, but which will define its ultimate disposition.

The later texts of 2 Thessalonians and Revelation take up Paul’s eschatological parousia theme, but with an eye to the future rather than the present. In these texts, the conflict with Rome in parousia is more explicitly dramatized through the person of the ‘lawless one’ (2 Thessalonians 2:1–9) or the ‘beast’ (Revelation 13, 17), and through the practices of Roman imperial cult. Both eschatological opponents are given a parousia, which competes with the arrival of a messianic figure. In 2 Thessalonians, the lawless one is depicted as taking his seat in the Temple of God and declaring that he is God.30 These events are consistent with the practices of the ruler’s visit to the major sanctuaries of the city upon his entry into it during the parousia reception, and the inclusion of the ruler in local cult as a sunnaos theos.31 The arrival of the Man of Lawlessness is also accompanied by ‘all power and signs and wonders of falsehood,’ an expression that most likely refers to the miracles that were connected with the arrival or birth of imperial rulers.32 An inscription from the koinon of Asia

28 1 Thess 5:8.
30 2 Thess 2:4.
32 2 Thess 2:9: εν πάσῃ δυνάμει καὶ σημείοις καὶ τέρασιν γενόμενη. For a recent discussion of imperial miracles, see U. Riemer, ‘Miracle Stories and Their Narrative Intent in the Context of the Ruler Cult of Classical Antiquity,’ in Wonders Never Cease: The Purpose of Narrating Mira-
proposes that the province make the birthday of Augustus the god the first day of the New Year because he 'restored all things to usefulness, if not their natural state.'33 A more dramatic example would be the rise of the Nile in response to Vespasian’s presence, or the end of a drought in Africa in response to Hadrian’s visit.34 Such wonders functioned as tokens of the benefits of empire and the imperial presence in a manner in keeping with the claims of Roman imperial ideology.

The author of 2 Thessalonians has expanded on the implicitly competitive nature of parousia performances by placing the arrival of the Christ side by side with the parousia of an earthly imperial ruler upon which the Pauline metaphor in 1 Thessalonians was based. The parousia of the Christ is so glorious that it destroys the lawless one altogether. Furthermore, the author of 2 Thessalonians reframes the spectacle of imperial arrival by placing it in a new theological context with dramatis personae, like Satan, alien to the usual imperial narrative. Such a strategy encourages a number of interesting interpretive responses. First, the parousia of the Christ becomes the summum of all such similar imperial events, which now become not only inferior precursors, but even ‘evil’ inversions of the Christ’s parousia. The wonders that testified to the efficacy of the Roman imperial order are shown to be deceitful and hollow. More interestingly, the texts posit a layered reality in which the apparent Roman order serves as a temporary mask that obscures a Satanic interior. This split between appearances and underlying realities is reminiscent of the meta-theatrical gestures of Euripides’ Bacchae, wherein the god Dionysus arrives at Thebes in the guise of a priest of his own cult and as a harbinger of destruction.

The book of Revelation also sets the arrivals of two figures in stark contrast. At the opening of the text, the messianic figure is introduced twice by a tripartite divine title that combines elements of prophecy and parousia: ‘he who is and was and is to come.’35 This formula is imperfectly mirrored in the description of the eschatological opponent, the beast, who ‘was and is not, and will

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33 Stories in the New Testament and Its Religious Environment (eds. M. Labahn and L.J. Lietaert Peerbote; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 32–47. Riemer makes the bold declaration that the ‘venation of Roman emperors is primarily based on “miraculous” acts that reveal them as gods on earth’ (p. 44), yet very little in the way of argument is offered to establish that contention. Surely the role of miracle narratives in imperial cult has received less attention than it deserves, but the phenomenon is far too complex to reduce to such a simple formula.


ascend out of the bottomless pit. Both figures – the Christ and the beast – are predicted to make a future arrival. Indeed, one of the key themes of the text is the announcement of the future arrival of the Christ. In the opening this is accomplished through the construct of letters to seven churches in Asia. The practice of announcing the arrival of a ruler by way of letter was a common practice in the Hellenistic Period and the Roman Empire, and its practical purpose was, as in the first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, to help prepare the community for the arrival event. The author announces the way in which the Christ will make his arrival so that the churches will recognize the event when it occurs: ‘he will come with clouds; and every eye shall see him... and all people of the earth will wail because of him.’ That parousia, in which the messianic figure triumphs over his opponent, is dramatically rendered in chapter 14, but as 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 predicts, it only happens after the parousia of the eschatological opponent.

The parousia of that opponent is described in chapter 13. The imagery involved, including the description of the opponent as a beast and his arrival from the sea, are drawn from the Ancient Near Eastern combat myth, as Collins has demonstrated, but many details of the announcements, arrivals, and worship of these arriving figures is drawn from the parousia of imperial rulers. The arrival of the beast is accompanied by the miracle of his wounding and healing, which causes all people to wonder and then worship him. A token of that worship is the shouting of acclamations that here take the form of questions: ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’ Although abbreviated in form, this sequence of events maps quite well onto the image of imperial parousia. The ruler arrives, his arrival is attended by wonders, and these wonders motivate the enthusiastic reception of the ruler as well as the institution of cult in his honor. The eschatological opponent of Revelation even has an envoy, who is also described as a beast and who

36 Rev 17:8: το θηρίον ὁ είδες ἐν και οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ὀβώσου...
37 Rev 1:7: ὅδε ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν, καὶ ὄψεται αὐτῶν πᾶς ὁ δαίμων καὶ κόμωνται ἐπὶ αὐτὸν πᾶσιν αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς. Aune (Revelation 1–5, 53–54) points out that there are many first person predictions of the coming of the messianic figure in Revelation (3:11; 16:15; 22:7; 22:12; 22:20). By reading this passage as a parousia, I am not denying its rich allusions to the Old Testament, such as passages in the Daniel and Zechariah, which Aune (Revelation 1–5, 54–55) discusses.
40 Rev 13:4: Τις ὁμοίος τῷ θηρίῳ καὶ τίς δύναται πολεμήσει μετ’ αὐτοῦ;
exercises the same power as its master.\textsuperscript{41} The envoy-beast performs wonders for the purpose of establishing the worship of the first beast. Like the wonders that accompany the arrival of the Man of Lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2, these wonders deceive.\textsuperscript{42} Finally, as has been noted before, the worship of the beast, which includes as an important element the beast’s image, is most likely a reference to imperial ruler cult.\textsuperscript{43}

Thus far we have briefly examined the use of parousia imagery and structure in three New Testament texts. The object of this discussion has not been to provide an exhaustive examination of the phenomenon. Certainly much more could be said about these texts and the parousia passages in the gospels as well. For present purposes, however, a few observations will have to suffice. It is clear that Jewish and Christian authors, beginning at least with Paul, found the structure and imagery of the parousia reception ritual of the Hellenistic polis useful in imagining the eschatological arrival of a messianic figure and his conflict with the imperial order. In doing so, these authors situated themselves squarely within imperial discourse.\textsuperscript{44} It should be noted that at no point in this process did they reject the basic logic of the ritual – that arriving rulers bear divine power to set the city in proper order. Instead, they simply replace the emperor with the messianic figure.\textsuperscript{45} The basic eschatological message is thus fundamentally imperial in nature.

At the same time, the imperial order is transformed through its expression in the theological and narrative framework of apocalyptic Judaism and Christianity. Not only are God and his messianic agent set above the powers of the Roman order, but there is a new focus on the invisible and the interior aspect of those powers. The powers that make the eschatological opponents and their envoy successful are either Satan or unclean spirits. At Revelation 16:13–14,

\textsuperscript{41} Rev 13:11–16.
\textsuperscript{42} Rev 13:14: καὶ πλανή τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς διὰ τὰ σημεῖα…
\textsuperscript{43} For the most recent study on Revelation and the imperial cult, see Friesen, Imperial Cults.
\textsuperscript{44} In treating these New Testament parousia narratives as imperial discourse, I am following Frilingos, who argues, contra Friesen, that Revelation is imperial discourse. See C.A. Frilingos, Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 12. He writes, 'Rather than posit Rome and Revelation as distinct, stable identities, this book presents Revelation as an expression of Roman culture, possessed of the same ambiguities and ambivalence to which a variety of contemporaneous cultural products—the Greek romance, the Roman arena, and even imperial cult—attest. It was precisely through these sites that negotiation and instability entered the world of ancient Rome. Separating out Revelation as 'subaltern' or as 'resistance literature' obscures, I think, the multiplicity of power relations in structure of Roman imperialism.'
\textsuperscript{45} As Lincoln has demonstrated, myth is an 'ideology in narrative' in which one can expect these kinds of power plays to occur. In other words, assertions, contestations, and negotiations of power are woven into the plots of myths. See Lincoln, Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 147–9.
the eschatological opponents are depicted disgorging the unclean spirits that give them miraculous power. It is a fair inference, although certainly not uncontestable, to suppose that such spirits were construed to be the power through which the wonders of chapter 13 were accomplished.\footnote{See Aune, \textit{Revelation 6–16}, 894–5 for commentary.} The notion that Satan and demonic powers are behind the successes of the empire as it presents itself during parousia is at odds with the claims of Roman imperial ideology, which finds no place for the power of either kind of entity in its parousia discourse. The separation between surface appearance and internal reality created in \textit{Revelation} in particular runs contrary to the predominant imperial construction of the elite Roman man as moral agent under the empire. I will now turn to Quintilian’s rhetorical handbook as a representative expression of this construction.

Quintilian describes the ideal orator, who would line up fairly closely with any elite Roman man, as one whose success depends on the tautological relationship between his moral quality and his bodily performance.\footnote{E. Gunderson, ‘Discovering the Body in Roman Oratory,’ in \textit{Parchments of Gender} (ed. M. Wyke; Oxford, 1998), 169–89.} In such a formulation, there is no consideration of a possible discrepancy between the surface and what lies beneath. Success is the ultimate proof of an inherent moral worth that is manifest to all in the quality of performance. It is not surprising that the body of the emperor comes to be considered the living image of all the male virtues desirable in a representative of the Roman imperial order. Pliny describes the body of Trajan in a manner that is entirely consistent with the assumptions of Quintilian: “For how weighty are his sentiments, how unaffected the truth of his words, what seriousness in his voice, what conviction in his visage, how great the trustworthiness in his gaze, his stance, his gestures, indeed in his entire person!”\footnote{Pliny, \textit{Pan.} 67.1: quae enim illa gravitas sententiarum, quam inaffectata veritas verborum, quae asseveratio in voce, quae affirmatio in vultu, quanta in oculis habitu gestu, toto denique corpore fides!}

This is not to say that interiority, and a disparity between performance and internal reality did not exist in Roman thought. Roman anxiety about actors and impostors, and Tacitus’s unflattering description of Tiberius and Domitian as inscrutable, demonstrate that such interiority and its attendant issues were of concern.\footnote{C. Edwards (‘Beware of Imitations: Theatre and the Subversion of Imperial Identity,’ in \textit{Reflections of Nero} [eds. J. Elsner and J. Masters; Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1994], 82–97) explores the tensions between imperial power and the art of acting. She sums up the problem, ‘The words of the actor were \textit{leves, vani} – ‘empty’, ‘hollow’ – without any effects. They were the antithesis of the weighty sentences uttered in the praetor’s court’ (85). Seneca (\textit{Ep.} 80.7) used the mask as a metaphor for the disparity between put-on airs and reality,} Nevertheless, as it constructed itself in ideal terms – which
one would expect in a parousia scenario – the Roman Empire had little place for the man of affairs to be anything other than what his public performance displayed. In the eschatological narratives examined above, new realms are constructed to envelop the absolute hegemony Roman imperial discourse has claimed over the surface. These are uniquely Jewish and Christian realms, which are populated by God, the Christ, Satan, and demons. By populating parousia discourse with these new realms and entities, an entirely new hermeneutical approach to a familiar imperial ritual is created through the proffering of a competing, mimicked spectacle, which has the potential of appropriating, and challenging the claims of, privileged imperial discourse.50

Something remains to be said about the formation of consensus and Jewish and Christian eschatological parousia. At the risk of oversimplification, I propose a vision of imperial parousia in which consensus for cities and provinces as a whole is produced. Naturally this consensus is partial and apparent. No city, community, or even family can be perfectly united in everything, but when the city presented itself to a ruler during a parousia reception, it (re)presented itself as a united whole. One of the benefits of the spectacle was the normalization of relations within the city as it was simultaneously aligning itself within the larger imperial system. Even though the arrival of a new ruler and new order precipitated violent disruptions in property, position, welfare, symbolic systems, rituals, and life, the myth of parousia did not recognize these things.51 The city was instead re-imagined as a kind of realized utopia in

50 The term 'mimicry' is used by H.K. Bhabha (The Location of Culture [New York: Routledge, 1994], 86) to describe 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite.' I am applying this principle in the sense of an active process that is not only what the colonizer wills upon the colonized, but also the creative negotiations of the colonized within the imperial system. By 'privileged imperial discourse,' I intend to delimit a part of a larger imperial discourse, not to identify privileged and imperial.

51 The connection between parousia and the reordering of society should be understood not simply in cosmetic terms, but in also in terms of the city's internal social and political hierarchies, its factions, and the distribution of wealth. Factions in the city could use the arrival of a ruler as a means of gaining leverage in internal struggles. Tacitus (Ann. 6.42.1–3), in describing the arrival of Tiridates at Seleucia in 36, discusses the tendency of different Seleucid factions to call in support against their rivals. Tiridates' predecessor, Artabasus II, 'betrayed the people to the nobility for his own advantage.' Tiridates gives the government over to the people as one of his benefactions during his parousia reception. Certain factions in Ephesus complained about the triumvir Antony for distributing wealth to the worst elements of society. Where he had been hailed as 'Dionysus Giver of Grace and Mild' upon his first arrival, he soon acquired the name 'Dionysus the Savage and Cruel.' This latter example demonstrates how the rhetoric of parousia continued to be used after the actual event, and how memories of the arrival continued to be shaped. See Plutarch, Ant. 24.3–4.
which all present participated in the consensus. One could not speak of hidden dissension, because, ritually speaking and according to the spectacle, it simply did not exist. In the eschatological texts we have examined here, however, a new, layered parousia landscape produces new truths of imperialism and the minority community that is effaced in the old consensus becomes the only survivor of an open eschatological conflict.

3. Pauline Parousia and Hegemony in Acts

The parousia spectacle produces imperial consensus. Cities, a key social and political unit in the empire, performed their place in the imperial system, and their belonging to it, in the way they received the emperor and his representatives. Menander described the cities of an imperial province as members of a tragic chorus in performing their consensus before the emperor.52 In the Greek East, it was this theatrical way of consenting to empire that defined Roman hegemony more than the violence of the amphitheater.53 At the same time, the imperial *itinerum* was an important way of imagining the geographical expanse and unity of the empire in the East from the Roman point of view.54 The most important conflicts of the end of Rome’s Republic occurred in that Greek world, and under Augustus and Tiberius the eastern tour was used to introduce the imperial heir to his future empire. Tiberius, Gaius, and Germanicus were all sent east by the reigning emperor with missions to settle local affairs, and the associated narratives describe how the heir went from city to city restoring things to proper order.55 One is reminded of the regular tours of conquest undertaken by Seleucid monarchs to reaffirm their position over sometimes-rebellious satraps and client kings.56

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52 Menander Rhetor 381.7–23. ‘If the cities could speak and take the form of women, as in a play, they would have said: ‘O greatest of governors, O sweetest day, the day of your coming!’’ Translation by Russell and Wilson.

53 Violent Roman spectacles were susceptible to refiguring. Gladiators in the Greek East used the language of athletes in their self-representation. See D. S. Potter and D. J. Mattingly, *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 1999), 323.

54 The use of the itinerary as a means of imagining the geographical extent of the empire owes much to the legacy of Alexander the Great’s conquests.

55 The most fulsome record of such an *itinerum* under the Julio-Claudians is the eastern mission of Germanicus, described by Tacitus (Ann. 2.53–61). Germanicus’ rearrangement of local affairs to the advantage of some and disadvantage of others is mentioned briefly in Tacitus’ account: ‘He gave relief, as he went, to provinces which had been exhausted by internal feuds or by the oppressions of governors’ (2.54).

The canonical Acts provides a similar kind of travel narrative for Paul. The letters refer and are addressed to places Paul visited, while Acts describes the visits. Within the imperial system the letters of emperors sometimes acted as a substitute for his personal praesentia. Such letters were inscribed in stone and set up in prominent places as if to 'stand in' for the emperor. The combination of Acts and epistles tells the story of Pauline hegemony. By comparison, Paul's apostolic colleagues in Jerusalem are relegated to secondary status. They can match Paul neither in the reach of his travels, which almost competes with the extent of Rome's reach, nor in the number of circulated epistles to various cities. Only in the non-canonical Acts does one see the spiritual hegemony of Paul transformed into the hegemony of the Twelve, as other apostles are given their missionary journeys to distant places, even beyond the reaches of the Roman Empire.

Since Paul is the first Christian to have capitalized on the metaphor of parousia in 1 Thessalonians, and since his itinerum marks the spread of his message and of an incipient Christian (Pauline?) spiritual hegemony throughout the Roman Empire, it is not surprising that in the canonical Acts the reader is treated to dramatic accounts of Paul's arrivals at various cities. What is surprising is the unflattering depiction of some of these arrivals. Here I will focus on two of the more dramatic arrivals: Lystra (14:8–13) and Thessalonica (17:1–7). Upon arriving in Lystra, Paul and Barnabas heal a crippled man, prompting the locals who see this to acclaim them Zeus and Hermes and a local priest of Zeus to prepare for a procession and sacrifice. Paul and Barnabas are forced to make a scene in order to convince the local people that they are only human beings (14:14–15). Shortly after Paul's arrival at Thessalonica, certain Jews use the rowdies of the market to accuse him of proclaiming a new king, other than Caesar, named Jesus (17:7). In both narratives, the arrival leads to an abortive mission in the city. Paul is either thrown out or forced to sneak away before he is captured.

What is also striking is the way in which Paul's activities are easily misunderstood or misrepresented such that he is taken to be a god or political envoy. This bespeaks some level of awareness on the part of the authors or their sources that the behavior of Paul matched fairly closely the parousia of a god or ruler. Unlike the eschatological accounts of parousia in the New Testament (1 and 2 Thess; Revelation), however, victory over the opposing order or its representatives is denied. The spectacle of Pauline parousia in Acts instead has a tragicomic effect. A dramatic demonstration of Paul's teaching or wonderworking sets the stage for his unceremonious departure thanks to the

machinations of his enemies. The failed results of Paul’s parousia displays would appear to undercut any assertion of a developing Pauline or Christian hegemony, were it not for the fact that the initial failure corresponds so well with the pattern of Jesus’s parousia at Jerusalem. The narrative pattern of Jesus’s Jerusalem parousia is one of dramatic entry (Matt. 21:1–15; Mark 11:7–11; Luke 19:35–47; John 12:12–15) followed by rejection and execution. The enemies who turn a celebrated entry into apparent failure are the same for both Paul and Jesus: certain Jews and local authorities. Thus the spectacle of parousia in Acts is, at least for Paul and his companions, often a lesser mirror image of the Jerusalem parousia of Jesus. An important difference, however, is the sense of realized eschatology that pervades the gospel accounts of Jesus’s parousia that is largely absent from the parousia of Paul in Acts. In the gospels, the arrival (parousia) of Jesus at Jerusalem points forward to his post-resurrection return (Parousia). The failed parousia of Paul, by following the type of Jesus’s parousia – an effect that is even more obvious when we view Luke and Acts together – establish the authority of Paul in spreading the spiritual hegemony of Christ. Yet, the absence in Acts of the realized eschatology implicit in the gospel accounts of Jesus’ arrival at Jerusalem has the effect of distancing the reader from the Parousia of the Christ. Yet, the absence in Acts of the realized eschatology implicit in the gospel accounts of Jesus’ arrival at Jerusalem has the effect of distancing the reader from the Parousia of the Christ. The rich, layered effects of parousia spectacle in the epistles and Revelation is also missing. Both of these elements return in the Acts Paul Thecl., with the result that Paul and the Christ are closely identified with each other.

4. Paul’s Parousia at Iconium

The arrival of Paul at Iconium, among Pauline parousia narratives, realizes some of the narrative possibilities presented by its eschatological counterparts in the New Testament, and perhaps even more explicitly than does the parousia of Jesus at Jerusalem in the gospels. The arrival of Paul at Iconium is found in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, which in turn is included among the *Acts of Paul*, although it was also circulated separately, and dates to the last quarter of the second century C.E. Aside from the prominent role of Thecla, the *Acts*

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58 Price (Deconstructing Jesus [Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000], 54–55) discusses the possibility that the resurrection was an event some early Christians still saw as being in the future. This reinforces the notion that the actual timeframe in which theological events (such as the resurrection or Parousia) unfolded can be manipulated to serve a variety of ends.

59 The Coptic Papyrus No. 1 in Heidelberg (PHeid) contains the *Acts Paul Thecl.* as part of
Paul Thecl. is famous for providing the first extant physical description of a famous early Christian: Paul. The description appears in the context of Paul’s arrival at Iconium, which occurs at the beginning of the text. As mentioned earlier, the results of investigations into the description have been mixed. Here I revisit the issue of the description, but only within the context of the parousia spectacle of which it is a part. I argue that the narrative of Paul’s arrival at Iconium represents a transformation of the nature of the production of the parousia spectacle, in that the mediating perspective shifts from the Roman emperor to the individual Christian, here represented by Onesiphorus, a citizen of Iconium. Through this perspective, new truths about the body in parousia spectacle emerge, and the tautological relationship between Roman bodily performance and imperial authority is undermined.

The Acts Paul Thecl. opens with Paul and his traveling companions Demas and Hermogenes making their way to Iconium, after fleeing Antioch. The text draws our attention to the differences between Paul and these companions. Demas and Hermogenes put on the appearance of loving Paul, but they are hypocrites and flatterers. Paul, keeping his gaze on Christ, sees their hypocrisy yet does no harm to them, and instead continues to teach them. In Iconium Onesiphorus, having heard of Paul’s imminent arrival, and, having received a description of the apostle from Titus, has taken his family out along the Royal Way to find the apostle.

As Onesiphorus looks for Paul among the arriving travelers, the apostle approaches. It is at this point that the description of Paul appears: ‘a man small in stature, bald, bandy-legged, plump, with eyebrows joined, and a somewhat hooked nose, full of grace; sometimes he appeared like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel.’ Paul smiles at Onesiphorus, and the latter greets Paul, ‘Greetings, servant of the blessed God.’ Paul returns his greeting with a blessing, ‘Grace be with you and your household.’ Demas and Hermogenes become angry because they did not receive a similar greeting, and Onesiphorus compensates by inviting them to his home. When the group arrives at


60 Acts Paul Thecl. 1: ὑποκρίσεως γέμοντες, καὶ ἐξελιπάρουν τὸν Παύλον ὡς ἀγαπώντες αὐτὸν.

61 Acts Paul Thecl. 3: ἄνδρα μικρὸν τῷ μεγέθει, ψιλὸν τῷ κεφαλῇ, ἀγκύλων ταῖς κνίμαις, εὐκτικῶν, σώφρων, μικρὸς ἐπίρρινων, χάριτος πλήρης: ποτὲ μὲν γὰρ ἐφαίνετο ὡς ἄνθρωπος, ποτὲ δὲ ἀγέλου πρόσοψιν εἶχεν.

62 Acts Paul Thecl. 4: Χαίρε, ὑπηρετᾷ τοῦ εὐλογημένου θεοῦ.

63 Acts Paul Thecl. 4: Ὁ χάρις μετὰ σοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὀίκου σου.
Onesiphorus’s home, a gathering of people commences a feast with the breaking of bread, and Paul embarks on a ‘beatitue’ sermon, opening with the words, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’

This arrival narrative shares a number of elements with the royal or imperial parousia reception. Here is a list of the of the elements of a ruler’s parousia reception that are paralleled in some way by the Acts Paul Theol.’s account of Paul’s arrival at Iconium:

1. Linguistically, the author employs terms that are very close to the ones that commonly appear in parousia narratives. *Sunantēsis* is very close to the more common term *apantēsis*, which refers to the extra-urban meeting, while *hupodexomai* is a common term for receiving a ruler-guest.

2. The ruler sends advance word through a messenger or letter of his imminent arrival. Onesiphorus hears of Paul’s arrival in advance.

3. The people of the city go outside of the city in procession to a designated meeting place. This extra-urban meeting is called an *apantēsis*. Onesiphorus gathers his family and heads out of the city along the Royal Way. The family encounters Paul and his companions outside the city.

4. During the *apantēsis*, representatives of the city offer speeches in honor of the ruler, and the people shout acclamations. Onesiphorus and Paul exchange greetings. Onesiphorus’s greetings take a form more like an acclamation (‘Greetings, thou servant of the blessed God’), while Paul’s response takes the form of a blessing (‘Grace be with thee and thy house’). It should be noted that the rhetoric on the occasion of an arrival often included a reference to the blessed state of those present on the occasion. Also, a favorable description of the ruler may be included. Paul is described at the point when he encounters Onesiphorus.

5. The ruler is escorted back into the city. He is feasted and may be hosted by one of the city elites. Onesiphorus escorts Paul and his companions back into the city. They retire to Onesiphorus’s house, where a feast occurs.

The similarities outlined above provide a very clear indication that the arrival of Paul at Iconium is comprehensible as a parousia spectacle. An attentive reader of the late second century, who lived at a time when emperors were more mobile and more liable to visit the cities of the provinces, and who at any rate may have witnessed the arrival of a governor, might have picked up on these similarities and taken them as a subtle signal of Paul’s elevated status and importance. Paul obviously was not an emperor or governor, but among

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64 *Acts Paul Theol. 5*: Μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται.
many Christians he was a person imagined to possess some authority and influence. The arrival scene gives such readers an opportunity to imagine their participation in a performance of their consensus in recognition of his status through the lens of the narrative. He or she is encouraged to adopt the role of Onesiphorus.

In addition to recognizing the similarities between imperial parousia and Paul’s arrival, consideration of the distinctive elements of this particular parousia spectacle is also illuminating. It is noteworthy that Onesiphorus and his family are the only people mentioned as having gone out to meet Paul, when the scene at Onesiphorus’ home clearly indicates that a group could have accompanied him. These others do not appear until the house scene. Imperial parousia was ordinarily a performance of the entire city’s consensus. Thus, the procession that went out to greet the emperor or governor represented all of the different divisions of the community, including associations, age groups, gender groups, status groups, and divinities. The city was, in other words, offered up as a whole to the ruler’s gaze as performing that consensus. The imbalance between the particular identity of the ruler and the group identities of city divisions, whether intentional or not, encouraged the reader of a parousia narrative to adopt the perspective of the ruler. In other words, the spectacle was imagined as through his gaze. In the scene of Paul’s arrival at Iconium, the primary focus is on the individual encounter between Onesiphorus and Paul. Although Onesiphorus brought his family out for the welcome, they dropped out of the narrative before the meeting occurred. The balance was thus shifted such that the reader might be equally or more inclined to adopt the perspective of Onesiphorus.

Another strategy shifts the mediating perspective of the spectacle. At the opening of the narrative, the reader is informed that Demas and Hermogenes are not what they appear to be, a fact of which Paul is aware, but other characters in the narrative may or may not discover. This split between appearances and reality is a feature of the eschatological passages discussed earlier. Although the eschatological opponent of these NT passages gives certain signs that encourage others to accept him and receive him, these signs are revealed to be deceptive. The arrival of the messianic figure leads to the defeat and destruction of the opponent. The arrivals of both the opponent and the messianic figure operate as a kind of sifting mechanism for those who receive them. The reader is encouraged to reject those who appear in the manner of the

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65 Acts Paul Theol. 5: ἐγένετο χαρά μεγάλη, καὶ κλάσις γονάτων καὶ κλάσις ἄρτων... (‘There was great joy, and bowing of knees, and the breaking of bread...’); 7: καὶ ταῦτα τοῦ Πούλου λέγοντες ἐν μέσῳ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐν τῷ Ὄνησιφόρῳ οίκῳ... (‘And Paul was saying these things in the middle of the gathering in Onesiphorus’ house...’).
opponent and await the arrival of the authentic messianic figure. Onesiphorus is presented with a similar, although not identical, dilemma. While the reader has one eye on Onesiphorus, anticipating how he will react to the arrival of these very different men, the other eye looks through the perspective of Onesiphorus and imagines his or her own performance through that of the character. The reader is not asked to judge Onesiphorus so much as discriminate as Onesiphorus does. In this way, the mediating perspective of the parousia spectacle has shifted from the arriving figure to the receiving one. The individual Christian, not the Roman emperor, becomes the producer of the parousia spectacle, just as the author has become the producer of its narrative version.

How Onesiphorus arrives at the correct conclusion represents something of a revolution in the truths of parousia spectacle. Before Onesiphorus went out to meet Paul, Titus taught him what Paul looked like, since Onesiphorus only knew the apostle only in the spirit.66 Onesiphorus sizes up passers-by against the description provided by Titus. We then learn that Onesiphorus saw Paul coming and then we are given his description. Paul smiles at Onesiphorus, and Onesiphorus greets Paul. The whole series of events looks straightforward enough.

Upon closer inspection, however, certain nagging problems emerge. First, the description of Paul seems oddly disconnected from the flow of events in the narrative because of its final phrase: ‘Sometimes he appeared as a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel.’67 Either we are to imagine that Paul’s appearance was shifting back and forth between human and angelic form before Onesiphorus’ eyes, or the description was not meant to represent what Onesiphorus saw on that occasion. If the description is not precisely what Onesiphorus saw, then there is some reason to doubt that Onesiphorus relied upon it to identify Paul.

Other issues vitiate against a straightforward connection between the description and Onesiphorus’ recognition of Paul. First, a seemingly insignificant event is interposed between the description of Paul and the greeting: Paul smiles at Onesiphorus.68 It is after this smile that Onesiphorus hails Paul. The position of the smile in this chain of events raises the question of whether it was Onesiphorus’s recognizing Paul or Paul’s smile that prompted Onesiphorus to hail Paul. This smile has been compared to the epiphanic smile of Greek

66 Acts Paul Thecl. 2: δηγήσατο γὰρ αὐτῷ Τίτος ποταμίας ἐστιν τῇ εἰδέα ὁ Παύλος· οὐ γὰρ εἶδεν αὐτόν σωρίκ ἀλλὰ μόνον πνεύματι (For Titus had instructed him concerning Paul’s appearance. For he had not seen him in the flesh, but only in the spirit).
67 Acts Paul Thecl. 3: ποτὲ μὲν γὰρ ἔφηκεν ως ἄνθρωπος, ποτὲ δὲ ἄγγελλος πρόσωπον εἶχεν.
68 Acts Paul Thecl. 4: καὶ ἴδιον ὁ Παύλος τὸν Ὀνησιφόρον ἐμειδίσσειν, ….
literature – the smile that a god offers to the human worshiper before whom he or she has appeared.69 The ancient reader of this text would therefore have had further reason to question the precise means by which Onesiphorus recognized Paul and the precise nature of Paul as well (Is he mortal or divine?). The next problem only further complicates the picture. Onesiphorus does not hail Paul by name. We assume that he recognized Paul because he recognized him based on the description he had been given. The complaints of Demas and Hermogenes, however, are obviously not that Onesiphorus did not call them Paul, but that he did not call them ‘servants of the blessed God,’ as he did Paul. The greeting, then, does not support the notion that Onesiphorus recognized Paul as Paul. Onesiphorus’ explanation for why he did not greet Demas and Hermogenes in the same manner cuts against the notion that Onesiphorus personally identified Paul. Onesiphorus says that he did not greet them because he did not see ‘the fruit of righteousness in them.’70 This last detail raises the possibility that not only the manner of the greeting, but the very fact of the greeting was contingent on Paul’s possession of a quality called ‘the fruit of righteousness’ and not on his physical characteristics at all.

The irony of the Acts Paul Thecl’s description of Paul is that, detailed as it is, other complicating factors in the text significantly undermine it as the means by which Onesiphorus identified Paul. The narrative instead turns to the problem raised at the beginning, namely, whether Onesiphorus will recognize the difference between Paul and his traveling companions. Onesiphorus correctly identifies the difference, but he does so based on the same kind of spiritual knowledge through which he knew Paul before he met him in person. In the crucial question of spiritual discernment, therefore, the description of Paul makes no difference. Onesiphorus’s judgment is vindicated over the course of the Iconium narrative, as Demas and Hermogenes turn on Paul and try to use imperial authority against him.71

If the description of Paul ultimately makes little difference, the question of the purpose for its inclusion arises. A popular view has held that the author provided the description to invite a physiognomic interpretation of the apostle’s personality. Such a view is entirely reasonable. Physiognomy was a fashionable tool for interpreting personality and divining personal destiny in the second century, and we can reasonably suppose that the author would have

71 Acts Paul Thecl. 11–13. The spurned fiancé of Thecla, Thamyris, finds Demas and Hermogenes and invites them to banquet with him. During the meal, they advise that Thamyris drag Paul before the Roman governor Castellius.
calculated this when including the description.\textsuperscript{72} The further problem, however, is in assigning a definitive interpretation to the physical description provided. Modern disagreement about the significance of the description reveals a fairly obvious point, namely, that the nature of the interpretation very much depends upon the interpreter. One view holds that the description of Paul, while apparently unappealing, is consistent with the qualities of Heracles.\textsuperscript{73} Another view holds that the characteristics are negative, but that the body is theologically redeemed.\textsuperscript{74} Betz argues that the physiognomy is an inversion of the qualities of the romantic hero in the ancient novel.\textsuperscript{75} Each of these views has its merits. Betz’s is particularly interesting, because it illuminates how the description relates to Paul’s interactions with Thecla over the course of the text. Here, I am more concerned with the description within the context of the scene in which it appears. What can we say about such a description as part of the parousia narrative?

In the context of imperial parousia spectacle, the description of Paul is distinctive. The arrival speech, or \textit{epibaterios logos}, customarily provides a panegyrical depiction of the arriving ruler.\textsuperscript{76} The ruler is rhetorically constructed by judicious attribution of valued achievements, qualities, and origins. Pliny’s \textit{Panegyricus}, the only extant example of a panegyric describing an emperor’s \textit{adventus} at Rome before the \textit{Acts Paul Thecl.}, encodes the emperor’s body with desirable moral values: ‘For how weighty are his sentiments, how unaffected the truth of his words, what seriousness in his voice, what conviction in his visage, how great the trustworthiness in his gaze, his stance, his gestures, indeed in his entire person!’\textsuperscript{77} By comparison, the description of Paul in the \textit{Acts Paul Thecl.} functions as a kind of ancient, physiognomic Rorschach Test. Even the fact that Paul is described as sometimes having the face of an angel should not mislead us into imagining that the description decidedly comes down on the side of positive, value-infused characteristics, since the author of the \textit{Acts Paul Thecl.} was likely aware of 2 Corinthians 11:13–14: ‘(13) For such


\textsuperscript{73} This is the position taken by Malherbe, ‘A Physical Description of Paul,’ 174–5.

\textsuperscript{74} Bollók, ‘The Description of Paul’, 10–12.

\textsuperscript{75} Betz, ‘Die betörenden Worte’, 140–4.

\textsuperscript{76} Menander Rhetor 379.5–18. The orator is advised to review the great deeds of the governor, and, where such deeds are lacking, amplify references to an illustrious, heroic, and divine ancestry. Elsewhere the comparison of the governor with the sun and its rays suggests something of his bright (beautiful?) appearance, without risking unintentional humor.

\textsuperscript{77} Pliny, \textit{Pan.} 67.1: quae enim illa gravitas sententiaria, quam inaffectata veritas verborum, quae asseveratio in voce, quae affirmatio in vultu, quanta in oculis habitu gestu, toto denique corpore fides!
men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder; for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.\textsuperscript{78} Rhetoric does not construct Paul’s body in the parousia spectacle, and neither does the gaze of Paul. The specifics of Paul’s appearance are immaterial. Instead, Onesiphorus’s faculty of spiritual discernment recognizes ‘the fruit of righteousness’ in Paul that legitimizes his spiritual authority over the Christian community at Iconium.

The arrival narrative at the opening of the Acts Paul Thecl. is a parousia spectacle that denies the Roman tautology of morality and bodily performance/appearance, which legitimized claims to imperial authority. In this tautological schema, the Roman elite cultivates a bodily performance that evokes or makes explicit the internal moral character, which formed the basis of his claims to authority.\textsuperscript{79} A Roman elite is a ‘better,’ and thus worthy to be obeyed. His bodily performance simply communicates that fact. His success affirms it. The assumptions behind the ‘science’ of physiognomy, an interpretive tool for discerning character and destiny by reading the body, work hand in hand with this Roman elite body concept.

In the scene of Paul’s arrival at Iconium, there is nothing in the description of Paul that would unquestioningly establish his authority, although one might expect the application of physiognomy to his description to do so. This expectation is driven by an awareness that physiognomies and natal charts of the famous dead were often raised to provide a retrospective explanation for their greatness. In Suetonius we learn of the favorable physiognomy reading given to the young future emperor Titus, but decades after he was a much beloved but briefly reigning emperor.\textsuperscript{80} The author of the Acts Paul Thecl. has elided the interpretation of Paul’s physiognomy, thus exposing its lack of inherent content, and has instead taken up the layered cosmology of the New Testament eschatological arrivals of 2 Thessalonians and Revelation. This author shows Onesiphorus reading something in Paul unrelated to the traditional

\textsuperscript{78} 13 οἱ γὰρ τοιοῦτοι γενεατότοι, εργάται δόλιοι, μετασχηματίζομεν εἰς ἀποστόλους Χριστοῦ, καὶ οὗ θαύμα, αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ Σατανᾶς μετασχηματίζεται εἰς ἐγγελον φυτός. Translation: NIV.

\textsuperscript{79} Cf. Gunderson, ‘Discovering the Body in Roman Oratory,’ 172–89.

\textsuperscript{80} Suetonius, Tit. 2: educatus in aula cum Britannico simul, ac paribus disciplinis et apud eisdem magistros institutus. Quo quidem tempore aitut metoposcopum a Narcissio Claudii liberto adhibitum, ut Britannicum inspiceret, constantissime affirmasse, illud quidem nullo modo, ceterum Titum, qui tune prope astabat, utique imperaturum (‘He was brought up at Court with Britannicus, sharing his teachers and following the same curriculum. The story goes that when one day Claudius’ freedman Narcissus called a physiognomist to examine Britannicus’ features and prophesy his future, he was told most emphatically that Britannicus would never succeed his father, whereas Titus (who happened to be present) would achieve that distinction’). Translation by R. Graves.
canon of parousia performance in the empire: the fruit of righteousness. This quality is attained by behavior foreign to the values of the Roman Empire (e.g., celibacy), and does not manifest itself in a manner that is intelligible to the usual interpretive tools. Its efficacy is nevertheless borne out by the remainder of the narrative.

5. Conclusion: Christian Spectacle and the Project of Imperialism

It is intuitively attractive to propose that Onesiphorus’s discernment has taken the arrival narrative out of the realm of spectacle. How can one see that which is beyond the reach of gaze? I have argued, however, that the eschatological parousia passages we have examined here draw the images of things perhaps not visible into the realm of spectacle. Unlike the predominant imperial parousia spectacle, in which there is a single continuous realm of consensus, these parousia spectacles contain different layers. Some of these layers are less apparent to the naked eye than others. Appearances are also deceiving. Each layer nevertheless has its image and belongs to the overall spectacle in a manner not unlike the theater, wherein actors wear masks. Both the actor and his mask belong to the spectacle. The mask does not erase the participation of the face, even though the face is not fully visible.

In this article, I have demonstrated the advantage of viewing parousia narratives in early Christian literature as part of a larger imperial discourse in which parousia spectacle was a locus for the production of empire. The parousia spectacle was particularly seductive in that it presented the advance of empire as a cooperative project. provincials were often cast as willing participants in the imperial project, and, when it came to their role in the parousia spectacle, they usually played their part. This façade of cooperation did not, of course, change the fact that the emperor, whether present or distant, was always the ideal producer, consumer, and mediating gaze of the spectacle. He was also its ideal bodily performer, and the values of empire were encoded in his person. He thus carried the ideal image of empire wherever he traveled. In the eschatological parousia narratives of the New Testament examined here, it was observed that Christian authors not only participated in the production of spectacle by crafting parousia narratives, but that they crafted new truths about empire through the spectacle by expanding its cosmology and complicating its morality. The image of imperial consensus generated by the parousia spectacle through the body of the emperor was destabilized when demons were placed in that body and messianic figures came from above to destroy it. This new, layered parousia spectacle undermined the assumed connection
between good performance and upright character in the Roman language of authority, and thus asserted the instability of imperial hegemony. Such a fragmentation of empire was effective because its method was not arbitrary. It was already an important part of the negotiation between ruler and ruled within the imperial project.

The parousia of Paul at Iconium in the *Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla* brings to the fore another development in Christian production of parousia spectacles. Here the emperor is displaced as the mediating gaze through which the parousia spectacle is produced. The mediating gaze here belongs to the individual Christian. Furthermore, the visible body is not only an unreliable basis for negotiating authority and obedience, inasmuch as it can conceal important truths, in the gaze of Onesiphorus it is also shown to be of negligible importance. Between the cracks in this parousia narrative, the individual Christian seizes the power to judge authority through means at odds with the traditional assumptions of an imperial society dominated by the canons of rhetoric. The disposition of the body and the sound of the voice are of little importance next to the 'fruit of the righteousness' and the power of spiritual discernment, which are proffered to serve as a new standard through which authority may be produced. Christianities thus challenged the way in which imperial authority was constructed, but in doing so they did not separate themselves from the imperial project. In the *Acts Paul Thecl*, Christianity is a mode of participation in Roman imperialism.81

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