Celestial Topography: Mapping the Divine Realms of Antiquity

by

Amy Marie Fisher

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Amy Marie Fisher 2015
Celestial Topography: Mapping the Divine Realms of Antiquity

Amy Marie Fisher

Doctorate of Philosophy

Department for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

2015

Abstract

This dissertation explores the cartographic descriptions and depictions of the heavens in antiquity, specifically the 1st century BCE through the early 5th century CE. The physical nature of the heavens and the loci each portrayal includes or excludes tells the reader a great deal about the communities creating and engaging with these various understandings of the heavens. This study offers a series of snapshots of differing depictions of the heavens from various times and places in early Judaism and Christianity; the poetic Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice from the Dead Sea Scrolls, the depictions of 1st Century CE apocalypses, the first explicitly Christian tour of heaven in the Visio Pauli, and the artistic renderings of late antique Palestinian synagogue mosaics. In order to read these many spaces and their mythic places out, the study engages with various critical spatial theories, demonstrating that a nuanced deployment of modern spatial theory can yield fruitful results in the study of antiquity. In addition it offers one answer to the question of why the heavens developed and became so complex in the second temple and post second temple period. This dissertation suggests that this complexity was a natural development of pre-exilic proclivities for seeing the earthly temple as a miniature copy of the heavenly one; albeit one forced to develop due to imperial expansion upon the earth. The expanded holdings of heaven, while losing their importance as loci from the mythic past, were retained in early Christian maps of the heavens as the resting places of so many different sorts of righteous.
Acknowledgments

This project owes much to many people, some of whom receive multiple thanks in different capacities below. First and foremost, thanks to my committee members, my adviser John Kloppenborg, and Professors Judith Newman and Jennifer Harris. All three offered copious and constructive feedback on the project and made it a much stronger and coherent piece than it would have been without them. The idea for this project was born on a hot summer afternoon in the upper Galilee, in a brainstorming session with my undergraduate adviser and constant mentor, Nanette Goldman. I hope you are proud of the final product Nanette! Thanks go to my colleagues and peers in my dissertation writing group, Rebecca Bartel, Michelle Christian, Jairan Gahan, Nathalie LaCoste, and Justin Stein, who all offered up ample and honest feedback on an early draft of the introduction. Nathalie and Michelle, along with Maria Dasios, Brigidda Bell, and Sarah Rollens also provided feedback and aid in other chapters of this piece, for which I am most grateful. Emily Springgay, Laurie Drake, Yaniv Feller and Jessica Radin offered ‘outsider’ support and advice at various stages of this project. Students in RLG203Y1Y, Introduction to Christianity, all got the chance to read descriptions of Visio Pauli’s City of Christ and work through its geography in group work, which allowed their instructor to reflect on its set up too. Versions of chapters two and three were presented at Society of Biblical Literature panels; the feedback from those audiences has at least been gestured to in the footnotes here. I also presented a version of chapter two at my departmental colloquium, at which Dr. Simon Coleman offered helpful feedback. The Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, with Dr. Doris Bergen as the Director of Graduate Studies there, provided me with top up funding for all five years of my doctoral studies, travel grants for my work in Israel in the summer, and part time employment in my upper years, for which I am most grateful. In addition the staff at the Centre, Sol, Emily, and Galina have offered much career and life advice throughout my PhD. Thank you all for the supportive environment you work so hard to maintain. The staff at the Joint Archaeological Expedition to Omrit has been a constant source of encouragement throughout my entire doctoral program; thanks go to Dr.s Andrew Overman, Daniel Schowalter, Benjamin Rubin, Jason Schlude, Michael Nelson, and Jennifer Gates-Foster. Indeed, I both wrote the proposal for and last bits of this project at the site, in the “free time” of the afternoons and evenings. I began work on another project with Dr. Peter Richardson, shortly after I started this dissertation, and I must thank Peter for the use of his office, his advice on all
matters academic, and his patience with my falling behind on deadlines for that project as I slogged away on this one. I promise I will now work as hard on “the Herod book” as I have been working on this dissertation. My parents, who have moved me from school to school, receive many thanks for their lengthy support of my pursuit of higher education. My far flung American friends receive sincere thanks for all the long distance phone calls and short visits throughout my five years as an ex-pat; many thanks for your cheerful chats Anne Stewart, Claire Wan, Maureen Ragalie, Megan Roberts, and Samantha Petty. Lastly, especial thanks for all the encouragement, advice, picnics, outings, and in this last year, when like the railway we were trans-Canadian, the care packages that always contained loose leaf tea, to Dan.
Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Work ................................................................. 1
  1.1 Critical Spatial Theory .......................................................... 6
  1.2 Overview of the Project ......................................................... 20
  1.3 The Primary Texts Under Consideration .............................. 21

Chapter 2: The Poetics of Temple Space: the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice’s Heavenly Temple and Temple-ish Heaven .................................. 25
  2.1 An Overview of the Shirot ............................................... 27
  2.2 Ekphrases of the Tabernacle and the Temple ....................... 33
  2.3 Elsner’s Ritual Visuality and the Politics of Viewing ............... 37
  2.4 The Politics of Temple Ekphrasis ........................................ 39
  2.5 The Spatiality of the Shirot ............................................... 43

Chapter 3: Catastrophe and the Stoic Spaces of Coping: the Hidden Places of 3 Baruch ..... 56
  3.1 Introduction ........................................................................ 56
  3.2 Third Baruch ..................................................................... 59
  3.3 A Brief Review of the Literature on 3 Baruch to Date ............... 62
  3.4 Introduction to the World of 3 Baruch .................................. 64
  3.5 The Heavenly Places of 1st Century CE Apocalyptic Texts .......... 72
  3.6 Bachelard’s Poetics of Space ............................................. 82
  3.7 The Continuation of Cosmic Time in 3 Baruch’s Heavens .......... 85
  3.8 Conclusions ..................................................................... 89

Chapter 4: The Heavenly Holdings of Souls: the Visio Pauli’s Confused Cartography ...... 91
  4.1 Introduction to the Visio Pauli ........................................... 92
  4.2 The Relation of the Visio Pauli to Other Early Apocalypses .......... 99
  4.3 The Places of the Heaven in the Visio Pauli ......................... 100
  4.4 A Cosmological Introduction? The Opening Scene of the Visio Pauli as
      Cosmology ....................................................................... 106
  4.5 The Problem of Placing the ‘Land of Promise’ and the Purpose of Cartography in the
      Visio Pauli ........................................................................ 111
  4.7 Conclusions ..................................................................... 119
Chapter 5: Tessellated Territories: Mosaic Maps of the Late Antique Jewish Heavens ........ 121
  5.1 The Synagogue Mosaics ....................................................................................... 122
  5.2 Early Scholastic Reception of the Synagogue Mosaics .................................. 125
  5.3 Trends in the Depiction of Hebrew Bible Scenes in Late Antique Christian Art .. 130
  5.4 Mosaics as Maps: a Non-polemical and Spatial Reading of the Synagogue
      Zodiacs .................................................................................................................. 139
  5.5 Polemic or Cultural Borrowing: Physical Places as the Cosmos Writ Small in Late
      Antiquity .................................................................................................................. 151
  5.6 Conclusions .......................................................................................................... 152
Chapter 6: Conclusion .................................................................................................. 153
Bibliography ............................................................................................................... 158
Appendix ...................................................................................................................... 173
List of Tables

Table 4.1: Traditional Division of Vis. Paul ................................................................. 101
Table 4.2: Proposed Division of Vis. Paul ................................................................. 104
Table 4.3: Opening Section of Vis. Paul as Map of the Heavens ............................... 109
Table 5.1: The Various Schematics of the Heavens .................................................. 142
Chapter 1

1 Introduction to the Work

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates, speaking of the soul’s journey to the afterlife, remarks

the journey is not as Telephus says in the play of Aeschylus; for he says a simple path leads to the lower world, but I think the path is neither simple nor single, for if it were, there would be no need of guides, since no one could miss the way to any place if there were only one road. But really there seem to be many forks of the road and many windings; this I infer from the rites and ceremonies practiced here on earth (Plato, *Phaedo* 107b-108a).¹

While Socrates is specifically talking about the journey to the underworld, he could have been speaking of the journeys of various adepts and prophets into the heavens of antiquity. No two narratives of the heavens of early Judaism and Christianity agree with one another as to the layout of the heavens, which mythic topoi are within them, or in what order one reaches these various sites. While the idea of heaven was not new in the late Second Temple period, this era, and the period of time just after it, witnessed an explosion of texts dealing with the topography and geography of the heavens, which was accompanied by an increase in the complexities of these heavens. No longer was heaven a simple plane with the heavenly temple seated upon it, as Enoch in the *Book of Watchers* had claimed (*1 Enoch*). Rather, the heavenly temple was just one of the many topoi of these new multi-level heavens, if a very important and holy topos.² Indeed, the various issues and problems various groups in this time period had with the Second Temple and Jerusalem more generally contributed to this desire to assure themselves, as well as others, that all was still ordered, pure, and holy in the heavenly temple, irrespective of events in Jerusalem. In addition, the choice, description, and use within the narrative of the various mythic topoi reveals the particular concerns and needs of the intended audience for these


² This choice of the words *topos* and *topoi* is something I discuss below, in the my section on critical spatial theory.
different works. Reflected in the heavens of these various texts one finds the concerns and questions of each group answered.\(^3\)

While the past century has witnessed an increased attention to literature devoted to accounts of trips to heaven, the *topography* of the heavens visited has not been the focus of scholars’ attention. Rather, focus has centered on the journeys themselves, the figure of the sojourner, or the source of these fantastic tales that erupt in the Second Temple period.\(^4\) This is an analytic oversight, for the heavens of antiquity were filled with various mythic *topoi* that frequently were thought to have had a place on the earth in the dim and fabled past. These places include the Temple of God, which holds the Throne Room of God, the Throne of God, the chariot of God, the Garden of Eden, and in addition to the Garden, certain individual “natural” features, including streams of water (or other liquids), trees, sometimes named and sometimes not, and in the later texts, lakes. The geography of the ancient heaven is varied but complex in every text one picks up; this intricate divine biosphere deserves closer examination than scholars have given it. Indeed, the closest one comes to finding a study on the topography of heaven is actually work done on early conceptions of hell, a field begun by Martha Himmelfarb, with the

---


publication of her monograph *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature*, in the early 1980s.\(^5\) These studies dwell on one place amongst the many that filled the landscape of ancient heavens, the hellish regions. These works on early conceptions of hell, while examining the role of hell in the heavens, leave unanswered the question of how this singular place related to all the other places of these heavens and how and why all its neighboring mythic loci came to be held in the celestial spheres, instead of remaining on terra firma.

In this project, I am not attempting to compile a catalogue of ancient descriptions of heaven, for others have already done this work, in both popular and scholarly works.\(^6\) I am also not proving a teleological point about the development of the heavens; the composition of the heavens varied from period to period and group to group, but it did not proceed in a strictly linear fashion, beginning with the single plane of *1 Enoch* and ending with a singular prototype for Dante’s adoption.\(^7\) For example, the canonical *Revelation* is in fact archaizing in its description of a single-planed heaven, with its circle of enthroned individuals. As I show in chapters three and four the “typical” heaven, Jewish or Christian, of the post 70 CE landscape was a multi-faceted and multi-leveled place. In this work, I am, however, interested in charting broad shifts in the ways of depicting the heavens, and how terrestrial events affected these celestial depictions. To that end, I use critical spatial theory to read out the topoi of these heavens and to better understand the heuristic moves being made with each change to the topography of heaven. In addition, rather than log a whole catalogue of different depictions of the heavens from antiquity, I have instead chosen to focus my attention on a particular text from a particular period and


\(^7\) That the *Latin Apocalypse of Paul* did serve as inspiration is acknowledged by scholars, indeed, by Dante himself, when he remarks, “Io non Enea, io non Paolo sono,”(*Inferno*, Canto 2.32) meaning, of course, the Paul of the Apocalypse by that statement, for the Paul of 2 Corinthians makes no mention of visiting the hellish regions of heaven. One must remember, however, that the *Latin Apocalypse of Paul* coexisted in Late Antiquity with various recensions of many of these other texts, with their various depictions of the heavens and that these apocalypses continued to be read for some time after apocalypses like them ceased to be produced.
group for each chapter, save the last, which features artistic depictions. This allows for a much more detailed study of each text’s topographical features and how the events of the time led to these particular places receiving a place within the heavens. I do make recourse to other texts for comparanda within each chapter, but the focus is very much on a single source’s account of the heavens. In the second chapter, I look at the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* from the Dead Sea Scrolls; in the third chapter I look at texts from around the time of 70 CE, with my focus on 3 *Baruch*; in the fourth chapter I look at the late fourth century *Latin Apocalypse of Paul*, which would become the archetype of all following Christian tours of the heavenly realms; and in the last chapter I turn my attention to the earliest surviving artistic depictions of the heavens, from late antique Palestinian synagogue mosaics of the 4th to 6th century CE.

Even though the work begins in the Second Temple period, where single plane heavens were still very much the norm, every version of heaven I examine here portrays it as a multi-leveled place. The number of levels and the placement of certain topoi vary from heaven to heaven, but all agree that there were celestial spheres, not a single celestial sphere (or plane). The texts I selected all feature highly complex depictions of the heavens, represent distinct and different groups of people in antiquity, and feature some curiosity or unique trait that makes investigating them over other texts of the same time period more salient to this project’s goal of exploring the territories of the ancient heavens. Because these heavens are multi-leveled, they have more space in which to emplace more physical places, but also in which to develop the heavens towards differing ends. Thus, these heavens allow for extreme ekphrastic descriptions demonstrating the supreme status of the heavenly temple, the bending of temporal and spatial parameters, and the expansion to allow for so many different sorts of righteous souls over the course of several hundred years. To this end, some of the texts may seem surprising, until one recalls that the focus of this project is the topography of heaven, meaning the texts selected were chosen due to their rich descriptions of the heavens, not because they are necessarily the best known text about heaven from each time period. These texts are ordered and approached chronologically, giving the work a temporal framework. Each chapter features a discussion and examination of key issues surrounding the text under review and its depictions of the heavens,

---

but it also features an ongoing examination of which mythic topoi are found in which heaven and the possible reasons that these topoi might be located there.

In this project I suggest that the continued interest in the topoi of the heavens, in particular the Temple, but also other key mythic places, occurred due to a complex set of reasons. In this way, I attempt to direct discourse about the ancient heavens to one focused on the spatiality of celestial spaces in ancient texts, which offers a nuanced and focused discussion of individual texts’ goals and foci. In some ways this interest in the heavens was a natural outgrowth of pre-exilic proclivities for seeing the earthly temple as a miniature (albeit imperfect) copy of the heavenly temple; in these cases, tours of the celestial temple served to impress the reader with the superiority of that place over the earthly place. In other cases, the continued expansion of the various imperial powers of the time made more and more of the “unknown” known and this meant there was shrinking space on the face of the earth for the mythic topoi of the past – the Garden of Eden the most important example of these sites. In light of this, and the existence of other places, such as the temple, in the heavens already, it made sense for these topoi to migrate up into the heavens, beyond the boundary of the sun, moon, and stars and to a place accessible only to the righteous. We see this notion particularly in the depictions of the heavens following the destruction of the temple in 70 CE in both Jewish and Christian traditions, exemplified in both text and art. As each case study in this work demonstrates, beyond this overarching connection, each depiction of the heavens served a certain need for the creator and their community. Thus, in the second chapter, a desire to prove the superiority of the heavenly temple over and above the temple in Jerusalem leads to the coopting, writing, and aggrandizing of styles of ekphrases of the earthly temple to describe the celestial temple. In the third chapter, *3 Baruch* uses knowledge of the heavens to rebuke those still mourning the loss of the temple and to suggest that while ritual time on the earth has stopped, cosmic time in the heavens carries on, even as the righteous are denied access to the temple that keeps this time. In the fourth chapter, the *Latin Apocalypse of Paul* draws heavily from contemporaneous understandings of the cosmos to describe the heavens. Here, the confused cartography of the heavens speaks to the Christian appropriation of Jewish depictions of the heavens in a manner that signifies the shift in interest from Jewish preoccupation with the exact layout of the heavens to a Christian preoccupation with who dwells in the heavens. While the heavenly temple is still present, it no longer holds the importance that it did in earlier Jewish texts. Lastly, in the fifth chapter, we see
the use of mosaics to depict the topography of the heavens in the synagogues of certain Jews in post-70 CE Roman Palestine. Here, the focus remains very much on the celestial temple, but also features sites from the mythic past, as well as the sun, moon, and stars in their dividing band of heaven. Thus, in each chapter one sees that the temporal concerns of the community affects their spatial conceptions of the heavens. Indeed, the shifts in the temporality of each community are reflected in their cartographies of the heavenly realms. The question then is how best to unpack the spatial features of these cartographies.

1.1 Critical Spatial Theory

I utilize several theoretical tools for unpacking the spaces and places of these various ancient heavens, but all of these tools come out of the field of critical spatial theory, a broad field consisting of many scholars’ work. Because of the field’s size, I offer only a brief overview of some key thinkers in the field and explain my rationale for whose work I chose to utilize and whose I did not in this section. Here, I note that while the geography of heaven may be understudied, other scholars have been engaged with the work of reading the spaces of antique texts, whether those are cityscapes, bodyscapes, or apocalyptic spaces. Most of these scholars use critical spatial theory, applying a neo-Marxist lens to these texts, via the work of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja to do this.

Henri Lefebvre is the forefather of most critical spatial theory, and in his work argued that “(social) space is a (social) product” and that this was a truth universal in societies and cultures. In light of this statement, one can see why scholars studying the spaces of ancient texts, particularly texts we might view as cultural, would turn to Lefebvre for aid in their research. But who was Lefebvre and how does this statement fit into his larger project? Too often it seems that recent biblical scholarship engaging with Lefebvre has reduced him to a sound bite. Henri Lefebvre was a French scholar whose life and work spanned most of the 20th century, with his

---


first book appearing in 1924 and his last book published in 1992. In toto, Lefebvre published nearly seventy works, many of them books, ranging across disciplines. Lefebvre refused to be confined by disciplinary boundaries and while writing in the fields of history, sociology, philosophy, and politics, eschewed any designation except that of Marxist. A key to understanding Lefebvre is to realize that he was always first a Marxist and only then anything else. Indeed, Lefebvre’s Marxism in the late 1950s led to his being thrown out of the French Communist Party, where he had found a home for some thirty years and for a time had even been the party intellectual. Once outside the confines of the party’s censors, Lefebvre’s Marxism could take exactly the shape he wanted it to and, as David Harvey has put it, proceeded to fight to “rescue dialectical materialism from the Marxists, history from the historians, the capacity for revolutionary action from the structuralists and the social from the sociologists.” Having done this work for some ten years the events of 1968 led Lefebvre to turn his attention to the study of space, particularly urban space to look at how space, particularly its production, functioned within the capitalist frame. Lefebvre thought that the way space was produced and used had changed over time and he sought to understand how space worked in the modern world. Lefebvre first threw out the simple distinction of city versus country and then moved on to think about space in far more existential terms.

Space, Lefebvre determined, was actually composed of three different entities, something we call the spatial triad. The first of these three entities was the actual production of space, which Lefebvre called spatial practice (espace perçu). Spatial practice consists of both the production and the reproduction of space. Lefebvre saw spatial practice as ensuring continuity and, to a lesser extent, cohesion in society. As an example of spatial practice, Lefebvre suggested “the

11 Stuart Elden and Elizabeth Lebas, Introduction to Henri Lefebvre: Key Writings (ed. by Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas and Eleonore Kofman; New York: Continuum, 2003).
12 Elden and Lebas, Introduction, xii.
13 David Harvey, Afterword to The Production of Space by Henri Lefebvre (Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; Malden, MA: 1991), 428.
14 David Harvey, Afterword, 429.
15 Here I use the standard English translations of Lefebvre’s categories by Nicholson-Smith, which are not literal translations of Lefebvre’s own terms.
daily life of a tenant in a government-subsidized high-rise housing project,” as well as placing “motorways,” and “air transport” in this category.\textsuperscript{16} In the case of the tenant, his/her spatial practice consists of the repeated activities of private life carried on within the government shaped and supported confines of the apartment, the travel to the space of work, the work itself, likely also housed in a government supported structure, and the spaces in between those two where leisure activities occur, such as public parks. The links between these different sorts of spaces are as important to spatial practice as are the spaces themselves, which is why Lefebvre includes motorways and air transport in his examples, for they create ever longer links between different spaces (where the space of leisure for one actor might become Hawaii or Bermuda). The second of these entities Lefebvre called representations of space (espace conçu), which is tied only to the relations of production and the ‘order’ these relations impose. Thus, representations of space are connected to knowledge, signs and codes. Lefebvre placed “the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers” in the category of representations of space.\textsuperscript{17} An example of this would be the plans for a subdivide or a new government funded housing complex, which are both precise and idealized. While the shape of the space can inform the spatial practice of its inhabitants, these representations of space are always fully realized only at the conceptual stage, before too many actors get involved. The third of these entities Lefebvre called representational space (espace vécu), which embodies complex symbolisms.

Representational space is the space of art and has the potential to be linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, through subversive art or a subversive reading of art. Lefebvre suggested the work of artists, certain writers, and philosophers were in the category of representational space, which is “[r]edolent with imagery and symbolic elements.”\textsuperscript{18} These elements of representational space are then studied by “[e]thnologists, anthropologists and psychoanalysts,”\textsuperscript{19} who seek to understand a society based on these images and symbols.

\textsuperscript{16} Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, 38.

\textsuperscript{17} Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, 38. Lefebvre also places “Arcane speculation about Numbers, with its talk of the golden number, moduli and ‘canons,’” in this category of space as well.

\textsuperscript{18} Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, 41.

\textsuperscript{19} Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, 41.
idea of the clandestine is an aspect Lefebvre’s acolyte Edward Soja would embrace in his work on the spatial triad, something I examine below.20

Lefebvre’s spatial triad was designed for the modern world and operated under his Marxist lens, which leads to the question of how applicable his theory can be for the exploration of ancient spaces. Lefebvre argues that “each society offers up its own peculiar space,” but later clarifies, explaining “I say each society, but it would be more accurate to say each mode of production, along with its specific relations of production.”21 Lefebvre notes that the ancient Greek city produced space via appropriation and he asks, “How much can we really learn, for instance, confined as we are to Western conceptual tools, about the Asiatic mode of production, its space[?]”22 Can we then use these “Western conceptual tools” to explore the modes of production and reproduction of space in antiquity? For help in answering this question, it is helpful to turn to a preface Lefebvre wrote for the third edition of The Production of Space in the 1980s, which was not included in the English translation of the work. In this preface, Lefebvre rewords his spatial triad into a useable guide to analyzing the production of space in a society, by identifying the phases of each of the three units, note that this leads to a reordering of the spaces, which he introduced in the original work in the following order: espace perçu, espace conçu, and espace vécu, beginning with the space encountered by the most people (espace perçu), rather than the first sort of space to arise temporally in his schema (espace conçu). Thus, in the first phase of the production of a space (espace conçu), one finds the ‘actors’ of production (Lefebvre calls out technocrats as being the chief example of these actors and later “architects and planners,” naming Le Corbusier as an example),23 the elements they use, and the profits they make; in the second phase of production (espace perçu), one finds “paradigmatic oppositions,” that is, “public and private – exchange and use – official and personal – frontal and spontaneous

20 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 33. Lefebvre spends the rest of his book discussing what each of these categories mean and encompass, but he gives his short pithy definitions here.

21 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 31.

22 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 31.

– space and time,” and in the third phase of production (espace vécu), one finds “the conflicts, social rhythms and phases produced in and by this space.”24 This alternative explanation of the spatial triad is frustratingly short, but the rewording does help make clear the way Lefebvre thought of these spaces interlinking and stacking upon each other. One can think of a space as being constantly reshaped by all three categories, as the altering effects of espace perçu and espace vécu create new canvases for espace conçu to reconceive. In addition, reading the earlier definitions provided by Lefebvre about these spaces through the lens of these later explanations helps keep clear his understanding of spaces as being sites of possibilities for a variety of events, phases, and developments. This breadth of possibility for each sort of space seems to get lost in recent scholarship working with Lefebvre. This problem may in fact stem from the reliance of these scholars on Soja’s understanding of Lefebvre’s work, a spatial scholar whose work I do not utilize in this project.

Many biblical scholars interested in space, be it real, imagined, recreated, bodily, or apocalyptic, have utilized Soja’s concept of Thirdspace. Soja, an American geographer, took up Lefebvre’s model and reworked it into his own “trialectics of spatiality.” Soja’s attempt to translate Lefebvre’s categories actually ended up creating a slightly different triad of types of space, which he numbers for reference, Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace. For Soja, Thirdspace is equivalent to Lefebvre’s espace vécu/representational space (which is the third space described by Lefebvre, hence Soja’s name). Of course, Thirdspace is not actually equivalent to Lefebvre’s espace vécu. It is, instead, equivalent to Soja’s own understanding (and expansion on) Lefebvre’s category. Soja describes Thirdspace as, “both a space that is distinguishable from other spaces (physical and mental, or First and Second) and a transcending composite of all spaces (Thirdspace as Aleph).”25 Soja goes so far as to claim that “Everything comes together in Thirdspace,”26 which raises the question, if everything is in Thirdspace, what need is there for any other type of space? Despite this vagueness, or perhaps on account of it, scholars have made frequent recourse to Soja’s work of late in a variety of disciplines.

---


26 Soja, Thirdspace, 56.
In the field of Biblical Studies, many of these pieces found a home in one of the volumes of *Constructions of Space*, the ongoing book project that arose from the SBL series of the same name. Most of the papers in the project which utilize Soja focus in on his concept of Thirdspace, perhaps because it is so all encompassing, making it adaptable to so many different sorts of spaces.\(^{27}\) Two of the papers utilizing Soja’s work focus in on something they call Apocalyptic Space; Kathryn Lopez’ “Standing Before the Throne of God: Critical Spatiality in Apocalyptic Scenes of Judgement,” and Tina Pippin’s “The Ideology of Apocalyptic Space.”\(^{28}\) Pippin’s essay is a bit of a buffet of spatial scholars, thrown in one after another in something of a musing on apocalyptic space *qua* a variety of different sorts of space, but Lopez focuses in on apocalyptic space *qua* Soja’s Thirdspace explicitly. Lopez writes, “Soja’s Thirdspace as a place of resistance to Secondspace mapping sheds light on apocalyptic writings as strategies to create alternative lived space.”\(^{29}\) For Lopez, apocalyptic space is an alternative space to the dominated space of the terrestrial sphere (and real, lived space for the author and readers of apocalyptic texts).

Indeed, the recent (and larger) focus on apocalyptic texts as *texts of resistance* may be the reason that the theories of Lefebvre and especially Soja appear so frequently in these studies of the spaces of late antique texts; Soja’s Thirdspace and Lefebvre’s representational space, if read through the lens of Soja, represent the space of resistance (amongst other possibilities such as the space of difference) in both schematics. After all, in her study of one of the earliest of all apocalypses, *1 Enoch*, Anathea Portier-Young suggests that this preoccupation with space in early apocalypses be called “cosmic cartography,” and proposes its purpose is to give power to

---

27 Both Berquist in his introduction to the first volume and Claudia Camp in her introduction to the second volume of the series both remark on this fixation with Soja by so many panelists. Indeed, Camp’s entire essay is devoted to an exploration of this phenomenon. Jon Berquist, “Introduction: Critical Spatiality and the Uses of Theory,” in *Constructions of Space I: Theory, Geography, and Narrative* (Ed. Jon Berquist and Claudia Camp; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 1-14; and Claudia Camp, “Introduction,” in *Constructions of Space II: The Biblical City and Other Imagined Spaces* (Ed. Jon Berquist and Claudia Camp; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 1-17.


29 Lopez, “Standing Before the Throne of God,” 141.
the conquered, through their secret knowledge of realms and places beyond the domain (and maps) of the empire. In this way, apocalypses utilized a strategy of the empire, the strategy of possessing one’s territory through the art of cartography, which allowed them to challenge imperial authority in a way that the old style of challenge via prophecy did not. The conquered now spoke in the idiom of empire, albeit in a heightened and exaggerated manner. This understanding of these early apocalypses, particularly 1 Enoch, certainly holds merit. But, while this explains the sudden appearance of “cosmic cartography” in Second Temple texts, it does not explain the continued interest in the mappings of the heavens and the concurrent growth in the number of sites that the heavens housed. Could there be more to this continued interest than simply the continuation of resistance to imperial forces?

An additional problem I find with an equating of all spaces found in these texts with the space of resistance is that it severely limits what one can say about these texts’ depictions of not just space, particularly heavenly space, but also the places one finds within these large and (if thirddspace in nature) all-encompassing spaces. These studies do not allow for an examination of how the varying points within the heavenly realm coalesce into a coherent celestial landscape. Of course, as Lopez, for example, is explicitly focused on apocalypses, her chief interest is obviously on space within the larger apocalyptic project. In contrast, my own focus is on ancient conceptions of the heavens, irrespective of the type of text in which one finds these descriptions, though, the nature of apocalyptic texts makes them the most likely of all ancient texts to contain a glimpse of the heavens and their layout. I am interested in the individual places and their importance to and within the larger heavenly landscapes in which they are placed. The sweeping views of space given by Soja are not helpful to such an endeavor, and so I do not make recourse to Soja’s work at all, but I do utilize aspects of Lefebvre’s work, particularly his ideas on the monumental, which I discuss below.

The question then is where to turn in unpacking the places, be they the minutiae in the heavenly landscape or the grandeur of the heavenly temple, which one might call the topoi of the heavens. Here, the works of two scholars interested first and foremost in place over (and sometimes

---

against space) is most instructive. Indeed, my repeated use of the term “topoi” throughout this project comes from the work of Philip Ethington on space and place. Ethington’s work depends in part on the philosopher Edward S. Casey, whose work I also utilize and discuss below. Ethington, a historian, argues that “knowledge of the past … is literally cartographic: a mapping of the places of history indexed to the coordinates of spacetime.” Such an understanding of interpretations of the past provides an excellent platform from which to conduct my study of the movement of mythic places from the earth to the heavens in the period of the Second Temple and just following. Ethington, while giving credit to Lefebvre for initiating a serious discussion of space, openly critiques the scholar’s haphazard approach, accusing Lefebvre’s spatial triad of being enclosed “within an unnecessarily convoluted tangle of neo-Hegelian ‘moments’.”

Ethington attempts to cut this Gordian knot by offering a different understanding of both the past and the task of the historian. He does this by working with Edward Casey’s phenomenological approach to space rather than Lefebvre’s (or any of Lefebvre’s acolytes’) neo-Marxian approach. Thus, in Ethington’s reading of Casey, “space” is denoted as bad, and “place” is denoted as good. Indeed, this is not a position held only by Casey, but by spatial scholarship in general. Ethington, following Gaston Bachelard, whom I discuss below, suggests that “Places are experiential, memorial, emotive, subjective, even poetic.” In contrast, Ethington writes of space that it is “the alienating and exploitive handiwork of the capitalist bourgeoisie, bearing the same relation to place as exchange value does to us value in the Marxian account of commodities.”

Thus, focus should turn from the sweeping acres of space, to the minutiæ of places and examine the nooks and crannies they give to the everyday individual. Note that in this way one of the difficulties previous scholars have had with reading the spaces of antiquity, particularly apocalyptic space, vanishes with this shift in the focus of discourse. Rather than look at space writ large through the prism of Lefebvre’s or Soja’s work, one can look at individual places, even as they are strung together within these texts, through the prism of Casey’s theory. The use of Ethington and Casey’s work allows a more nuanced and careful examination of the places of

32 Ethington, “Placing the Past,” 479.
33 Ethington, “Placing the Past,” 481.
these heavens, which in turn opens up additional topics of meaningful discussion beyond that of the overtly political concept of “apocalyptic space” qua “space of resistance”.

To return, for the moment, to Ethington, he argues that “every past is a place (emphatically in the present tense because the past is always present),” citing Aristotle for support of this claim.\(^{34}\) In light of this, Ethington suggests that “we refer to the places of the past as topoi,”\(^ {35}\) and it is from this suggestion that my own use of the term in this work springs. Ethington unpacks his idea of past places as “topoi,” with three key ideas. First, these topoi “are recognizable because we can map them within a general topology of the known and familiar.”\(^ {36}\) Ethington suggests one can read one’s environment, and that each person notices, connects to, and remembers different aspects of that environment. Second, “Topoi collapse time.” This idea draws on the Aristotelian roots of the term ‘topoi,’ as it suggests that place can be, amongst other things, metaphoric. Ethington argues that this means any two people who conceive of a place in the same way, or through the same metaphors, share a bond lacking between two people who conceive of the same place with different metaphors. Third, and perhaps most importantly, “topoi touch the ground,” an idea that undergirds Ethington’s main claim regarding history. Ethington argues that while “the map of the past,” is neither removed from the earth nor merely representative as such, rather, through these topoi, the present is directly touched by the past.\(^ {37}\) Ethington’s further claim that “Cartography’s infinitely possible figurations cannot be reduced to narrative form,”\(^ {38}\) speaks, I believe, to the complexity of the textual tours of the ancient heavens and the eventual

---

\(^{34}\) Ethington, “Placing the Past,” 483. Ethington here actually cites Casey’s study on Aristotle’s observations of space as a container in his *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), 51. Casey focuses particularly on *Physics*, where Aristotle notes, “These are the reasons, then, for which one might suppose that place is something over and above bodies, and that every body perceptible by sense is in place. Hesiod, too, might seem to be speaking correctly in making Chaos first: he says: ‘Foremost of all things/Chaos came to be/And then broad-breasted Earth,’” suggesting that it was necessary that there should first be a space (*chōra*) available to the things that are, because he thinks as most people do that everything is somewhere (*pou*) and in place (*en topō*).” (208b27-33). J. Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (trans. Hardie and Gaye; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 355.  

\(^{35}\) Ethington, “Placing the Past,” 483.  

\(^{36}\) Ethington, “Placing the Past,” 484.  

\(^{37}\) Ethington, “Placing the Past,” 485.  

\(^{38}\) Ethington, “Placing the Past,” 486.
attempt to map these heavens in mosaic form upon the floors of certain synagogues. The heavens could not, it turned out, be adequately represented by words, but had to be visualized in these mosaic maps; cartography ended up being necessary to full expression.

Ethington’s project, as I mentioned above, is based in part on the work of Edward S. Casey, particularly his work *The Fate of Place: a Philosophical History*, but also Casey’s essay in the book *Senses of Place*, which offers a much more concise presentation of his ideas. In this essay, Casey first examines the disappearance of the term “place” from academic discourse in the late 19th century and then argues for the return and, even, primacy of the idea of place over that of space. Indeed, Casey desires to make “the very idea of spaces … posterior to that of place.” Casey suggests that “a place is more an event than a thing to be assimilated to known categories.” For Casey two attributes of places showcase and highlight the importance of a place over abstract space: first, “places gather,” and second (building on the first idea), “culture is dependent on place, not the other way around.” These two ideas lend themselves to this project, suggesting as they do that once one topos of the mythic past became installed in the heavens, it would slowly gather other mythic topoi around it. In addition, it suggests that the collection of these topoi in the heavens allowed for the perceived continuity of a certain culture, even while major changes were occurring on the ground to physical historical sites (read: the temple).

Casey, while quibbling with and questioning Ethington’s project on several points, finds the task a worthwhile one, and suggests some additions to Ethington’s ways of thinking about the past as a collection of places. For example, Casey desires a clear distinction between the idea of a “boundary,” and of a “border.” Casey suggests that “boundaries are where places happen,”


40 Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place,” 26.

41 Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place,” 34.


43 Casey, “Boundary, Place, and Event,” 509.
and that for this reason it is important for one to note where these boundaries are located. This is because unlike a border, which is firm, a boundary “facilitates movements of bodies across it.”\textsuperscript{44} The porousness of a boundary is what allows places to accrue all around it, making it a key addition to Ethington’s conceptions of the past as a series of places. This idea is also of interest here, for the liminal nature of the celestial spheres, at least to certain persons and beings, is an important facet of these various ancient heavens. While not everyone can gain access to the celestial spheres, certain people are allowed to see at least parts of it, and many of these parts are the various mythic topoi that compose these heavens. It seems then, that another reason for the collection of these mythic topoi in the heavens is their ability to migrate from the mythic nether regions of an ever-more conquered, explored, and mapped earthly sphere through the boundary between the two regions – celestial and terrestrial – up into the heavens. Even so, the fact that the lower levels of these heavens, in particular the sphere containing the sun, moon, and stars, served as a boundary that protected these places from the reach of those not worthy of them, be they Romans or be they wayward Jews or Christians, is also important.

Having established the importance of looking at the places that together create the constellation that is heaven, next one needs to determine how best to study them, the places of grandeur, the places of the mythic past, the places lost, the places of repose for the righteous, as well as their relation to one another. In order to study these places and their relation to one another, I turn to a near contemporary of Lefebvre, Gaston Bachelard. Bachelard was a philosopher of science turned philosopher of poetry, who loved the imagination and the places that it created.\textsuperscript{45} Bachelard once wrote that “two people must first contradict each other if they really wish to understand each other” and this attitude helps explain the difficulty one has in placing him firmly in a single school or group of philosophers; he engaged with, but never joined, many different schools of thought.\textsuperscript{46} For example, in the 1970s, French Marxists were divided over him, both arguing for and against his theories. More recently, a scholar of Bachelard has categorized his

\textsuperscript{44} Casey, “Boundary, Place, and Event,” 508.

\textsuperscript{45} Etienne Gilson, Foreword to The Poetics of Space: the Classical Look at How We Experience Intimate Places by Gaston Bachelard, (trans. by Maria Jolas; Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), xii-xiii.

\textsuperscript{46} Gaston Bachelard, La philosophie du non : essai d'une philosophie du nouvel esprit scientifique (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1940), 134.
thinking toward the end of his life as “Non-Husserlian phenomenology” or a “phenomenology of
the imagination.”\textsuperscript{47} Bachelard appears to have conceived of himself from the start to the end of
his career as a philosopher of science, even when writing on other topics. Bachelard was
a prolific author, publishing ninety works, twenty three of which were books, in a span of just over
thirty years.\textsuperscript{48} Like Lefebvre, Bachelard’s work on spatial theory came later in his career, after
he had already published twelve books in the philosophy of science, his area of training, and had
entered into the realm of the imagination and poetry, the area into which he drifted as he
abandoned the world of reason for the world of the imaginary.\textsuperscript{49} Here I engage with Bachelard’s
writings in his \textit{The Poetics of Space} (\textit{La poétique de l’espace}, 1958), one of his last books, in
which he ruminates on the nature of the places of the house and the house’s place in the wider
world. At least, this is ostensibly Bachelard’s focus for, despite all his chapters on cupboards,
closets, nests, and shells in \textit{The Poetics of Space}, Bachelard is also conducting a study of
humanity. The metaphors in \textit{The Poetics of Space} are rich, numerous and drift back and forth
between the house as humanity to the house as a construct of humanity. In his foreword to the
1994 reprint of the English translation of \textit{The Poetics of Space}, John R. Stilgoe writes of
Bachelard that

\begin{quote}
his analysis is truly cross-cultural, for it focuses on physical items known and
cherished the world over, structures and objects that comprise a universal
vocabulary of space a vocabulary so crucially important that few inquirers notice
it, let alone hold it up and turn it before the eye.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

Here I embrace this aspect of Bachelard’s work, using it to focus on the vocabulary of the places
of heaven one finds in these ancient texts. I focus particularly on Bachelard’s study of ideas
about places that are home, places that are miniature, and places that have been lost to an
individual. This idea of loss and of memory with respect to place finds important resonance in
the texts that were composed just after the fall of the Second Temple and the destruction of

\textsuperscript{47} The French Marxist theorists were Dominique Lecourt and Michel Vadee. The recent scholar is Mary
McAllester Jones in her book \textit{Gaston Bachlard, Subversive Humanist Texts and Readings} (Madison, WI: The
University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 162.

\textsuperscript{48} McAllester Jones, \textit{Gaston Bachlard}, 3.

\textsuperscript{49} Gilson, Foreword, xii.

\textsuperscript{50} John R. Stilgoe, Foreword, ix.
Jerusalem. This was a loss of drastic size and scope and I explore the spatial coping mechanisms of those living in its wake via the lens of Bachelard’s theories where “an immense cosmic house is a potential of every dream of houses.”

Having come back to French spatial theorists, I will now reintroduce Lefebvre to this project. While both Ethington’s and Bachelard’s theories lend themselves to discussions on the many places in the heavens, their relation to one another, and a look at the minutiae of heaven, they are not sufficient to explain the idea of the colossal in the heavens. In light of this, an element of Lefebvre’s spatial musings that I will utilize in this project are his observations regarding monumental architecture, which appear promising to the study of certain sites located in these heavens: the celestial temple, the celestial altar, and other places, such as the heavenly Jerusalem. Lefebvre suggests “that spaces made (produced) to be read are the most deceptive and tricked-up imaginable.” Lefebvre was remarking on the nature of monumental architecture in particular and the way this architectural style contains simultaneous narratives that jostle and overlap within the concrete confines of a single structure. Such a monument offers to each visitor a particular narrative, one that appears to be a collective and inclusive narrative, while hiding the exclusivity of the power that actually ordered the building of the monument. This power both creates and is supported by the ideology of the monument, yet the monument also offers a third narrative that overlaps with the other two, all within a single structure. While Lefebvre was speaking of real built space such as the temple in Jerusalem, his remarks carry resonance for the study of written spaces that can only exist if literally read. While in many ways, this comment is an aside in Lefebvre’s work, I believe the deceptiveness of these monuments is a concrete example of Lefebvre’s espace conçu writ large. The idea of the visibility of “paradigmatic oppositions” is abundantly clear, with the rhetoric of the monumental offering very well defined divisions: inside and outside, sacred and profane, chosen and not chosen. In addition, Lefebvre writes that monuments “offered each member of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage.”

51 Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, 51.
52 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 143.
53 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 220.
and roles is important in exploring the way the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* work as the products of an *espace conçu* writ most large offering representations of the heavenly temple to those worthy of them. Lefebvre was working on spatial practices and his observations on monumentality arise as a case study of sorts for his *espace conçu*, so he does not make the connection between his spatial observations regarding representation to the ancient concept of *ekphrasis*, which is the verbal representation of art works, including architectural ones. Because of this, I open with Lefebvre’s observation as the starting point in the following chapter and then look to art history for theoretical aid in unpacking these monumental depictions through their theories of *ekphrasis*.

In the field of art history, I look mainly to Jaš Elsner’s work, particularly his piece on something he calls “ritual-centered visuality”\(^5^4\) for this theoretical help in developing the idea Lefebvre planted, but did not water. Elsner uses this term to help describe the way texts employing ekphrastic passages towards political ends functioned in the ancient world. Elsner focuses on the Greek geographer Pausanias and his various travelogues to ancient Greek cult sites in his essay. Elsner suggests that the lack of topographic logic behind Pausanias’s tour of cult sites does not speak to his being wrong about the layout of a site, as most scholars before Elsner have implied, but rather that the ancient geographer’s focus was on a different aspect of the site – the ritual aspect. Thus, descriptions of various sites in antiquity describe not “how the monument looks or where it is so much as of how it works.”\(^5^5\) This idea of the way a monument functions within as well as on a society, ties into a rhetorical question Lefebvre poses when discussing *espace conçu*, “What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies?”\(^5^6\) One finds the preservation of ideology in the works of ancient *ekphrases*, such as the ones the composers of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* utilized in their compositions. I find Elsner, as well as other classical scholars’ observations on the nature of *ekphrasis* in describing monuments helpful for unpacking some of these ancient descriptions of the imagined celestial temple. When one


\(^{5^5}\) Elsner, *Roman Eyes*, 16.

\(^{5^6}\) Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 44.
realizes that an *ekphrasis* of a tangible, visible, built object took great artistic license in its descriptions, because it was both the product of and the means of maintenance for an ideology, one can better understand the complexities and seeming incongruities of these various heavens’ topographies and the location of places within them.

Because these heavens are complex and multifaceted places, creations of different earthly beliefs, needs, and ideologies, a constellation of spatial theorists is needed to fully unpack their topographies. Having now sketched out the various theories that will aid in this reading of celestial cartographies, I can move to a discussion of the project itself, looking more closely at the depictions under consideration.

### 1.2 Overview of the Project

For this project, I examine a very wide swath of ideas about the heavens in antiquity, but also give detailed case studies of individual examples. The chapters are organized temporally, beginning in the first century BCE and ending in the 4th-6th century CE. This is a long period of time, but each chapter represents an epoch in ways of thinking about the heavens: Second Temple, Post-70 CE, early and explicitly Christian, and finally, early Jewish artistic depictions. Each of the textual chapters focuses on a single text, and the chapter on art work is concentrated on one sort of artistic depiction, which keeps the discussion of each chapter tightly focused, even as the project skips forward from century to century. I, therefore, examine one text from the Second Temple period, a text preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls from the 1st Century BCE, the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. I specifically chose a poetic text to open this study, as I wished to examine a variety of conceptions of heaven, not the well-known conceptions of heaven, which come largely from texts traditionally categorized as apocalyptic. These ancient poetic descriptions are thus perfectly suited to that pursuit. I then move forward to the chaotic period of time just after the fall of the Second Temple in 70 CE and look at the state of the heavens in Jewish texts of the era. In that chapter, I focus on 3rd *Baruch*, an oft overlooked apocalypse from the period that offers much food for thought on the places of the heavens in antiquity, as well as their status and meaning. Having looked at post-70 CE Jewish texts, I then examine early Christian views on the heavens, looking at the *Latin Apocalypse of Paul*, a text that shows a marked shift in the role of the places of heaven from locations elevated and, thus, protected from the chaotic earth, to places of safety themselves for the souls of the righteous. I conclude the
work by examining early Jewish depictions of the heavens, focusing on the mosaic floors of a certain set of synagogues from Roman Palestine, the zodiac synagogues, which date between the late fourth to early sixth centuries. Each case study offers insights into the intricacies of the individual texts’ and artworks’ depictions of the heavens, even as it ties back into the larger project at hand, which is an exploration of the shifting nature of the celestial spheres in antiquity.

1.3 The Primary Texts under Consideration

The first text I examine is the intricate and fragmented Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, from Qumran. The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice is from the Second Temple period, and I focus on them, rather than another text, such as the Book of Watchers, for two reasons. First, I desired to explore as many sorts of depictions of the heavens from antiquity as I could in this text, and by including these poetic descriptions, another and different genre could be included in this work. In the second place, within the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, one finds an incredibly complex heaven that is simultaneously heaven and temple, while also housing multiple temples within it. This complexity creates a rich environment for exploring early conceptions of the heavens.

While it seems that the sectarians at Qumran did not compose the original songs, the copies we have are their versions of them, bearing their imprint, however slight. In addition, it should be noted that the sectarians did seem to utilize the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice as one of their liturgical texts, performing the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice in sequence, one per Sabbath, which allowed these priests access to a different (and better) temple than the one in Jerusalem. The temple in Jerusalem was, as far as they were concerned, corrupt, but this did not matter for they worshipped alongside the angels in the heavenly Temple, which made manifest their superiority to the Jerusalem priesthood. This overtly political use of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice speaks to the songs’ implicit claims about the unfathomable nature of the heavenly temple. Here I focus on the texts of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice themselves and do not speculate on their meaning to the sectarians, keeping my remarks to what one can say definitively about the nature of the heavens in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice through their verbal constructions of the heavenly temple(s). To explore this use of the construction of (re)imagined places, I employ various scholars’ work on the ancient concept of ekphrasis, taking the ancient meaning of the term, which was that of a descriptive passage for any object, not just paintings. I explore not just various theoretical engagements with the idea of ekphrasis, but the history of ekphrases in Israelite texts on the temple and its heavenly counterpart and how these
passages often conflate the two places into one. In contrast to these earlier texts, the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* appear to break the celestial temple off from the earthly temple and make clear its truly incomparable status. This reflects a shift in the use of *ekphrasis*, suggesting as it does both that the celestial temple is not dependent on the earthly temple for existence and that its angelic priests always execute the rituals that support this place with perfection. Because of this ritual component, I work with Elsner’s idea of a “ritual-centered visuality,” and also Sprague Becker’s suggestion that *ekphrases* with seemingly incongruous sections are not confused, but instead are attempting to create an aesthetic experience through these sequences of overlapping images.\(^{57}\)

In the second half of the chapter I then explore the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*’s monumental *ekphrasis* of the celestial temple. This study focuses on Songs 7-13, exploring the complicated spatial sequences through these new theoretical lenses. I demonstrate that Song 7 serves as a transition in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, offering a quick map of all the realms of the heavens, which sets the scene for the detailed tour that follows. This allows me to then explore this complicated tour, and demonstrate that the spatial progressions of Songs 8-13 make the most sense when seen as a tour through the ritually correct topography of the celestial temple. I then suggest that the reason the theophany occurs in Song 12 is because the purpose of these songs is, in fact, the witnessing of the Sabbath Sacrifices, which only occurs in Song 13, as one visiting the celestial temple must first understand how each section of the heavenly temple relates ritually to one another, before one can witness the sacrifices that depend on this proper ritual order. Thus the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* offer a tour of heaven that is all temple, but this temple is multi-storied, multi-structured, and can only be understood when thought of as multi-dimensional.

In chapter three, I examine the nature of heaven in texts written in the wake of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 CE; my case study within the chapter is the unusual apocalypse *3 Baruch*, but I begin with a look at other more typical apocalypses of the era: *2 Enoch*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*. The texts focused on

heaven that come out of the first century CE are very diverse in their understanding of the composition of the heavens, but most retain the focus of first century BCE texts on the celestial temple, with a theophany within the climax of the narrative. In 3 Baruch, one finds a very different message from other texts written in the wake of 70 CE. 3 Baruch suggests that while the heavenly temple remains in existence and active, it is no longer accessible to humans. 3 Baruch also suggests that while the righteous should remain righteous, they should not expect a change in current conditions anytime soon – the earthly temple is gone and they must adapt to the new situation on the ground, rather than await a 3rd Temple and the vindication of their people with bated breath. Even Baruch, most righteous of them all, is not permitted a glimpse of the Temple, but instead receives a tour of other, and for the moment, more immediately important, topoi in the heavens. In the post-70 CE heavens we see a marked change in the nature of a heavenly tour; instead of a heaven that is all temple, we see a heaven made up of a series of different mythic topoi, of which the heavenly temple is just one, albeit the most sacred and holy one.

In chapter four, I examine explicitly Christian explorations of the ancient heavens. I look at the late fourth century text Latin Apocalypse of Paul and the way that its various topoi reflect a clear shift in Christian interest in the heavens as repository of mythic sites for safety, to the heavens as repository of souls. The Latin Apocalypse of Paul is bursting with various mythic locales situated outside of the earth, but this complicated cosmic cartography is difficult to map into coherence. I argue that the reason for this lack of cartographic clarity is this change in the role of heaven from holder of God’s celestial temple to the holder of all the souls in their places of eternal rest, or torment, depending on the soul. Thus, the mythic sites that in the apocalypses immediately following the violence and rupture of 70 CE, found new and safe havens in heaven by the fourth century had, for the Christian imagination, themselves become refuges for the deceased souls of the devout. The different mythic spots were singled out as so many homes for so many different types (and different degrees) of the holy upon the earth.

In chapter five, I turn to later artistic depictions of the heavens in Jewish and Christian art, focusing my inquiry on the mosaic floor decorations of synagogues, because I believe these mosaics mirror the ideas about the heavens explored in the preceding textual chapters. I explore a reading of a specific genre of these synagogue mosaics, those of late Roman Palestine that feature a zodiac in the center of the main panel. I agree with scholars that suggest that these
represent the heavens, and believe the mosaics are maps of the mythic past earth coupled with the heaven. Highly schematized, these maps depend on the tradition already extant in Judaism of certain key places existing in the heavens, chief amongst them and in the highest realm of heaven, the Temple. Thus, these mosaics are the earliest pictorial depictions of this idea of a multilayered heaven, featuring different places and people from the mythic past in the different levels. I see these artistic depictions not as examples of active resistance to a growing appropriation by Christians of these key mythic people and places, but instead as the visualization in art of ideas already held by a number of Jews (as well as Christians) at the time regarding the nature of the heavens.

This project, then, is the first study of its sort. It is a case-by-case look at the cartographies of heaven arising at the tail end of the Second Temple period and onward into the first centuries following the destruction of the Temple and the formation of Christianity. Through these case studies I offer a new way of looking at the heavens of antiquity, via a close reading of their places. By doing so I offer a new reading of these heavens as heaven that is all temple, then as repositories first for the sacred spots of the mythic past for Jews in the wake of the Temple’s destruction and finally as the repository of souls when Christians begin to appropriate and rewrite these heavenly narratives. These findings further demonstrate the role critical spatial theory can play in the study of ancient texts, if carefully and thoughtfully applied to the actual spaces and places found within these texts.
Chapter 2

2 The Poetics of Temple Space: the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice’s Heavenly Temple and Temple-ish Heaven

In this chapter, I look at early poetic descriptions of the heavens from the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (hereafter, the Shirot). This early text, when speaking of the celestial realm, describes a realm that is more temple or house of God than heaven. Indeed, in the Shirot heaven is a series of temples. This is in keeping with other post-exilic descriptions of the heavens, such as Enoch sees in the Book of Watchers, where God and the angelic host dwell within a large temple that rests on a single plane, but in the Shirot this vision is both fractured and multiplied by seven. This fracturing and multiplying is one of the reasons I have chosen to focus my first chapter on the Shirot, rather than on another text, such as the Book of Watchers, which is the classic Second Temple tour of heaven text. The other reason for my selection of the Shirot in my first chapter is a desire to not have this be a project devoted only to apocalyptic depictions of the heavens through time. Rather, here I focus on purely poetic depictions of the heavens from the Second Temple Period. While the Shirot were likely composed as non-sectarian poems, those at Qumran used them in a cultic manner, which allowed the community there, and anywhere else that was not Jerusalem for that matter, to sing the heavenly temple into creation through a poetic recitation of the places and the ritual of the place. One notes here in this text a poetic attempt to demonstrate the unfathomable greatness of the celestial temple, even over and above its earthly “copy,” which pales in comparison. The celestial temple the Shirot explore is a temple constructed by poets intent on maintaining ritual correctness, even while exploring the physics-defying nature of the celestial realms.

In the introductory chapter, I spent some time discussing the spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre and other scholars’ use of his work in the study of the space of antiquity, in particular ancient

---

58 The idea that the Shirot are describing the heavenly temple and not the earthly temple is not a new idea. Various scholars have assumed as much, in particular Carol Newsom in her critical edition of the Shirot, Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: a Critical Edition (HSS 27; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985). My own word study of the Shirot that I detail below, supports this understanding of the Shirot as being descriptions of ever higher realms of the heavens.
texts. While I critiqued much of this engagement, seeing it as overly dependent on Soja’s both too broad and too simplistic reinterpretation of Lefebvre’s work, I noted that it did seem possible to utilize aspects of Lefebvre’s work in the study of ancient space. In particular, I believe Lefebvre had it right, for modernity, antiquity, and all points in-between, when he noted, “that spaces made (produced) to be read are the most deceptive and tricked-up imaginable.”

Lefebvre was remarking on the nature of monumental architecture in particular and the way this architectural style contains multiple narratives at once. This comment comes out of a larger discussion by Lefebvre of his concept of espaces conçu, which is usually translated into the English, “representations of space.” In his observations on the nature of espaces conçu as a concept, Lefebvre argues that these representations are in a constant state of change because they are, “shot through with a knowledge – i.e. a mixture of understanding and ideology.” Indeed, Lefebvre argues that ideologies are dependent on a space for endurance, suggesting that without a space to shape, an ideology has no hope of continued existence. In light of this, Lefebvre appears to see the monumental as an example of ideologies shaping space in very big ways. Lefebvre argues that “Monumentality, for instance, always embodies and imposes a clearly intelligible message. It says what it wishes to say – yet hides a good deal more[.]” The ideology that shapes and reshapes a monument makes sure the monument exposes the correct message clearly and also mutes all other messages. Lefebvre was a scholar of modernity, not antiquity, something he admits freely. Despite this, Lefebvre suggests that for most of humans’ existence, “monumentality took in all the aspects of spatiality that we have identified above: the perceived, the conceived, and the lived[.]” Here, Lefebvre suggests that the conception of and the living of a space are indistinguishable and inseparable from one another within the framework of the monumental. Perhaps, had Lefebvre been more conversant, or simply more interested, in antiquity, he would have offered observations on the way this entanglement arose,


60 This is the phrase used throughout the Nicholson-Smith English edition; Lefebvre, The Production of Space.

61 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 143.

62 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 143.

63 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 220.
or how ancient ideologies worked to reify these monumental spaces and their clear-cut messages. As it is, Lefebvre does not offer explanations or concrete examples of this conflation between *espace conçu* and *espace vécu* within the monuments of antiquity. To those more familiar, or at least more interested, in the spaces of antiquity, it seems that this idea, at which Lefebvre is driving with his observations, is that of the ancient practice of *ekphrasis*, which in many ways was the ancients’ tacit admission of and maintenance of a monument’s public story and hidden alternatives.

Because Lefebvre did not develop his observations and because a body of work exists on the ancient practice of *ekphrasis*, I use his comments as my starting point, even as I utilize other scholars whose work actually explored the problem Lefebvre only noted. This “tricked up nature” is particularly true with respect to the cartographic sections of the *Shirot* that simultaneously obfuscate and offer thick descriptions of the nature of the heavens. In this chapter, I explore the complicated and contradictory spaces of the celestial temple in *Shirot* 7, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 using aspects of recent work on the practice of *ekphrasis* of temples in antiquity. In this chapter, I argue that the spatial descriptions of the *Shirot* are as intricate and complex as they are because they are attempts to aggrandize the visual rhetoric of the earthly temple in Jerusalem and thus describe its greater heavenly counterpart. This aggrandizing of the already multiple narratives of the earthly temple, found in such texts as Isaiah or 1 Kings, created an even more conflicting set of narratives for the celestial temple. Here, I further suggest, that the performance of these narratives at Qumran allowed the group there to create the space of the heavenly temple by recreating the ritual “events” of the celestial temple. This performance of the rituals of the celestial temple created the place of the celestial temple, pure and in proper order at Qumran, a physical place quite other from the earthly temple in Jerusalem. This celestial temple contained within it multiple other temples, making heaven a concentric series of temples, many thousand times more impressive and awe-inspiring than the temple in Jerusalem.

### 2.1 An Overview of the *Shirot*

Portions of the *Shirot* survive in nine separate manuscripts, eight of which come from the caves at Qumran and one of which comes from Masada. Of the Qumran manuscripts, seven are from Cave IV and one is from Cave XI. The manuscript from Cave XI is at least sixty years younger
than the manuscripts from Cave IV. Scholars continue to debate whether the Shirot were composed at Qumran or elsewhere. The uncertainty of the facts underlying this debate is manifested by Carol Newsom’s own shifting between positions from publication to publication. These manuscripts are quite fragmentary; in the case of Song 3, no definitive surviving portions remain and little of substance remains of Songs 4 and 5 as well. The fact that the Shirot are incomplete means all statements made about them as a whole must always be qualified by the admission that we lack the details of three of the thirteen songs. It is clear that the corpus consists of an outline of the divine liturgy for the first thirteen Sabbath sacrifices.

The name of the text comes from the formulaic openings of the Songs themselves, “For/to the Maskil, the song of the holocaust offering of the X Sabbath on the X in the X month.” The Hebrew term Maskil, which translates best as “sage” in English, is not a term that is unique to the Shirot, nor to the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Maskil, however, appears to have been a special position within the Sectarian community and carries a different valence in the Sectarian texts than it does in Biblical Hebrew. The Maskil seems to have been both a community leader and an adept, with special knowledge about (and access to?) the heavenly realms and its denizens. This complicates the categorization of the Shirot, as they are similar to apocalyptic texts, giving

64 The handwriting of 4Q400 is “a formal hand from the late Hasmonean period (ca. 75-50 B.C.),” but the handwriting of 11QShirShabb is “a developed Herodian formal hand with strong semiformal traits (ca. 20-50 A.D.).” Carol Newsom, Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: a Critical Edition, 86 and 363.

65 In her initial publication of the Shirot, Newsom was more inclined to see them as sectarian (see especially pages 59-72), than she was in her more recent piece, “Sectually Explicit’ Literature from Qumran,” in The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters (eds. William Henry Propp et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 167-87. See also Joseph Angel’s overview of the arguments for and against sectarian composition in Otherworldly and Eschatological Priesthood in the Dead Sea Scrolls (STDJ 86; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 85-87.


their readers, performers, and listeners a tour of the divine realm. Unlike apocalypses, however, the Shirot lack an angelic guide to lead the novice through the Shirot’s realms. As James Davila notes in his commentary, those engaging with the text journey “through the heavenly realm from week to week and learn its secrets without the explicit revelatory framework central to the genre apocalypse.” Similarly, while numerous comparisons to the later rabbinic Merkabah and Hekhalot literature exist, one should not conceive of the Shirot as proto-Hekhalot literature, as the Hekhalot literature comprises explanations and rituals for ascending (or descending) to the chariot, something the Shirot do not do. Rather, the Shirot are either a self-guided tour for the Maskil himself, or a Maskil-guided tour for the community, or at least certain privileged community members, of the divine realm that never explains how one arrived there in the first place. In a category of their own, the Shirot offer a unique glimpse into early Jewish conceptions of the divine realm.

The Shirot use a variety of ways to describe the heavenly realm or realms. The most popular term by far is קדש (sanctuary), attested some ninety-six times, followed by הולErot (Holy of Holies), attested thirty-three times, with מרום (heights) trailing behind in third place, having twenty-one occurrences. The choice of descriptive words shifts from song to song. For example, both Song 1 and Song 7 contain nearly every different term that the Shirot employ to describe the

---

68 Davila, Liturgical Works, 87.


71 Davila, Liturgical Works, 93.

72 Here I build (most gratefully) on the work done by Carol Newsom in Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: a Critical Edition.
spaces of heaven at least once, whereas Song 10 uses only the word דְבֵּר (the Holy of Holies) and Song 11 uses only הקָוָר דְבֵר (inner sanctum). The Biblical Hebrew word for the temple as a whole, הֵיכָל, only rarely appears throughout the שִׁרֹת, for example at 4Q401 I 13 and at 11QShirShabb 2-1-9 7. This paucity of references to the temple as a whole suggests that in the שִׁרֹת, the point is the creation of the scenes within the heavenly temple, or, perhaps better, within heaven, which is a temple, rather than to describe the exterior of the heavenly temple. The point of these descriptive passages, after all, is to demonstrate an understanding and knowledge of the inner workings of the courts of heaven.

In addition to which, while the שִׁרֹת offer a depiction of the heavens as temple, they ultimately express the belief that there is more than just one heavenly temple. Indeed, the שִׁרֹת make multiple references to seven temples, an idea that we are not familiar with anywhere else in the corpus of Second Temple literature.73 References to these include “seven exalted holy places” (4Q403 Frg. 1 Col. ii 11), “seven wondrous territories according to the ordinances of His sanctuaries” (4Q403 Frg. 1 Col. ii 21), “the seven shrines of the priesthoods” (4Q405 Frg. 7a-e 7), “seven holy precincts” (4Q405 Frg. 44 1), and “the seven wonderful territories” (11Q17 Col. II (Frg. 3) 6). The number seven is an important number throughout the שִׁרֹת.74 Carol Newsom suggests the thirteen songs make up a “pyramidal structure,” with the seventh song the climax of the set.75 The songs at the peak of this pyramid, the sixth through eighth, all feature the number seven. There are seven chief princes in Song 6 and seven angelic princes in Song 8, in between these two are the passages of Song 7, which relate a seven-fold schematic for the temple. The seven priests are called upon to do things in sets of seven; these include the injunction to the sixth chief priest to sing “seven [wondrous] songs of joy,” and to “cry joyously


74 While many scholars have noted and commented upon this feature of the שִׁרֹת, Elliot Wolfson offers a unique argument for the centrality of the numbers seven, stating, “in my judgement, the significance of this number in this particular literary context stems from the conception of the divine as a corporate body composed of seven potencies,” which Elliot suggests are enumerated by the seventh chief prince in his song of praise. “Seven Mysteries of Knowledge,” 205.

75 Newsom, “He Has Established for Himself Priests,” 104.
to [the] Ki[ng of] goodness seven times with se[ven words of] wondrous rejoicing,” (4Q403 Frg.1 Col. i 5). As I mentioned above, and will further explore below, the seventh song also uses the most spatial terms of all the surviving songs, both in quantity and in diversity. This lends new support to Newsom’s claims for the importance of Song 7, though whether this importance is because it is the climax of the set, or because it marks a transitional moment in the narrative remains to be seen.

The Shirot do not always stipulate how many heavenly temples there are; occasionally one finds reference to an unspecified multiplicity of temples. For example, “the sanctuaries of holiest holiness” (4Q400 Frg. 1 Col. i 7), “the temples of the King” (4Q400 Frg. 1 Col. i 13), “all the wondrous sanctuaries” (4Q403 Frg. 1 Col. i 46), “the shrines of the King” (4Q405 Frg. 14-15 Col. i 7), “the wondrous shrines” (4Q405 Frg. 15 Col. ii, 16 5), “all the heights of the sanctuaries of His glorious kingdom” (4Q405 Frg. 23 Col. ii 11), and “all dwellings of and for the temples of his glory” (11Q17 Col. X (Frg. 23-25) 8). There is another curious phrase in the Shirot that combines the idea of one sanctuary and the seven-fold division of the heavenly ranks, stating that there exists “the wondrous sanctuary for the seven holy councils” (4Q403 Frg. 1 Col. ii 22). The exact meaning of this phrase is unclear, but it is possible that it is a conflation of the two ideas; God’s temple is unified, but made for the seven heavenly divisions (if that is what the holy councils are). Several scholarly positions on this issue exist, and many share much overlap with one another. Maxwell Davidson, in his book Angels at Qumran, suggests that there were seven places in the heavenly temple, with an angelic priesthood for each of these holy spots.76 Similarly, Davila suggests that in the Shirot, “seven firmaments are envisioned, each of which has its own sanctuary containing its own inner chamber (holy of holies) and administered by its own high-priestly chief prince and secondary prince.”77 Carol Newsom is more conservative in her argument, suggesting that “the heavenly temple was in some way considered to contain or consist of seven holy places in which served seven angelic priesthoods, headed by seven angelic high priests and their deputies.”78 All agree that the Shirot’s divine realm is neither a simple, nor

76 Davidson, Angels at Qumran, 239.
77 Davila, Liturgical Works; 84.
a singular, construction. Rather, the divine realm is a complex and multifaceted place, full of overlapping and, at times, seemingly incongruous spaces.

Here, rather than join that conversation directly, my research runs beside the debate over the number of the heavens and offers new ways of looking at these differing celestial spaces of the Shirot. Taking Lefebvre’s comments on monumental architecture as my starting point, I will explore the territory of Songs 7-13, with a look at the setup of Song 1 for the spaces of the rest of the songs, and look at the way the cascade of different spatial terms creates a new and different sort of place for God to dwell. In doing so, I work with the concept of the monumental in architecture and the poetic practice of ekphrasis, specifically with reference to the description of built structures, rather than paintings or scenes. Here, I use the term ekphrasis in the more ancient sense of the word, meaning a written (usually rhetorical) description of “any phenomenon in nature and culture,” rather than in the modern sense of the word, where the description is limited to works of art. When I place the modifier “monumental” before the word, I am referring to the ekphrasis of a built structure in particular. This is not an “official” term per say, but one that I use to make clear the sort of ekphrasis I am discussing in this chapter. Also, it is important to note Graham Zanker’s observation “that ekphraseis may well be bad guides for reconstructing paintings and so forth because they emulate, rather than merely reproducing in words, the objects of art which they describe.” This is directly related to the fact that ancient rhetors saw ekphrasis as an educational tool – the descriptions highlighted the important parts of an image or object and fit the piece under review into a larger narrative that

_____________________________ 
79 In some ways, this can be seen as a corrective to the lacuna Elliot Wolfson sees in scholarship on the scrolls, “Scholars of Jewish literature in the Second Temple period, what is sometimes referred to (in what strikes me as an overly determined historiographical taxon) as “early Judaism,” have not generally appreciated the full mythopoetic import of the imaginal symbol of the celestial temple, a transcendent reality supposedly envisioned contemplatively in the heart of the worshiper, the organ of apperception that corresponds to the throne upon which the glory sits.” “Seven Mysteries of Knowledge,” 184.
81 See Andrew Sprague Becker, in his book The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), 2-3 for a thorough discussion of the changing valence of the term in antiquity and its use in modernity. Though, see also Zanker, Modes of Viewing, 6 for his discussion of the use in antiquity of the term ekphraseis agalmaton, as a sub-category of ekphrasis, which were solely about works of art.
82 Graham Zanker, Modes of Viewing, 7.
the student learnt as they learned about the piece. Thus, it is best to see an ekphrastic passage as a piece of rhetoric, rather than a technical description. Zanker further suggests that “ekphrasis depicts material objects, but, by invoking the audience’s phantasia, it can also go beyond the surface to a deeper reality which the audience is invited to impose, thus changing the meaning of the description.” This observation is important to keep in mind when looking at the ekphrastic passages of the Shirot, for the Shirot’s goal is not just the painting of a scene, but the recreation of the heavenly sanctuary for the singers and listeners.

2.2 Ekphrases of the Tabernacle and the Temple

The idea that the Shirot use the technique of ekphrasis is not new; Ra’ananan Boustan explored the idea in his essay “Angels in the Architecture,” however, Boustan’s work used the idea of ekphrasis to draw out an argument for the Shirot’s use (and inversion) of a pre-existing (Israelite) tradition of using architectural terms to describe angelic beings. Here, I do not disagree with Boustan’s reading; rather, I take a different angle. Boustan’s focus was on the angelic aspects of the ekphrastic scenes, whereas I look at the monumental. Boustan helpfully highlights the fact that the Shirot do not contain the first use of ekphrasis to describe the temple, rather, they draw on a long standing tradition of aggrandizing descriptions of both the temple in Jerusalem, as well as the enthroned Lord in the heavens. For example, Boustan highlights the

---


85 Graham Zanker, *Modes of Viewing*, 8. By invoking Zanker here and by using ideas of ekphrasis in the chapter I hope to avoid what Joseph Angel has described as “the projection of flat, one-dimensional historical assumptions onto the image of the temple in Qumran thought.” *Otherworldly and Eschatological Priesthood*, 101.

86 Ra’ananan Boustan, “Angels in the Architecture: Temple Art and the Poetics of Praise in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice,” in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (Edited by Ra’ananan S. Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 195-212.

description of not just the Lord, seated enthroned, but the architectural detail surrounding him in the call scene of Isaiah 6:

    In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 And one called to another and said:

    “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;/the whole earth is full of his glory.”

4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

Jon Levenson, in his work on the Jerusalem Temple in the Hebrew Bible, notes that in this scene, “Isaiah is privileged to see the difference between the earthly antitype and the heavenly archetype disappear: iconography becomes the reality it symbolizes.”89 For Isaiah, the difference between the earthly copy and the heavenly temple has ceased to be and the two are one. This “contiguity” of the heavenly and mundane, Levenson argues, “accounts for one of the most powerful spiritual dynamics in the Hebrew Bible.”90 While Isaiah 6 highlights this idea, the tradition is strong throughout the psalms (i.e. Psalm 11:4 “The Lord is in his holy temple;/the Lord’s throne is in heaven”) and the importance and, indeed, elaborate nature, of the temple’s architecture remains, despite Deuteronomistic redactions, elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.91

88 Boustan highlights the descriptions in 1 Kings 7 and the theophany of Exodus 24 in particular. Boustan, “Angels in the Architecture,” 203-204. 1 Kings 7 is discussed below, but Exodus 24:9-10 reads, “Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.”


91 “The affinity of Isaiah’s throne-vision with the spirituality of the Temple as it appears in the Psalms is patent.” Levenson, “The Jerusalem Temple in Devotional and Visionary Experience,” 54.
Indeed, the practice of architectural *ekphrasis* remains in overwhelming detail in the account of the temple in 1 Kings. Levenson notes that, “the radical iconoclasm of Deuteronomic tradition, which prohibited all plastic art (Deut 4:15-18), never seems to have taken root in the Jerusalem Temple. There, in contrast, one encountered a dazzling display of art.”92 In 1 Kings 7, we read a rich description of a great variety of architectural decoration: (named!) pillars of bronze, topped with elaborate bronze work of lilies and chain-work wreathes; hundreds of pomegranates; a giant “sea” in a bronze basin, set atop twelve oxen, ten “small” bronze basins, each set on its own stand covered over in cherubim, wreathes, palm trees, lions and oxen; and a number of golden cultic paraphernalia for the interior of the temple. Levenson continues, “The blunt truth is that, if we judged from the descriptions of Solomon’s Temple and the Tent of Meeting (Exod 25-30; 35-40) alone, we should never guess the depth of anti-iconic feeling in ancient Israel.”93 Certainly, the descriptions of the Tent of Meeting in Exodus are classic ekphrastic pieces, overwrought and minutely detailed descriptions of an entity that likely did not exist at all, and if it did, only as a shadow of this impressive textual monument.94 Take, as an example, the opening lines describing the structure of the Tabernacle itself, supposedly an easily portable structure made of cloth:

Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twisted linen, and blue, purple, and crimson yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skilfully worked into them. 2 The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall be of the same size. 3 Five curtains shall be joined to one another; and the other five curtains shall be joined to one another. (Exodus 26:1-4)

These descriptions of God’s temporary home upon the earth suggest that his celestial dwelling place must be even greater and more impressive. The description of the temple in 1 Kings, less

interested in the physical structure of the earthly dwelling spot of the Lord than the Tabernacle texts, is perhaps less elaborate and redundant than the Tabernacle texts precisely because it is describing a structure known to many among the audience of the text. Despite this, both ekphrastic pieces verbally construct whole structures, replete with decoration, for their audiences, sparing no word in their descriptions of the Lord’s first and second earthly dwelling places. It is upon this tradition of *ekphrasis* of both actual and fictional works of architecture that the sweeping scenes of the *Shirot* build their own celestial temples.

In the *Shirot*, however, this technique of monumental *ekphrasis* has visibly shifted in form and in purpose from the style of 1 Kings.\(^\text{95}\) No longer is the goal of *ekphrasis* to describe a structure with which many, if not all, readers/listeners would be familiar. But, the *ekphrasis* of the *Shirot* is not a direct mirroring of the Tabernacle texts’ take on *ekphrasis* either; the *ekphrasis* of the *Shirot* has a larger project at hand. Instead, the *Shirot* use *ekphrasis* to craft an incomparable vision – something that one could not conceive of as ever existing upon the earth. Thus, while not an apocalypse, the *Shirot* offer a rare glimpse into the workings of the heavens and the perfectly ordered kaleidoscoping temples therein. It seems that the *Shirot* were used to demonstrate special and important knowledge of the heavens, using rhetoric similar to apocalypses, such as the Book of Watchers, with its descriptions of sites viewed by few mortals, but lacking a polemical strain; this makes the reason for their composition somewhat puzzling. Were they only intended to make clear the glory of God? Might a priest in the Jerusalem temple have composed them? In addition, the *Shirot*, being in structure liturgical, could also be used to gain access to the heavenly temple. Through use of the *Shirot*, such a reciter of these potent poems now had access to a much grander temple than the one in Jerusalem – one that holds within in it multiples of that singular temple. Here then, one sees an ekphrasistic mimicking of what Anathea Portier-Young calls the “cosmic cartography” of contemporaneous apocalypses.\(^\text{96}\) Whereas in a regular apocalypse, angelic guides make clear the boundaries of the earthly empires and the all-encompassing nature of the cosmos, in the *Shirot* through a tour of the celestial

\(^\text{95}\) Here I offer my understanding of the Shirot, but see also Joseph Angel’s assertion that the Shirot’s spatial understandings derive from Ezekiel’s conceptions of space, which is a very different understanding than mine. Angel, *Otherworldly and Eschatological Priesthood*, 101.

temple, the reader and/or listener recognizes the limits of the earthly temple. Note though that the goal here is quite different, whereas in apocalypses the primary purpose of knowledge of the cosmos is intellectual superiority to one’s overlords, in the Shirot the primary purpose of knowledge about the cosmic temple is to make clear the celestial version’s primacy over the earthly copy. Indeed, the earthly version is a shadow of the heavenly original, and cannot rival it in any category, particularly architectural design, for the celestial temple is not bound by the laws of physics. The style of ekphrases of the Shirot makes this aspect of the heavenly temple quite clear.

2.3 Elsner’s Ritual Visuality and the Politics of Viewing

The politics of temple ekphrasis is a little-explored field, but Jaš Elsner has offered a very stimulating study of Pausanias’s political use of monumental ekphrasis of an ancient Greek cult site under Roman dominion. Elsner notes that Pausanias’ seemingly nonsensical ordering of places demonstrates a deeply focused interest in the detailed precision of ritual, in which the topographical orchestration of a prime sacred center is rendered, and is experienced by writer and readers alike, both as a temporal process of liturgical action and as a spatial progress through a series of monuments whose order and meaning are dependent on their ritual relations with one another.

Elsner argues that in this focus on the way ritual relations relate to one another “[w]hat matters to him (Pausanias), in effect, is not a topography of geographical accuracy, a map of juncture and position, but a topography of ritual correctness,” and that in this different sort of topography “the temporal unfolding of a series of sacred actions becomes the dominant frame for his account.”

The physicality of the site is less important than the ritual grid laid over the top of it. In this

---


98 J. Elsner, Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text.

99 J. Elsner, Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text, 14.

100 J. Elsner, Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text, 15.
topography of ritual correctness, the physical proximity of one altar to another is obsolete, what matters, and what the text preserves, is their relation to one another both temporally and ritually. Thus, this sort of topography “shows a ritual-sensitive visuality in which the pilgrim-viewer submits to the liturgical rule book of a holy site in order to be offered its sacred experience.”

For this “pilgrim-viewer” the desire for the experience of the sacred trumps the need for a Baedeker-like overview of the cult site in question.

Elsner calls this form of visuality, “ritual-centered visuality” and notes that these descriptions evoke not “how the monument looks or where it is so much as of how it works.” This style of visuality is the sort of visuality Lefebvre envisions his *espace conçu* both creating and manipulating, the highlighting of what a culture holds as important through visual cues or guides. It follows that in these descriptions, the meaning of an altar, for example, is “above all a continuing site for the execution of traditional religion” and that such a site had implicit “political and cultural undertones” due to this harkening back to pre-imperial cult. In the case of Pausanias’ account, this reification of ancient cult was a reference to pre-Roman times and the way Greece was before subjugation by an imperial force. In other cases, this same sort of ritual-centered visuality would conjure up images of each culture’s free or “pure” past, before a different group took control of the cult, or when the way a cult operated changed substantially.

This “ritual-centered” visuality need not be “political” in the sense of anti-imperial, but could as easily refer to inner-group disagreements over cultic practice, priestly lineage, or the right interpretation of documents. Or, following Lefebvre, this sort of politics could be less about disagreement and more about the implicit use of the monumental by those in power to retain power and delineate individuals roles based on their place within the monument itself.

---


102 J. Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text*, 16.

103 J. Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text*, 16.
2.4 The Politics of Temple *Ekphrasis*

The idea that the *ekphrasis* of monumental architecture is often implicitly political is a view held by more than just Elsner. Basil Dufallo notes this tendency in his book, *The Captor’s Image: Greek Culture in Roman Ecphrasis*. Dufallo writes that the Palatine Temple of Apollo’s imagery and appearance, immortalized in ekphrastic lines by both Virgil and Propertius, both “subtly acknowledge Octavian’s defeat of Antony” and “encourage an onlooker to interpret Octavian’s victories as a pious defeat of a barbarous foe … all without ever spelling this out in explicit terms.”

One sees here clearly that the elite and the victors can use *ekphrasis* to get their point across. Virgil’s description highlights the success of the West (i.e. Augustus) over the East (i.e. Antony) at multiple points in the narrative, which slips between descriptions of the artwork explicitly (the purple hangings, the gold and ivory doors, and the marble) and the scenes that are in the artwork:

> I’ll be the first, the very first, if I’m let live long enough, to bring back to my own place from the heights of Helicon the prize of the Muses— I’ll be the first to bring back to you, Mantua, the palms of Idumaea, and I’ll erect a marble temple in a grassy meadow by the waters of the wide Mincius whose ambling course flows this way and that, its sides tossing their fringe of wavy rushes. At its centre I’ll place Caesar, master of the shrine, and his honour—the day being mine—resplendent in my purple robes, I’ll drive five score of teams-of-four up and down along the bank. Because of me, all Greece will leave the Alpheus and the Cyprus groves of Molorchus, to compete in running races and bruising bouts of boxing, while I, presiding, my brow wreathed in a chaplet of clipped olive leaves, administer the offerings. Already I can see how pleased I’ll be to front that rich procession and observe the sacrificial slaughter of young stock; or, when the stage is set, to see it turn and open on a change of scene as ornate curtains rise to reveal embroidered Britons in the

---

104 Dufallo, *The Captor’s Image*, 111.
backdrop.
On its doors I will have carved in gold and solid ivory
images of battles, of the Ganges, and the all-conquering
regiments of Romulus,
and, yes, the mighty Nile in the full flood of war,
and columns springing up and decorated with bronze prows of
battleships.
And I’ll add in the Asian cities we’ve defeated and Niphates’
heights we’ve overcome,
and the deceiving Parthian who feigns to turn his thought to
flight
and—imagine—fires arrows backwards, and that pair of
trophies snatched
from different enemies, those races twice defeated at two far
edges of the ocean.
Then I’ll set up, cut in stone from Paros, statues standing in
relief so true to life
they seem to breathe, the scions of Assaracus, famous race of
Jupiter.
the founding father Tros, and he who set up Troy, Apollo;
Jealousy, from which no good could ever come, will quake and
quiver before Cocytus,
That grim river, and Ixion tied to a rotating wheel with writhing
snakes for ropes,
and the rock that bested everyone.

(Vergil, *Georgics* 3:10-38)\(^{105}\)

Here, of course, we see the victor use new architecture to make an implicit political point, but the
power of *ekphrasis* existed as a mode of political expression for both the victor and the
vanquished. Indeed, the reason that monumental *ekphrasis* can be implicitly political is because
the monument it describes is itself often full of implicit images. Thus, Tara Welch notes that the
Palatine Temple proper “brilliantly combines several threads, among which is the victory at
Actium”\(^{106}\) making any single interpretation of the site inadequate. It follows that if the
structure itself allows for multiple and sometimes out of sync narratives, then the writings about
the structure would also be polyvalent and offer both explicit and implicit readings through their
*ekphrasis*. Indeed, Andrew Sprague Becker, in his work on Homeric *ekphrasis*, suggests that “A

---


\(^{106}\) Tara Welch, *The Elegiac Cityscape: Propertius and the meaning of Roman Monuments* (Columbus: Ohio State
University Press, 2005), 114.
complex and shifting aesthetic stance does not necessarily mean confusion. Homeric *ekphrasis* describes an experience of representations, not just their appearance.\textsuperscript{107} While Sprague Becker was working explicitly with Homeric texts and defending Homer from later accusations of losing the thread of narrative in description, his observation regarding complex aesthetic passages holds true for texts besides Homeric Epic. This is particularly true of the *Shirot*’s complex descriptions of the heavens and the celestial structures than fill them. Though, unlike Vergil, the *Shirot* owe nothing to Homer and his techniques; one must look elsewhere for the *Shirot*’s source of *ekphrasis* of monumental architecture. While *ekphrasis* in non-classical texts is not an oft-discussed phenomenon, one can find instances of it in other ancient texts.

After all, the victory of Octavian and his transformation into “Augustus” did not create polyvalent meaning in monumental architecture. Indeed, the complex narratives of monumental buildings and their decorations had long existed before Augustus and were not a Roman phenomenon, but a wide spread one in the ancient Mediterranean world. The idea that at least one narrative for temples is that they are earthly copies of celestial ones is well attested in Akkadian texts on their temples.\textsuperscript{108} Yet, these texts also suggest implicit political meanings to the form and imagery of these mundane copies. Thus, one finds multiple interpretations and meanings in early *ekphrasis* of the Temple in Jerusalem. While I looked at the ekphrastic scenes of 1 Kings’ description of the Temple and the Tabernacle texts of Exodus above, other writings, canonical, non-canonical, and Rabbinic also offer polyvalent readings of *ekphrasis* on the Jerusalem Temple. Jon Levenson’s work on the canonical Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic literature alone highlights this complexity of temple readings. Levenson argues that there was not a single and coherent theology in ancient Israel, but a complex of theological ideas, which sprang from Priestly traditions, but still held currency with Israelite culture at large.\textsuperscript{109} Levenson highlights the ferocity of 3\textsuperscript{rd} Isaiah in its denunciation of the almost superfluous nature of the earthly temple. For 3\textsuperscript{rd} Isaiah, the earthly temple is a replica of the “true” temple, which is the universe

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{107} Andrew Sprague Becker, *The Shield of Achilles and the Poetics of Ekphrasis*, 11.  \\
\textsuperscript{108} See for example, the epic *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian Creation myth, wherein the earthly temple of Marduk is, in fact, an exact copy of his palace in the heavens. *Enuma Elish* (ANET 503).  \\
\end{flushright}
of heaven and earth combined: “Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house which you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?’” (Isaiah 66:1-2). Certainly, 3rd Isaiah suggests that the LORD would not fit into an earthly temple, taking up the entire earth and its heavens already.

One finds multiple understandings of the meaning of the Jerusalem temple in more than just the biblical prophets’ parsing of the temple passages. Many extra-canonical works also explain the complex symbolisms of the Jerusalem Temple. Even the historian and apologist Josephus believed that the temple was cosmically proportioned. Josephus laid out this idea both in The Jewish War and in Antiquities. In War, Josephus offered up much in the way of apology, but hidden within this are references to the cosmic nature of the temple and its accoutrement:

Now in front of these was a veil...of Babylonian woven cloth embroidered in blue and linen as well as scarlet and purple, worked in marvellous fashion. The combination of material it possessed did not lack theoretical significance, but was like an image of the universe. For it appeared that fire was hinted at in the scarlet, the earth in the fine linen, the air in the blue, and the sea in the purple. Some of these things compare for reasons of similarity of colour; others, as in the case of the fine linen and the purple, because of their origin, since earth yields the former and the sea the latter. And the woven cloth was embroidered with the spectacle of the whole heaven, except for the signs of the Zodiac. (War 5. 212-214; translated by Hayward)

Here, we see Josephus directly contradict the stipulations of both Exodus 2:4 and Deuteronomy 5:8, by claiming that there were no figures upon the cloth, but that it was aniconic. Despite this denial of the cherubim upon the veil, the passage does claim that the veil is made to represent (abstractly) the cosmos as a whole. This includes all the elements, as well as heaven itself, albeit devoid of its angelic denizens. In Antiquities, Josephus continued his explanation of the temple as representing the cosmos as a whole, though his discussion was focused on what he took to be the Temple’s precursor, the Tabernacle:

In fact, every one of these objects is intended to recall and represent the universe, as he will find if he will but consent to examine them without

---

prejudice and with understanding. Thus, to take the tabernacle, thirty cubits long, by dividing this into three parts and giving up two of them to the priests, as a place approachable and open to all, Moses signifies the earth and the sea, since these too are accessible to all; but the third portion he reserved for God alone, because heaven also is inaccessible to men. (*Jewish Antiquities* 3 180-181 [Thackeray, LCL])

Here, like in his passage from *War* about the meaning of the veil, Josephus suggests that the tabernacle *in toto* represents the cosmos and that one portion or part of it represents heaven itself. While Josephus does not say that the temple (or the tabernacle) is a copy of the heavenly sanctuary, he does see the earthly sanctuary itself and various parts within it, as being symbolic of heaven. This difference in style may be attributable to the fact that Josephus here is writing a text for outsiders, explicitly, rather than insiders. Thus, he is engaged in a different project, one of persuasion and defense here, as opposed to a display of hidden knowledge to the initiated.

This leads us back to Elsner, who further notes that texts that are focused on “ritual-centered visuality” are all “insider texts, written by religious devotees” making the form of visuality offered “always an initiate’s, and never a skeptic’s.”¹¹² In this sort of text the nonbeliever is completely ignored, if not forgotten. These texts exist to guide the devout and the non-devout need not bother with them. When one accepts this fact and reads these texts, if not as a believer oneself, but knowing the text is written within the rubric of belief, the meaning and importance of each site and its place in the schematic is much easier to understand. This highlights the difference in approach between Josephus’ account of the earthly temple and the *Shirot*’s descriptions of heavenly temple.

### 2.5 The Spatiality of the *Shirot*

It is to these complex and intricately interwoven depictions of the heavenly temples in the *Shirot* that we can now return. Here, the focus is on the tour of the heavenly temple in Songs 9 through 13, but it is helpful to first give a synopsis of all the songs. Thus, Song 1 is an introduction and description of the angelic priesthood, Song 2 dwells on how the human priesthood falls short of the angelic one, Song 3-5 are almost completely destroyed, but might be about an eschatological conflict in heaven, Song 6 offers a description, though not the words, of the praises and blessings

---

of the seven chief angelic priests, Song 7 invokes the praises of not only the angels already described, but also the animate furnishings of the celestial temple, and Song 8 mirrors Song 6, but features the seven secondary princes. Songs 9, 10, and 11 are all poorly preserved, but appear to make up a tour of the heavenly temple(s), with a focus on the Holy of Holies therein, Song 12 is a detailed account of the Throne Room and Song 13 features a return of the angels, with a description of the chief angels’ priestly attire for attending to the celestial sacrifices.

Just as there are varying ways of interpreting the number of heavens in the Shirot, so too are there differing ways of interpreting the importance of the differing songs in the series. While Carol Newsom sees Song 7 as the clear crescendo of the piece, Crispin Fletcher-Louis sees the set a slow build up to Song 13, where sacrifices are finally performed by the angelic priests. Christopher Morray-Jones, in his essay, “The Temple Within,” suggests that one should see Song 12 as the actual peak of the set featuring the descent of the merkabah with the Glory of God in it, with Song 13 as a sort of coda that continues the celebration of the merkabah. Morray-Jones further suggests that Songs 1 through 11 be read together as a continuous “process of ritual construction” of the Heavenly Temple that literally prepares the stage, as it were, for the descent of the merkabah in Song 12. Morray-Jones stakes this claim, in part, on “the very language and terminology of this remarkable liturgy,” and here I think his observations are both (partially) correct and in line with Elsner’s idea of “ritual-centered visuality.” The spatial and architectural terms of the Shirot reflect a deep interest and need for the creation (and building) of a powerful site of ritual by those performing the liturgy. The use of these terms in certain songs and in certain sequences also suggests that Morray-Jones’ understanding of the first eleven songs as a slow building of the heavenly temple is not correct. Save the descriptions in Song 7 of the living and praising temple furnishings, the first eight Shirot focus on the denizens of the celestial realms and do not offer much in the way of a tour of their place of habitude. The most frequent

113 Crispin Fletcher-Lewis, “Heavenly Ascent or Incarnational Presence,”.


referent to the space of their praising is "מרום רום," the highest heights, or "exalted heights,"\textsuperscript{117} or "lofty heavens,''\textsuperscript{118} which renders the celestial nature of these heights explicit (e.g., 4Q400 1 I 20, 4Q400 1 ii 4, 4Q400 2 4, 4Q403 1 I 33-34; and in the plural: 4Q403 1 I 30-31 and MasŠŠ 1 9).\textsuperscript{119} One does not see any interest in the development of these places in any spatial detail, nor any verbal “construction” of these sites.

2.5.1 The Spatiality of \textit{Shirot} 1 and 7

The two exceptions to this are Song 1 and Song 7, which use a far wider vocabulary to describe the regions that these celestial figures inhabit. Thus, Song 1 makes mention of “his royal sanctuary (מקדש מלכותו), “the holy of holies of his glory” (דביר כבודו), “the sanctuaries of the holy of holies” (מקדשים קודשים), “the inner sanctum” (קורב), “the holy of holies” (מקדש), “the sanctuaries of the holy of holies” (מקדשים קודשים), “the palaces/temples of the king” (היכלי אלך), and “the highest heights” (רום מרים), in that (seemingly random) order. Not only are these terms not in the correct order of exterior to interior or interior to exterior for the temple, they have multiplied and linked up to create new spaces, such as the “sanctuaries of the holy of holies.” The word “מקדש”, which I have translated as “sanctuary” here, in Biblical Hebrew usually means the Temple in Jerusalem and not any other temple/sanctuary. Here, however, we have multiples of the Temple and they appear to be either within the holy of holies or else possessed by the holy of holies. Thus, either the holy of holies contains multiple sanctuaries, or multiple sanctuaries lead to a single holy of holies. It is possible that both interpretations are acceptable. In either case, this is an aggrandizing of the idea explicated in Isaiah 6 and certain Psalms, where the Temple on earth links with the celestial throne room and the end of one versus the start of the other is not clear.\textsuperscript{120} This kaleidoscoping of sacred spaces is a poetic technique recurring throughout the \textit{Shirot}, and here in Song 1 it appears to be setting the (vast) stage for the coming vignettes from the celestial realms. This

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} This is James Davila’s preferred translation of the phrase. Davila, \textit{Liturgical Works}, 99.
\item \textsuperscript{118} This is Carol Newsom’s preferred translation of the phrase. \textit{Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: a Critical Edition}, 94.
\item \textsuperscript{119} This phrase is not a Biblical phrase, but Newsom notes that it parallels the word “שמים” in Psalm 148:1 and Job 16:19. \textit{Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: a Critical Edition}, 106.
\item \textsuperscript{120} See the discussion above, on pages 33-36, on these texts.
\end{itemize}
quick rundown of celestial spaces serves as a brief survey of what is to come in the weeks ahead, as the one reciting the songs journeys through the celestial realms and their temple(s). The various sites laid out make up the “topography of ritual correctness,” through and to which the reciter and listener will traverse, over the course of the remaining songs.

One has to wait until Song 7 to return to this all-encompassing place upon place style of verse:

41 With these let all the f[oundations of the hol]y of holies praise, the uplifting pillars of the supremely lofty abode, and all the corners of its structure. Sin[g praise]

42 to Go[d who is Dr]eadful in power, [all you spirits of knowledge and light] in order to [exa]lt together the splendidly shining firmament of [His] holy sanctuary.

43 [Give praise to Hi]m, O you god[like] spirits, in order to pr[aise for ever and e]ver the firmament of the uppermost heaven, all [its beams] and its walls, a[l]l its [for]m, the work of


45 all the hol[y ones...wonder, wonderful with majesty and splendor and wonder. And the gl]ory is in the most perfect light, kn[owledge]

46 [..in all the wondrous sanctuaries; the godlike spirits (are) round about the abode of the King of Truth and righteousness. All its walls...]122

In Song 7 one notes a slightly more ordered progression through the spaces of heaven and the appearance of new places, which do not appear in the earlier Songs (as we have them). As noted above, Carol Newsom sees the seventh song as the crescendo of the set of thirteen songs, but also suggests that one can split the Shirot into two parts, with an ascent in Songs 1-7 and a tour of the Heavenly Temple in songs 9-13.123 Looking at the spatial terminology of Song 7, both crest and lynchpin in Newsom’s schematics, it appears that a shift in focus does occur in that

121 J. Elsner, Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text, 15.
122 This is Carol Newsom’s translation of the section, in Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: a Critical Edition, 212-213.
song. The first half of Song 7 mainly refers to the highest heights when making spatial references, (4Q403 1 I 30,33,34,41, and 43), but in the second half of the song, we see a shift to recurrent mentions of the דביר, that is, the Holy of Holies (4Q403 1 ii 10,11,13,14, 15, and 16). Whether one wants to see Song 7 as the crescendo of the series is one issue; here the key is that Song 7 does mark a clear turn in the narrative of the Songs and it does so using spatial terminology. Song 7 describes places in all parts of the heavens and foreshadows the tour of the heavenly temple that will occupy the remaining five songs.

Along with the appearance of the Holy of Holies (דביר) at this point, the first mention of the Tabernacle (משכן) occurs in the second half of Song 7, “And the tabernacle of highest loftiness, the glory of his kingdom, the debir […]” (4Q403 1 ii 10). This appearance of the Tabernacle of the wilderness comes with a sudden intense descriptive passage on the appearance of the holy of holies(s) and the “seven holy places on high,” where the language echoes that of the Tabernacle texts, as well as that of the opening chapter of Ezekiel. This mixing of imagery from various, even differing, traditions of monumental ekphrases, creates a hybrid and complex scene that includes, rather than precludes, all these various topoi and their unique backgrounds:

11 And He/they consecrate/s the seven lofty holy places. And there is a voice of blessing from the chiefs of His debir […]

12 And the voice of blessing {is heard} is glorious in the hearing of the godlike beings and the councils of […]

13 voice of] blessing. And all the crafted furnishings of the debir hasten (to join) with wondrous psalms in the debir[…]

14 of wonder, debir to debir with the sound of holy multitudes. And all their crafter furnishings […]

15 And the chariots of His debir give praise together, and their cherubim and thei[r] ophanim bless wondrously […]

124 For more on the unique structure of Song 7 see Noam Mizrahi’s recent piece, “The Cycle of Summons: A Hymn from the Seventh Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q403 li 31-40),” DSD 22 (2015): 43-67. Mizrahi’s focus is purely philological and theological in focus, and he does not discuss the spatial terms or the places of the song at all.

125 See Carol Newsom’s careful parsing of these literary glosses, Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, 231-238.
16 the chiefs of the divine *structure*. And they praise Him in His holy debir. (*vacat*) […]

The effect is both awe-inspiring and overwhelming on the reader, or performer, or listener to, the piece. The swell of spatial terminology in Song 7 speaks to the fact that these songs are for initiates and not skeptics; Song 7 marks a transition in the spaces of the heavens, as the review of the various spaces of heaven, repeated from Song 1, gives way to the most sacred and set apart of the celestial places, the holy of holies (דביר) and the tabernacle (משכן) in the second part of the song. Yet, in the case of the holy of holies, rather than one, there are multiple, and the dizzying shifting of spaces from the first half of the Song continues, only in the second half of the song it is from holy of holies to holy of holies, with the tabernacle seemingly afloat betwixt them.

In this section, specifically vv. 10-16, one sees a clear abandonment of any logical geography or cartography, and instead the use of a “ritual-centered visuality,”¹²⁶ that displays the various topoi of the heavens in a manner that best explicates their importance. In this way, Song 7 displays the total glory of the heavens and their relative hierarchies, with the “tabernacle of highest loftiness” (משכן רוש רום) above the other heavenly realms, both physically and ritually, and the other spaces of the heavens—the (multiple) holy of holies and the “seven lofty holy places” (vv. 10), clearly lesser in stature. In addition, the description of the tabernacle is a classic *ekphrasistic* depiction, being set apart from other tabernacles by the chain of three descriptions of it in verse 10; thus, it is not just the tabernacle of the highest height, but also “the glory of his kingdom,” and even the holy of holies (דביר) of […], we can only wonder what, as the text breaks off there. One can surmise, based on the rest of the Song, that the terminology used to describe the holy of holies, which is also the tabernacle, would be superlative and defining its unique status. The claim that the glory of God’s kingdom, the place where he resides within the heavens, is both a Tabernacle (משכן) and a holy of holies (דביר) at the same time is less a conflation of disparate ideas and more a crafting of a strong *ekphrasistic* scene, which is interested in more than just a rote description of the structure’s appearance.¹²⁷ The place of God’s seat in the heavens looks both like the Tabernacle home of the desert years and also like the holy of holies within the Jerusalem

---

¹²⁶ Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text*, 16.

Temple. In an *ekphrasis*ic move worthy of a Homer, Song 7 suggests that the glory of God’s kingdom is a “both/and” situation, rather than privileging one earthly dwelling place over another.\(^{128}\) This does not mean the community at Qumran held all traditions in equal esteem, but that when attempting to describe the celestial spheres, they made use of all the existent descriptions of God’s various dwelling places, combining them into one overarching and overwhelming vision that made clear God’s power and glory.

### 2.5.2 The Spatiality of *Shirot* 8-13

In Songs 8-11 this same combining of spatial terms continues, with most of the spatial references to the holy of holies (דביר). Song 8, the lead in to this section of the *Shirot*, has the least mentions of the holy of holies (דביר), with just a single reference at the very end of the song. Instead, the focus in Song 8 is on the realms of the seven angelic priesthhoods/councils, mirroring, as it does, the focus of Song 6, which recounted the seven angelic princes. Song 8’s descriptions are much richer spatially than Song 6’s descriptions were, with a greater variety of terms and a different set of spaces mentioned. This showcases the way Song 7 serves as a divider between the first six songs and the last six songs.\(^{129}\) In Song 8, we do, however, pull back from the “complete” up-and-down and in-and-out overview of the heavens that Song 7 offered, and see only the middle levels of the heavens. These descriptions of the angelic priesthhoods’ celestial spaces privilege the language of Ezekiel’s descriptions of the celestial temple from Ezekiel 43-44.\(^{130}\) In addition, we see a clear use of “ritual-centered visuality” in this text, as the reader travels out of the holy of holies (דביר) at the end of Song 7 and into the more general Height of Heights (רוּם) at the opening of Song 8. The reader is next introduced to “priests of the inner sanctum,” who appear to have access to that space, but who are not necessarily within that space.

---

\(^{128}\) One notes this same technique of referencing both the wilderness tradition with the temple tradition in the *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, where Wisdom says, “8 Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment, and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent. And he said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.’ 9 From eternity, in the beginning, he created me, and for eternity I shall not cease to exist. 10 In the holy tabernacle I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion. 11 In the beloved city likewise he gave me a resting place, and in Jerusalem was my dominion. 12 So I took root in an honored people, in the portion of the Lord, who is their inheritance” (Ben Sira 24:8-12).

\(^{129}\) *Contra* Morray-Jones. See above, on page 44 for a discussion of his views.

in Song 8. Instead, they appear to each be in their own individual section of the heavens, the “seven wondrous territories (קורבים) according to the ordinances (or boundaries) of His sanctuaries” (4Q403 1 ii, 21). These territories seem to house the sanctuaries of each of these angelic priests, which reappear a little further down in Song 8 as “the seven [most] holy precincts” (4Q403 1 ii 27) of the heavens. The Hebrew word, קורב, here translated as territory, comes from Ezekiel’s description of the unbuilt temple in Ezekiel 43, where he uses the term to reference the temple mount as a whole. Here then we see the start of the official tour of the ritually important parts of the celestial temple(s). The celestial temple both appears to take up either the space of seven temple mounts, or consists of seven different celestial temple mounts, and features seven holy precincts, each overseen by a different angelic priest. These angelic priests offer ever increasing levels of sung offering to the Lord in the celestial holy of holies (דביר).

Here we see a clear example of a “topography of ritual correctness,” as the Jerusalem Temple’s singular precinct is multiplied by seven, and each one is more holy than the last. In terms of visualizing how this might look, one might think of a spiral staircase, of seven steps, each attached to a shaft in the centre, upon which the holy of holies/tabernacle (משכן) perches on top (following the conflation in Song Seven of the holy of holies (דביר) with the tabernacle (משכן)). A visitor (pilgrim?) could either proceed from precinct to precinct in ever increasing levels of holiness, or s/he could access the holy of holies (דביר) directly from each precinct. Because the Shirot are intent on building a ritually precise structure, Song 8 leads one from precinct (and respective angelic priest) to precinct (and respective angelic priest), not missing a single one of the seven. The progression is slow and ritually focused, from the first precinct up to the seventh by the song’s end. While the end of Song 8 is very fragmentary, there is mention of “the holiness of the (inner) sanctum” (4Q405 1 ii, 29), suggesting that songs from the seven different precincts and sanctuaries create or help maintain the holiness of the sanctuary above (and perhaps also all around).

The sanctuary itself is the topic of description in Songs 9, 10, and 11, as the narrative of this ritually correct topography of heaven continues onward and upward. Unfortunately, all three songs are highly fragmented, and we lack the opening sections of them all, so we can neither see how each one leads to the next, nor see how the introduction of each new place within the celestial sanctuary works in this monumental *ekphrasis*. One should also note, that if the *Shirot* were performed one per Sabbath for thirteen weeks, the three songs would not be sung in direct succession, but given their overlap in content and their clear connection, narratively speaking, I deal with them as a trio here. Despite their fragmentary nature, in terms of *ekphrasis*, Songs 9 through 11 offer the richest and most complex descriptions of the heavenly temple, drawing on many preceding traditions about the Jerusalem temple, as well as the heavenly temple, to create a grander and more complex scene than any of these proceeding ones individually. In Song 9, while the holy of holies (דביר) is the place mentioned most often, the singer is not yet there, only headed in that direction. Instead, the song leads one beyond the precincts and to the vestibules of the holy of holies/holies of holies of the celestial sanctuary (4Q405 14-15 i, 4). In the fragment we have of Song 10, the tour has progressed, across rivers of light/fire, to the very veil of the (דבירים) (4Q405 15 ii-16, 3). While highly fragmented, it appears that when the fragment breaks off, it is still outside of the holy of holies (דביר), and at the veil/curtain to it. This position changes in Song 11, where it is clear that the singer can now see several holy of holies (דבירים), though whether they are within it or not is less clear. The song describes the (multiple) holy of holies (דבירים) in great detail, a mix of building materials and spirits that together make up the walls and floors of the space (4Q405 19ABCD 5-6). Yet, even as the interior of these seemingly combined several holy of holies (דבירים) is finally described, the song pulls back in the middle and reminds the listener that this space is at the very top of the height of heights in the heavens, and that the majority of the heavenly beings are “underneath the wondrous [ebirim]” and offer their praises from these lower realms (4Q405 19ABCD, 7). Song 11 makes it clear that the realm described is that of the “priests of the inner sanctum,” presumably the same as the angelic

---

134 Carol Newsom makes an extended note about the great similarity that exists between Song Eleven’s descriptions of the heavenly temple and those of 1 Enoch 14, particularly Enoch’s descriptions of the nave and debir of the Temple. Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: a Critical Edition*, 299, 301-2.

135 Following Davila, I take only 4Q405 15ii-16 (+ 11Q17 v) as being definitively Song Ten. Thus, while in fragments 4Q405 17 and 18, one may reach the debir/im, those fragments are not clearly from any one song, and I do not consider them as part of Song Ten here. Davila, *Liturgical Works*, 139.
priests, whose various precincts were visited in Song 8, only here, the singer/listener observes their Holy of Holies, and may even obtain a glimpse within the holy of holies (דביר) of the Lord himself, along with his chariot throne (“of holiness, the construction of [its] cor[ners…] royal […] the glorious seats of the chariot th[rones…wings of knowledge…wondrous powers…]” (4Q405 20-21-22, 4)).

Together, Songs 9, 10, and 11, create an ever more dizzying and complex image of the upper levels of the heavens, and the inner workings of the celestial temple(s), even while pulling back to look down through the lower levels briefly. In these three songs, the singer/listener comes into contact with what Sprague Becker calls “an experience of representations,” where various and competing images overlap to create a complex depiction of the heavens. The “complex and shifting aesthetic stance” of these passages allows the songs to create an extremely vivid and intense image in the minds of the singer(s)/listener(s) of the piece. One moment the singer/listener is traveling toward the veil of the (plural) holy of holies (דבירים), and the next they are looking downward, below even the territories of the Angelic priests, to the lower realms of the heavens, which are also full of angels praising. While the mixing of the singular holy of holies (דביר) with the plural of ‘holy of holies’ (דבירים) throughout Songs 9, 10, and 11, is at first disorienting, I think that here a distinction is made between the various holy of holies (דבירים) of the various angelic priests’ precincts in Song 8 and the hybrid tabernacle/holy of holies (דביר/משכן) of the Lord. The hybrid tabernacle/holy of holies (משכן) first appeared in Song 7, as I discussed above, as the end of that song’s sweeping overview of the heavenly places about to be toured. Here, it is referenced repeatedly, in between references to the multiple holy of holies (דבירים) of the seven angelic priests of Song 8, but the singer/listener has not reached this place, but only sees it at a distance.

The opening of Song 12 supports this interpretation of the shifting back and forth in Songs 9-11 between speaking of a singular holy of holies (דביר) and a plurality, as it has the first reappearance of the word tabernacle (משכן) since Song 7. Song 12, in fact, lacks any surviving mention of the plural holy of holies (דבירים), even as it allows the singer/listener to cross over into the throne room of God and receive a tour of that space. In Song 12, the throne room of

136 Sprague Becker, The Shield of Achilles, 11.
God is quite clearly, “the tabernacle of the God of knowledge,” (4Q405 20-21-22, 7) where his “Glory” rests along with his chariot throne. Song 12 appears to mark the end of the tour begun in Song 8, and of which Song 7 gave an overview. Here, the singer/listener enters the tabernacle/throne room of God and appears to have a theophany there.

This is not to suggest that Song 13 is a spare song with no clear purpose, nor an addendum to Song 12. Rather, Song 13 features a return to a rich spatial vocabulary, offering, in a single verse, an overview of the heavens and its angelic priests, who are “the chiefs of the realm of the holy ones of the King of holiness in all the heights of the sanctuaries of His glorious kingdom,” (4Q405 23 ii, 11). This suggests that in Song 13, the singer/listener emerges from the throne room and travels back down to the seven sanctuaries, where s/he can now witness the sacrifices of the angelic priests. While to travel all the way past the altars of these spaces and tour the holiest place of the heavens may not make sense from a strict geographic point of view, I have shown that the Shirot do not present a geographic point of view, but instead employ “a topography of ritual correctness,” making a view of the most important section of the heavens and a theophany prior to the witness of the sacrifices completely natural. Thus, the singer/listener realizes that the most important aspect of the heavenly temple is its housing of God in his glorious chariot-throne, and that only because God resides there, do the sacrifices of the various angelic priests matter. This point would be much less clear if Songs 9-11 offered a view of these sacrifices, instead of continually hinting at the greater, higher, and more holy section of the Temple – the tabernacle/holy of holies (משכן/דביר), which houses the chariot-throne of the most high God. In this way, the spaces the singer/listener tours and glimpses and the order in which the spaces are reached emphasises certain “facts” about the celestial temple. Namely, it is larger, grander, and purer than the temple in Jerusalem, and its priests are pure angelic attendants, each with their own precinct and sanctuary, which appear to each have a holy of holies (דביר) of their own. This means that God can dwell in his own throne room כבירה, or seven other heavenly holy of holies (דבירים), instead of descending into the Jerusalem Temple. Rather than paint a picture of the corrupt and mismanaged Jerusalem temple, the Shirot use monumental ekphrasis to express dissatisfaction with the Jerusalem cult by demonstrating knowledge of the

---

137 See also Elliot Wolfson’s understanding of the last three songs of the Shirot as a literary unit in his piece, “Seven Mysteries of Knowledge,” 191.
intricate workings of the pure celestial temple. One who wishes to witness the proper sacrifices of this place must first receive an introduction to the place (Song 1), learn about the denizens of place (Song 2-6), have an overview of the topography of the place (Song 7), receive a ritually informed tour of that topography (Songs 8-11), enter the most holy portion of this extremely holy place (Song 12) and only then witness the sacrifices of this temple made up of multiple sanctuaries (Song 13). Lefebvre’s notion of the monumental being a space of contradiction is made quite clear in the Shirot, for the singers of and listeners of these pieces are both implicitly compared to the perfection of the angels and made cognizant of their special status in earthly society, all through the poetic touring of the celestial temple(s), with their architectural grandeur and physics defining parameters.

2.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I have taken a different approach to the Shirot than other scholars before me. I have explored the spatial dimensions of the heavens, as the Shirot depict them. To do this, I opened with a look at scholarly definitions of ekphrasis in ancient texts and explained my choice of the ancient meaning of the term, which calls any descriptive passage of an object an ekphrasis. I then explored the use of ekphrases in early Israelite texts on the Jerusalem temple, as well as the celestial temple and the way these two types of ekphrases are often conflated in poetic and prophetic texts. I looked at the way the practice of ekphrasis had shifted from these earlier texts to the Shirot’s use of ekphrasis, which was informed by the apocalyptic technique of demonstrating superiority against another group through special knowledge. Here this knowledge is about the celestial temple, both its floor plan(s) and its rituals. I explored current work on temple ekphrasis, focusing in on Elsner’s idea of a “ritual-centered visuality” informing many such descriptions, but also referencing Dufallo’s work on the implicitly political nature of these ekphrastic passages and Sprague Becker’s suggestion that ekphrases with seemingly incongruous sections are not confused, but instead attempting to create an aesthetic experience through these sequences of overlapping images. The second half of the chapter then offered an exploration of the Shirot’s own monumental ekphrasis of the celestial temple. This study focused on Songs 7-13, exploring the complicated spatial sequences through these new lenses. I demonstrated that Song 7 serves as a transitional section in the Shirot, mapping quickly all the realms of the heavens and setting the scene for the detailed tour that follows. I then examined more closely this complicated tour, and demonstrated that the spatial progressions of Songs 8-13
make the most sense when seen as a tour through the ritually correct topography of the celestial temple. This allowed me to suggest that the reason the theophany occurs in Song 12 is because the purpose of these songs is, in fact, the witnessing of the Sabbath Sacrifices, which only occur in Song 13, as the visitor to the celestial temple must first understand the relation of each section of the heavenly temple to one another ritually, before s/he can see the sacrifices. One sees from this study that Lefebvre was right about monumental pieces – they are the most “tricked up” and deceptive of all spaces -- and when one is looking at a celestial monumental building, the size of at least seven earthly sanctuaries, this intricacy is only multiplied. The Shirot then offer a tour of heaven that is all temple, but this temple is multi-storied, multi-structured, and can only be understood when thought of as multi-dimensional.

Thus, despite being a poetic tour of the heavens, the Shirot ultimately endorse a heaven that is in keeping with concurrent understandings of the main feature of heaven being the celestial temple.\textsuperscript{138} The Shirot, however, appear to endorse a multi-level understanding of the heavens, even though these multiple layers are all temples, seemingly within a temple. In the next chapter I explore the effect the destruction of the earthly temple in Jerusalem had on understandings of the heavenly temple, as well as on the layout of the heavens themselves. While some texts retained an obsession with the heavenly temple and its workings, others embraced the idea of a heaven made up of multiple layers, but no longer all temple.

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{138} Such as one sees in the Book of Watchers or even in the slightly later Apocalypse of Zephaniah.
Chapter 3

3 Catastrophe and the Stoic Spaces of Coping: the Hidden Places of 3 Baruch

3.1 Introduction

Having looked at a poetic text exemplifying the Second Temple era interest in the celestial temple as the main attraction of the heavens, I now move forward in time to the period just before and after the cataclysmic event of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. The literature of this time period is rich and here I focus first on 1st c CE Jewish apocalypses in general, and then turn to a close study of one of the post-70 CE ones, 3 Baruch. By looking at this text in particular, I show both the changing morphology of the heavenly landscape generally speaking, vis-à-vis the earlier Second Temple understandings, and the diverse work these different apocalypses do with their visions of the divine realm. Whereas most texts focused on the heavens and composed in the 1st century CE retain the earlier focus on the celestial temple and the throne room located in its Holy of Holies, which we saw in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, 3 Baruch not only lacks a fulsome description of the temple, but denies Baruch any vision, however fleeting, of it at all. This is in contrast to other texts of the era, such as 2 Enoch and the Apocalypse of Abraham, which offer tours of the heavens that feature the celestial temple and/or the glory of God enthroned as the central focal point. 3 Baruch’s descriptions of the heavenly realms appear, in large part, to be a “moth balling” of important mythic topoi in the heavens, keeping them both safe and out of human (and, it seems, angelic) reach. This variance in 3 Baruch from other contemporary texts via the denial of Baruch a “full tour” of heaven and theophany has led previous scholars to see 3 Baruch as a poorly executed apocalypse. In this chapter I seek to demonstrate that 3 Baruch is not poorly executed, it merely operates with a different goal and a different understanding of the workings of the celestial spheres than other contemporary texts. 3 Baruch is a pensive text that demands patience and lowered expectations for the short-term future from its readers.
This brings one to the key issue for several early scholars regarding 3 Baruch; they accused the text of being a failure as an apocalypse. More recent scholarship has chosen to identify 3 Baruch as an apocalypse, claims I examine below in my review of the scholarship, though they offer no one clear definition of apocalypse to which one might compare 3 Baruch. This is perhaps in part due to the change that has occurred over the past century in terms of how we decide what sort of text defines a certain genre. Here, I note that John Collins in his attempt to define and identify the genre of “apocalypse” categorized 3 Baruch as an example of “Otherworldly Journeys with Only Personal Eschatology,” (Type IIc). Collins further notes that the apocalypses he terms, “historical” (Type I) only make up “about one-third of the Jewish apocalypses,” but had served as the basis of most definitions of “apocalypse” in general up to that point. It seems this scholarly predilection for the historical apocalypses is mainly due to the fact that Daniel, the apocalypse of the Hebrew Bible, and Revelation, the early Christian apocalypse par excellence, both fit under this heading. Thus, the format of these canonical

139 See the comments of C.C. Torrey and M.R. James below in section 3.3.

140 John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” Semeia 14 (1979):1-20. Collins’ overall definition of an apocalypse is “Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world,” 9. In her more recent work on the earliest of the Jewish apocalypses, which she terms ‘historical apocalypses,’ Anthea Porter-Young uses the categories created by Collins, Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2011), 44-45. While the concept of genre with respect to ancient texts is being rethought, Benjamin Wright notes that “The definition put forward in that publication [i.e. Semeia 14] has become widely accepted and has served as the foundation for subsequent discussion of the genre.” Benjamin Wright, “Joining the Club: a Suggestion about Genre in Early Jewish Texts,” DSD 17 (2010): 288-314.


apocalypses, particularly of *Revelation*, appears to serve as the measuring tape in scholarly studies of other apocalyptic texts.\(^{143}\)

In the case of *3 Baruch*, the problem seems to be not what *3 Baruch* holds in common with other apocalypses, following Collins’ schematic (visions, discourse, otherworldly journey, an otherworldly Mediator, pseudonymity, primordial events, eschatological crisis and judgment, etc.),\(^{144}\) but what other “Otherworldly Journey” texts have that it lacks, chiefly a theophany and cosmic transformation. Indeed, it is this lack of a theophany that seems to have been the chief critique of the text from the start of English scholarship on *3 Baruch*.\(^{145}\) Here, it might be helpful to consider recent proposals to rethink the way biblical scholars use genre to describe ancient texts and the goals they have in doing so. Benjamin Wright has been a proponent of using “prototype theory” to work with questions of genre, particularly with respect to second temple texts. Prototype theory, “suggests that one of the ways that human beings organize conceptual and semantic spaces is by recognizing or identifying prototypical examples that together create a template against which other possible group members are judged.”\(^{146}\) In this way a whole “constellation” of criteria makes up a certain category, and members of this category fall along a continuum from having many of these criteria to having only a few.\(^{147}\) The examples that have the majority of these criteria then become the exemplars of that genre, but are not the means by which one categorizes texts as in or out of the family; familial resemblance, even slight, is enough to be considered part of the genre. In the case of *3 Baruch*, the text has

143 Martha Himmelfarb makes essentially this same point in the introduction to *Ascent to Heaven*, 5. Christopher Rowland opens his discussion with a look at both *Daniel* and *Revelation* as exemplars of an apocalypse, but also lists *3 Baruch* as an apocalypse in his chapter, ‘What is Apocalyptic?’ in *The Open Heaven: a Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 15. See also L. Linton’s “Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse: the Limits of Genre,” *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (ed. David L. Barr; SBLSymS 39; Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 9-41. But, see Collins’ critique of Linton’s misrepresentation of the project as a whole in his “Epilogue: Genre Analysis and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *DSD* 17 (2010): 418-430.


145 See in particular M. R. James’ comments about the text outlined and discussed below.


147 Wright, “Joining the Club: A Suggestion about Genre in Early Jewish Texts,” 293-4.
more than slight familial resemblance to apocalyptic; it has at least seven strong points within the constellation of apocalyptic. Here then, one sees that the lack of a theophany is not grounds for not admitting 3 Baruch into the fold of apocalypses. In this chapter, however, I strive not to prove a point of genre, a topic recently discussed and much troubled in Biblical Studies, but to shift the focus on 3 Baruch to a study of the very issue that so upset the [early] modern scholars, the lack of a theophany and viewing of the celestial temple as the conclusion, or even as just a portion of the text. Thus, in this chapter I explore the reason 3 Baruch is an abbreviated and incomplete tour of the heavens.

3.2 Third Baruch

The book of 3 Baruch was written shortly after the fall of the Second Temple in 70 CE as a means of explanation for that calamity, while the story is set in the aftermath of the destruction of Solomon’s temple in 587 BCE. Yet, the narrator of the piece, Baruch the pious scribe, is not bound to his time and place in the ruins of Jerusalem; instead, Baruch receives visions of the mythic past and hints of the glorious future in store for all who are righteous upon the earth. The righteous, such as Baruch, will either become bird like creatures or simply dwell in a lake with said bird-like creatures, and (in either case) behold this celestial world now invisible in that time now hidden to all but Baruch, who only sees bits of the place in angelic revelation. This celestial place is a world nearly inconceivable in its possibilities for Baruch and his contemporaries (and by extension, the pseudepigraphic author and his/her contemporaries), for it is multi-layered, and contains both places of punishment and a plethora of paradisiacal aspects. In this respect, 3 Baruch mirrors other contemporary celestial journey texts, with its revelations of both divine facts and the wonders of the celestial realm. Indeed, in 3 Baruch, this celestial

---

148 It is worth noting here that the issue of pseudepigraphy is another example of a core criteria of an apocalypse that one of the genre’s two prototypes, Revelation, lacks. Newsom discusses this point of tension in “Spying Out the Land,” 25. In addition, with respect to the issue of 3 Baruch and its lack of a theophany, Collins, in his Semeia piece, does not include theophany in his schematic of necessary components of an apocalypse and he suggests a cosmic transformation is an optional feature of an apocalypse. “Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” 7.

149 The entire volume 17 of Dead Sea Discoveries was given over to discussion of genre, but see especially John Collins’ end piece, “Epilogue: Genre Analysis and the Dead Sea Scrolls”.

150 Familiar to readers of Jeremiah, a figure who receives no mention in Third Baruch.

151 The nebulous nature of the passage in question will be explored below.
world appears to hold Eden itself within it, though Baruch is denied a vision of paradise itself, just as he is denied a vision of the celestial temple and God upon his throne within it. Here, then one sees the chief difference in the structure of 3 Baruch from other contemporary celestial journey texts; whereas Enoch and Abraham, and even Baruch himself in a different text (2 Baruch) all receive a vision of the enthroned God, Baruch does not achieve this grand conclusion to his trip, he is instead quite suddenly cast back down to the earth, having only made it to the threshold of the fifth heaven.

The decision to focus on 3 Baruch in the second half of this chapter is, perhaps, surprising. The scholarship on 3 Baruch, which I briefly review below, is scant and the early studies were less than encouraging with respect to the fruitfulness of further study in their own treatments of such an unusual ascent text. Indeed, the earliest scholarship on 3 Baruch wrote the text off as hopelessly tangled and certainly corrupt. Despite this, I believe 3 Baruch deserves a second, if not a third, reading; one that asks different questions of it than these previous studies and does not assume that a perceived “lack” in the text is due to authorial incompetence, but, rather, a different message than other Jewish texts written right after 70 CE. Thus, while other scholars have approached 3 Baruch with various templates for what is and is not a “proper” or “effective” apocalypse, I have approached the text desirous of seeing what 3 Baruch can tell us about views on the heavens in the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple. By using different theorists and asking different questions of 3 Baruch, I have found this dense and complicated text to be full of information and insights oft overlooked. 3 Baruch is not a failure of an apocalypse; it simply functions in a different way and towards a different end than most apocalypses and/or ascent texts that came before and after it.

This new reading of 3 Baruch fits into the larger scheme of this project, as I believe that in order to understand the logic of 3 Baruch’s heavens, one must understand the spatiality of its heavenly realms. Thus, in order to facilitate this new reading, in this chapter, I use spatial theory informed by the works of Gaston Bachelard to explore Baruch’s and his angelic interlocutors’ many maps of the heavens in order to gain a clearer image of this past-present-future realm of the righteous.

152 But, this is a problem revisited by James Davila in his work on using the pseudepigrapha as witnesses to ancient Judaism, although Davila does not discuss 3 Baruch in his work. James Davila, The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other? (SJSJ 105; Leiden: Brill, 2005).
the angels, and the almighty God. I argue that the temporal impossibilities of this once and future place work in tandem with the place’s spatial complexities to demonstrate the un conquerable nature of the God of Israel, even when lacking an earthly temple in which to dwell. While the Romans have destroyed the Second Temple, 3 Baruch assures its readers that this act does not signal the defeat of their God. Rather than invoke a simple temporal comparison of the First Temple narrative with the current narrative, the author of 3 Baruch plays with temporal and spatial dimensions, linking various mythic toposi together to create a counter-space to the hegemonic discourse of Roman imperial time and place. This counter-space was before the Romans, exists outside of their world, and will welcome the righteous in a glorious future. The fact that this time was and will be, but is not now is apparent from the places Baruch visits and the places about which Baruch only hears. The angelic guide Panuel shows Baruch the places of punishment for the various wicked of the earth and the current resting place for the souls of the righteous, but the angel does not show Baruch the Garden of Eden, the celestial temple, or the enthroned God. These three places denied Baruch are all sites from ancient myth that long predate a Roman presence in Judea. Indeed, these are primordial and potent sites for Judaism. Thus, in the contemporary topsy-turvy world of brutal Roman domination, 3 Baruch suggests these sites have been locked up in heaven, frozen in time, and kept safe until the future restoration. But, this inscribing of mythic sites in the sanctity of the heavens is not the only event of importance in 3 Baruch.

In this chapter, I argue that 3 Baruch’s heaven is composed of seven heavens, though Baruch only travels to five of them. I further argue that this denial by the heavenly denizens to let Baruch see the upper heavens and the glory of God is intentional and an important aspect of the overall project of the apocalypse. This denial of vision is an intriguing facet of the text and is, I believe, an integral part of the overall project of 3 Baruch. Thus, this chapter will explore not only spatiality, but also visuality, and how these ideas translated into texts featuring tours of heaven and, more specifically, how all this affected the text of 3 Baruch. Here I open with an

---

153 The idea of the celestial temple can be found in many texts, including the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, the Hodayot, 2 Baruch, 1 Enoch, and Revelation.

154 Thanks to Steven Weitzman, who suggested this route of development for this chapter, when I was at Stanford for the “Old Time Religion Conference.”
introduction to the world of *3 Baruch*, move on to an exploration of the heavenly realms found in texts contemporary to *3 Baruch*, where ideas about visuality that I discussed in the previous chapter will reappear, introduce the work of Gaston Bachelard to this discussion, and close with some observations regarding the location and nature of the celestial temple in *3 Baruch*. Thus, this chapter not only aids my overall goal in this project of charting the shifting celestial realms of antiquity, but also moves the discourse on *3 Baruch* forward in a fruitful manner.

### 3.3 A Brief Review of the Literature on *3 Baruch* to Date

The first critical edition of *3 Baruch* was of the Slavonic recension from a Serbian manuscript, S. Novaković published it in an academic journal in 1886.\(^{155}\) The first English edition was published some years later in 1897, by M. R. James in volume II of Robinson’s *Text and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature*, which offered a critical edition of the Greek text based on a manuscript from the British Museum (Cod. Mus. Brit. Add. 10,073) and a translation of the Slavonic manuscript of Novaković.

In recent work on *3 Baruch*, scholars often quote either C.C. Torrey, who called the work “a good example of a degenerate apocalypse … the account of which is grotesque rather than impressive”\(^{156}\) due to the odd shape of the text, or M. R. James’ reference to *3 Baruch* as a “curious—almost grotesque—book,”\(^{157}\) as examples of the negative treatment *3 Baruch* received when it first came to the attention of western scholars (James made this statement in the introduction to the volume that housed the first English critical edition of the Greek text and the first English translation of the Slavonic.) Torrey certainly does seem to have held *3 Baruch* in low esteem\(^{158}\) and the paucity of literature on the text following its publication vis-à-vis other


158 Having noted at the start of his article that, “The most noteworthy example of degeneration along this line is furnished by the Greek Apocalypse Baruch,” wherein degeneration refers to the so-called “Enochic” apocalypses. Torrey, “Apocalypses,” *Jewish Encyclopedia* 1 (1901), 669-675, 674.
apocalyptic texts aptly demonstrates the lack of scholarly interest in 3 Baruch. In the case of James, however, the full quote reads, “I shall be particularly glad if my readers will help me with suggestions as to the date and nature of this curious—almost grotesque—book”, suggesting not just disdain, but legitimate puzzlement by the text. Indeed, James uses the softer descriptor of “a most curious and amusing document” in his study of the text, suggesting confusion coupled with entertainment on his part. I should like to take up James’ request and offer him a belated attempt at reading out meaning and sense from this admittedly intricate apocalypse.

Other scholars before me have turned their attention to this slim and surprising apocalypse, most notably, Daniel C. Harlow in his published dissertation, The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (3 Baruch) in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity and Alexander Kulik’s commentary with a parallel translation of both the Greek and the Slavonic recensions. I am greatly indebted to these two works, which have paved the way for more particularized studies of 3 Baruch, such as this one.

While Harlow’s and Kulik’s works are broad and all encompassing, scholarship since the early 1970s has also focused on various aspects of 3 Baruch’s world. Thus, Martha Himmelfarb and Richard Bauckham have written on the locus of Hades within the realm of 3 Baruch’s heavens in their larger studies on the subject. Himmelfarb has also written on 3 Baruch within her study of heavenly ascent, as has Leif Carlsson more recently. 3 Baruch has made appearances in works looking at literature written in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, such as

---

159 This paucity of literature is apparent even when one looks at the amount of publications of other examples of Pseudepigrapha best preserved in Slavonic, such as 2 Enoch. For evidence of this, see Andrei Orlov’s recent bibliography on the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha, the list for 2 Enoch takes up nineteen pages, whereas the list for 3 Baruch takes up only five pages. Orlov, Selected Studies in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha (SVTP 23; Leiden: Brill, 2009).

160 M. R. James, “Preface,” v.


163 Martha Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven; Leif Carlsson, Round Trips to Heaven.
Dereck Dashke’s *City of Ruins* and Kenneth Jones’ *Jewish Reactions to the Destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70*[^164] Adela Yarbro Collins and Christopher Rowland included *3 Baruch* in their respective studies of the formation of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic[^165]. This work is the first study to engage with spatial theory, as well as the first, to focus on the mythic locales of the heavens in *3 Baruch*.[^166] I believe that by focusing on the places of *3 Baruch*’s heavens, I have arrived at a more satisfactory explanation of the five heaven schematic than other theories before me.[^167]

### 3.4 Introduction to the World of *3 Baruch*

*Third Baruch*’s language of composition was Greek[^168], and we have the text extant in some twelve Old Church Slavonic manuscripts, as well as a handful of early modern Greek manuscripts (c. 15th/16th century).[^169] In this chapter, I will be working with the Slavonic


[^166]: While Martha Himmelfarb places part of her discussion of *3 Baruch* in her chapter entitled, “The Secrets of Nature, Primeval History, and the Order of the Cosmos,” she does not focus on the spatiality of the heavens, but rather looks at the role of natural phenomena in the text. As such, her findings and my findings in this chapter are mainly complimentary. Himmelfarb, however, does embrace the idea that *3 Baruch* as we now have it is an abridgement of a longer text that would have included a tour of all seven heavens, a point on which I disagree. *Ascent to Heaven*, 87-93.

[^167]: Kenneth Jones argued that Baruch was never promised a vision of God – but of God’s mysteries in this phrase and that the angel, therefore, did not lie or mislead Baruch, but showed him many such mysteries in the heavens. Jones, *Jewish Reactions*, 24. Most recently, Jonathan Morgan has offered yet another apologetic for the denial of Baruch a theophany by suggesting that the oil of anointing is, in fact, the Glory of God (“The Vision of the Glory of God in the *Apocalypse of Baruch* (*3 Baruch*)”, *JSP* 22.3 (2013): 184-200). While this is an interesting interpretation, I am not convinced that is the correct, or even the best of interpretations. I believe the motif of denial is a key trope in *3 Baruch*, and as such, it must be embraced, not explained away.


[^169]: Alexander Kulik, in his commentary on *3 Baruch* has outlined the manuscript evidence in a helpful chart. *3 Baruch: Greek-Slavonic Apocalypse of Baruch* (*Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature*; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 8. Despite the fact that the majority of the extant texts were in Old Church Slavonic, no critical Slavonic text existed until 1983, with the completion of a Hebrew University Dissertation dedicated to this project
recension and all the citations will be to the Kulik edition of the Slavonic text. There are several reasons for this decision; in the first place, the Slavonic is a better textual witness to the initial Greek Vorlage,\textsuperscript{170} lacking the overt Christian interpolations of the subsequent Greek reception, perhaps most blatantly apparent in 4:15, where Jesus himself appears, “so again through Jesus Christ the Emmanuel {and} in him is the receipt of the future invocation, and the entry into Paradise,” a passage entirely lacking in the various Slavonic manuscripts. In the second place, in chapter four the Slavonic text gives the fuller account of the planting of the Garden of Eden story, an important scene for the overall narrative (this was likely omitted from the Greek recensions in an act of homoeoarchon),\textsuperscript{171} as well as a longer non-Christianized version of the end, where the text suggests an eventual movement of the righteous upwards past the lake of the fourth heaven.\textsuperscript{172} While the Slavonic allows the scholar to be one step closer to the earliest Greek text, it too is a late recension, with the earliest manuscript dating only to the 13\textsuperscript{th} century and stemming from a Byzantine archetype that was not the ‘ur-text’ of 3 Baruch.\textsuperscript{173} Indeed, the extended end of the Slavonic text is likely a Byzantine, but still Jewish, addition to the original text.\textsuperscript{174}

While most scholars now accept that 3 Baruch’s language of composition was Greek and not Hebrew,\textsuperscript{175} another aspect of 3 Baruch that supports this view is that in the opening of 3

\begin{footnotes}


\footnotetext{171}{Alexander Kulik, 3 Baruch, 189.}

\footnotetext{172}{“And the angel told me, “By the command of the Ruler I say to you, Baruch: Stand on the right side and see the Glory of God, and see the resting places of the righteous, gory and joy and happiness [and] glorification” (15:6a).}

\footnotetext{173}{Harlow; The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch, 9-10.}

\footnotetext{174}{Kulik, 3 Baruch, 377-8.}

\footnotetext{175}{This was proved by Gaylord, in his dissertation and laid out again in his chapter in Charlesworth, and is a view supported by Harlow’s and Kulik’s more recent published work. Gaylord, “The Slavonic Version of III Baruch;” Harlow, The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch, 6-7; Kulik, 3 Baruch, 11.}
\end{footnotes}
Baruch, Baruch receives his tour of heaven immediately after he is introduced, “weeping over the captivity of Jerusalem,” (Title 1:2b, both G and S) and crying aloud, saying, “O Lord, in what way was Nebuchadnezzar the king righteous? Why did you not spare your city Jerusalem, why have you set fire to your vineyard, and laid it waste?” (Prologue 1:2 S). This is an obvious reference to Baruch’s final scene in the book of Jeremiah, where Baruch cries aloud, “Woe is me! Woe is me! Because the Lord has added sorrow to my pain, I slept in groaning, and I found no rest,” and the Lord responds,

Behold, I bring down whom I have built up and pluck up whom I planted. And you will seek great things for yourself. Do not seek them because, behold, I am bringing evil upon all flesh, says the Lord, but I will give your soul as a windfall in every place, there where you may go.\[177\]

Whereas in the Masoretic version of the book of Jeremiah, this scene comes in chapter 45, prior to the “Oracles Against the Nations,” in the LXX, this passage comes in chapter 51, immediately after these oracles. In this way, Baruch is the last person to receive an oracle in the book of Jeremiah, according to the LXX, setting him up to take on the prophetic mantle of Jeremiah as the one to whom the Lord still speaks.\[178\] Thus, the LXX version of Jeremiah paints Baruch as the clear successor of Jeremiah and capable of prophecy and direct communication with God.

The author of 3 Baruch clearly follows this pro-Baruch school of thought, taking up the narrative where the Greek version of Jeremiah leaves off, with the start of Baruch’s new career, that of seer. Baruch’s career as Jeremiah’s heir is a curious affair though – while the Lord never speaks directly to the Baruch of 3 Baruch as he did with Jeremiah, this Baruch transverses the heavens, something Jeremiah did not do.

---

176 ὁίμμοι οίμμοι ὅτι προσέθηκεν κύριος κόπον ἐπὶ πόνον μοι ἐκοιμήθη ἐν στεναγμοῖς ἀνάπαυσιν οὐχ ἔδρον” Jeremiah 51:33, A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under that Title.

177 ἵππον αὐτὸν οὗτος ἐπεν κύριος ἰδοὺ οὗς ἐγὼ ὁκοδόμησα ἐγὼ καθαιρῶ καὶ οὗς ἐγὼ ἔφυτεσα ἐγὼ ἐκτίλλω (35) καὶ σὺ ἔπτεσες σεαυτῷ μεγάλα μη ἐπὶ τῆς ἐπάθεσες ὅτι ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐπάθαν κακά ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα λέγει κύριος καὶ δόσω τὴν ψυχὴν σου εἰς ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ οὗ ἐὰν βαδίσῃς ἐκεί” (Jeremiah 51:34-35)

Both versions of the text, Slavonic and Greek, consist of Baruch’s tour of five heavens with discussion between Baruch and his angelic guide about various geographic topoi within each heaven. The first and second heaven both consist of large plains with the men who tried to build the tower of Babel, transformed into strange beasts upon them:

And there was the first heaven and in that heaven he showed me very large doors. And the angel told me, “Let us enter through these doors,” And we entered about a 30 days’ journey. He showed me means of safety. (3) And I saw a plain, where men were living whose faces were those of cattle, with the horns of deer, the feet of goats, and the loins of sheep … (7) I said to the angel, “Lord, who are these strangely shaped creatures?” And the angel told me, “These are those who built the Tower of War against God [and] the Lord banished them. (3 Baruch 2:2-3, 7)

And the angel took me and brought me to the second heaven and showed me large open doors, and the angel told me, “Let us enter through them.” (2) And we entered flying about a 7 days’ journey. (3) And he showed me a great chamber, and there were strangely shaped creatures living in it, with the faces of dogs, the feet of deer, and the horns of goats. (4) And I asked the angel of the Lord, “Who are these? (5a) And he told me, “These are those who planned to build the Tower.” (3 Baruch 3:1-5)

The third heaven contains Hades, which takes the form of a large serpent upon a mountain, and, it would appear, the Garden of Eden, for it is here that Baruch requests a view of “the tree which deceived Adam” (4:6). However, instead of showing Baruch the tree, the angel tells Baruch the tree’s tragic history of corrupting men (4:10-16; quoted below). The fourth heaven consists of another plain, with a large lake filled with exotic birds, which appear to be the souls of the righteous transformed:

And the angel of hosts took me to a large [and] wide mountain, (2) and in the midst of the mountain there was a large lake of water. (3) And there were birds from all heaven, but not similar to these [on earth], [but] very large, similar to a crane. And there were other birds larger than those. (4) And I asked the angel, “What is this lake in the midst of the mountain and what are these birds?” (5) And he told me, “These are pure birds praising God unceasingly day and night. (6) And the clouds take water from there and rain upon earth, and a fruit grows.” (3 Baruch 10:1-7)\footnote{Note, the Slavonic does not make explicit that the birds are the souls of the righteous; the Greek adds a line clarifying this (“Listen, Baruch! The plain that has in it the lake and other wonders [is the place] where the souls of the righteous come, when they assemble, living together choir by choir’… And I said again to the angel of the Lord, ‘And the birds?’ And he told me, ‘They are those which continually sing praise to the Lord.’” (Greek 10:5-7), but...}
Baruch and his guide make it to the gates of the fifth heaven, but they do not enter it, instead the archangel Michael comes out and greets both them and a number of angelic attendants, who approach the gates bringing offerings in the form of flowers to the Lord:

And, while I was talking, and behold, angels came, carrying offerings full of flowers. (2) And I said, “Lord, who are these?” (3) And he told me, “These are the angels who are in the power of men. (4) And Michael took the offerings from them and put them in the receptacle. (3 Baruch 12:1-5)

Given that the Greek and Slavonic versions stem from different recensions of a now lost earlier text, it is intriguing to note that both feature the builders of the tower of Babel in the first and second heaven. This suggests that a very early version of 3 Baruch also featured this seeming repetition. Richard Bauckham was the first to suggest that this repetition must be the author replacing the two groups of fallen watchers, witnessed by Enoch in the second and fifth heavens, in 2 Enoch, with the builders. Bauckham sees this as “a polemical rejection of the Enoch traditions,” a stance that Martha Himmelfarb supports in her work on 3 Baruch. More recently, Andrei Orlov has both nuanced and taken this idea one step further, placing this narrative arc in the Adamic family of texts. Aside from the twofold appearance of the builders of the tower of Babel, and the complete erasure of the watchers from the “creation and fall” narrative Panuel recounts in 3 Baruch, Bauckham argues that the choice of Baruch, rather than Enoch, as the hero of the piece and the tracing of the origin of evil to the Garden of Eden are obvious acts of polemic against the Enochic traditions. Orlov notes that 3 Baruch is not following Kulik’s work on celestial birds as souls, it would seem that the original text was ‘laconic’ regarding this point. Kulik, 3 Baruch, 292-295.


181 Martha Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven, 93. Indeed, Himmelfarb suggests that there are more examples than the ones Bauckham furnishes in his article for categorizing 3 Baruch as “anti-Enochic.”


without any Enochic traits, but suggests this is evidence of 3 Baruch being engaged in an active polemic against a contemporaneous (and physically proximal?) Enochic school of thought.

Orlov argues that this polemic is achieved through the reworking of both Enochic and Noachic material with Adamic tropes; one sees this particularly clearly in the narrative of the tree/vine in 3 Baruch 4:7-15, where Panuel draws together the wicked angels (Enochic), the tree from which Adam and Eve ate (Adamic), and the vine off of which Noah got drunk (Noachic) into one whirlwind narrative that spans many years and miles:  

And the angel told me, “When God made the Garden and commanded Michael to gather 200,003 angels to plant the Garden, Michael planted the olive and Gabriel, the apple; Uriel, the nut; Raphael, the quince; and Satanael, the vine. And similarly all the angels planted the Garden in order.” (8) And I Baruch said to the angel, “Show me the tree through which the serpent led Eve and Adam astray.” And the angel told me, “[It is] the vine, which Satanael planted. Because of this God cursed him and his fruit.” (9) And I Baruch said to the angel, “If God cursed the vine, then how can it be in use now?” (10) And the angel told me, “Rightly you ask me. When God made the Flood on earth, and he destroyed 409,000 giants, and the water rose above the high mountains, 15 cubits above the mountains, and the water entered Paradise and took all flowers, and brought out one shoot from the vine. (11) And when the water of the Flood withdrew, and the dry land appeared, and Noah went out from the ark (12) and found the vine lying on the ground, (13) he thought to himself, saying, ‘Shall I plant it in the ground? I know that Adam ate from this and was exiled from the Garden. If I plant it, what if God will become angry with me?’ (14) And he knelt down and fasted 40 days praying, and he wept and said, ‘Lord, if I plant from this, what will happen?’ (15) And God sent his angel Sarasael, and he told him, ‘Arise Noah, and plant the vine and alter its name, bitterness to sweetness; and for that one it was for death, but for you it will be life.’ (16) “But beware, Baruch: The tree still possesses evil.” (3 Baruch 4:7-15)

Orlov’s troubling of the waters with respect to what counts as Enochic, Noahic, and Adamic would seem to suggest that one might be able to argue that 3 Baruch represents a movement all its own, a Baruchic tradition. Here I am not interested in hunting down further evidence for this supposed polemic, nor do I wish to argue for a Baruchic tradition clearly separate from the Adamic tradition, indeed, I do not think it necessary to categorize 3 Baruch as a polemic against another ‘school’. The choice of Baruch over Enoch may have been predicated by the fact that

---

Baruch did not yet have a set narrative tradition, and was thus more adaptable to the goals of this apocalypse than Enoch, who was already known to have transversed heaven, would have been. That said, I would like to build on this work insofar as to suggest that 3 Baruch is a work engaged in attempting to convince its audience of a very different point than contemporary apocalypses and ascent narratives. Thus, 3 Baruch is not only a non-Enochic and (at least tangentially) Adamic, it is also an anti-restoration narrative, which makes it a lonely apocalypse within the world of 1st century CE apocalypses, eschewing the usual triumphant end note of the theophany. The ending of 3 Baruch cannot be described as anything other than abrupt, unexpected, and a seeming frustration of most of Baruch’s hopes throughout the narrative. This is, however, a purposeful frustration, for by frustrating Baruch the righteous seer’s hopes, the point is made that the audience’s frustration must be borne and will likely not end any time soon.

Indeed, one notes a recurrent motif of denial for Baruch: he is not able to see either the tree or the Garden of Eden in which the angels planted it, he is denied entrance to even the fifth heaven, and despite the repeated promise of the angelic guide Panuel of a theophany (“you will see the Glory of God” at 4:2b, 6:12, 7:2, 11:2, and 16:6), none occurs. While this appears to echo the warning of God in Jeremiah, “And you will seek great things for yourself. Do not seek them because, behold, I am bringing evil upon all flesh,” (LXX Jeremiah 51:34), Baruch never demands “great things” much less the “Glory of God” from Panuel. Rather, Baruch is a very passive voyager in the heavens, writing a travelogue of heaven for his readers and calling his guide, Panuel a polite and deferential, “lord,” throughout the text. It is the Lord himself and his angelic guide who promise, but do not deliver, a full tour of the heavens. Indeed, Baruch sees a very circumspect part of the heavens both in relation to other revelatory texts (for example, the Apocalypse of Paul explored in the following chapter) and in relation to what the heavens of 3 Baruch appear to hold within them. The question arises then, why so few visions? Why no theophany? These questions are a large part of the reason 3 Baruch is so understudied in comparison to other early Jewish texts, particularly ones with ascents in them.

---

185 e.g. “I said to the angel, ‘Lord, who are these strangely shaped creatures?’” (2:7 S); note, in the Greek, Baruch asks in the formal jussive, “I pray you, show me what are these men” (2:7 G).
Because *3 Baruch* is the only known apocalypse with a five heaven schematic, much debate exists regarding whether we have the whole of the text of *3 Baruch*, or if the original text contained a “full” ascent through seven heavens. Early scholarship on *3 Baruch* assumed that Origen’s reference to a “book of the prophet Baruch” that had seven heavens in his *First Principles* was a reference to *3 Baruch* and evidence that the original version of the text had the “standard” seven heaven model, which would have closed with a theophany. Current scholarship on *3 Baruch* assumed that Origen’s reference to a “book of the prophet Baruch” that had seven heavens in his *First Principles* was a reference to *3 Baruch* and evidence that the original version of the text had the “standard” seven heaven model, which would have closed with a theophany.\(^{186}\) Currently, most scholars admit that the ‘book of Baruch’ Origen references must refer to a different text than *3 Baruch* and seek other ways of explaining the tour of only four of five mentioned heavens.\(^{187}\) Here I follow Daniel Harlow’s argument that the text is extant as it is now and that the denial of Baruch a glimpse of the enthroned God, despite repeated promises of such an event, is part of the overall theology of the work.\(^{188}\) I do, however, differ from Harlow, who sees this as simply a response to any who see the temple as necessary for the continuation of Judaism.\(^{189}\) I believe that this is only part of the reason for the present denial of this view for Baruch. I view this denial of entrance to even the fifth heaven as part of the larger world view of *3 Baruch* that sees the present as separate from the past and future, where the old topoi of myth were and will be accessible to the righteous.\(^{190}\) Thus, Baruch is denied entrance to the celestial temple and a glimpse of God, he is denied a vision of the Garden of Eden and the tree that caused the fall, and the righteous are temporarily housed on a lake in the fourth heaven, awaiting future restoration elsewhere (according to the Slavonic recension of the text; 16:6). The question then is how to read out these places denied Baruch and how to understand the point of this voyage that ends with a divine promise deferred. Here, I turn first to an examination of the ways other contemporary texts treat these same places and then return to *3 Baruch* with the spatial musings of Bachelard to present one answer to this conundrum.


\(^{187}\) See Harlow’s discussion of “the integrity of the ending,” in *The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch*, 34-76.

\(^{188}\) Harlow, *The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch*, 75.

\(^{189}\) Harlow, *The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch*, 75. This idea is also the view Michael A. Knibb in his piece, “Temple and Cult in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: Future Perspectives,” in Essays on the Book of Enoch and Other Early Jewish Texts and Traditions (SVTP 22; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 388-406.

\(^{190}\) This is also at odds with Harlow’s view that Baruch does enter the 5th heaven at the end of the text, but in agreement with Kulik’s opinion of the fifth heaven scene; *3 Baruch*, 308.
3.5 The Heavenly Places of 1st Century CE Apocalyptic Texts

The apocalypses of the first and second centuries CE have not all fared well in terms of transmission, preservation, and, indeed, scholarly reception of them. The inability to pin these texts down to clear cut dates, languages, and loci of composition make one’s ability to say anything definitive about the texts difficult. Here, I look briefly at other tours of heaven composed around the time of 3 Baruch, in an attempt to make clear that even with the great diversity one finds in these various texts, 3 Baruch stands apart from the rest with its understanding of the role of the heavens’ geographies within the workings of the cosmos. Here I look at three texts that scholars often mention together (with 3 Baruch) as the heavenly tour texts of the first and second century CE, 2 Enoch, the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, and the Apocalypse of Abraham. These texts cover a range of compositional dates, from the pre-70 but first century CE 2 Enoch to the clearly post-70 CE Apocalypse of Abraham with the Apocalypse of Zephaniah likely between these two other texts with 1st century CE dates. These texts are all plagued with problems of provenance and manuscript corruptions and/or lacunae that also beset the study of 3 Baruch; something I will discuss below. That I am able to identify a similar approach to the

---

191 The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah is often included in this list, but as the ascension half of the text appears to be a Christian composition, I do not include it in this discussion of Jewish ascent texts. See M. A. Knibb, “Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah,” in The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (ed. Charlesworth; vol. 2 of The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 91-221, also Jonathan Knight, The Ascension of Isaiah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

way the celestial cartographic sections of these texts work within their larger apocalyptic framework is a testament to the existence of a normative reason behind these tours that 3 Baruch disrupts and alters, in order to make a very different point about the heavens, God, and even time itself.

Here I will discuss the texts first briefly in separate chronological order and then I will discuss the similarities in their treatment of the heavenly landscapes they present. 2 Enoch is the earliest of these 1st century texts, as the temple in Jerusalem appears to still be standing, and offers a tour of seven heavens (while the long recension of 2 Enoch has ten heavens, I follow Böttrich in his assessment that heavens eight through ten are a later interpolation). Helpfully, in the very first chapter of the text there is a synopsis of the marvels that Enoch got to see in heaven, including “the Kingdom of God,” the “immovable throne,” the “heavenly armies,” the “army of the cherubim,” and “light without measure” (2 Enoch 1). In addition to this list, Enoch visits paradise in the third heaven,

And those men took me from there, and they brought me up to the third heaven, and set me down [there]. Then I looked downward, and I saw Paradise. And that place is inconceivably pleasant. And I saw the trees in full flower. And their fruits were ripe and pleasant-smelling, with every food in yield and giving off profusely a pleasant fragrance. And in the midst (of them was) the tree of life, at that place where the Lord takes a rest when he goes into paradise. And that tree is indescribable for pleasantness and fine fragrance, and more beautiful than any (other) created thing that exists. And from every direction it has an appearance which is gold-looking and crimson, and with the form of fire. (2 Enoch J 8:1-4)

---

193 2 Enoch is, of course, a problematic text to date as our earliest manuscripts are 14th century Slavonic recensions. F. I. Andersen, “2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” 92. See chapters 51, 59, 61, 62, and 68 of 2 Enoch for references to the still functional Jerusalem temple. Martha Himmelfarb is in favor of the dating of this text to the 1st century CE, and a provenance of Egypt, though she admits this view “was arrived at without adequate grounds.” Ascent to Heaven, 38. See also Macaskill’s recent critical edition of the manuscripts, The Slavonic Texts of 2 Enoch.

194 Christfried Böttrich, Weltweisheit, 109-11. The theophany occurs in the seventh heaven and the continued tour of heavens eight through ten feel like an afterthought either done to make the text fit a ten heaven schematic or to increase the “awe inspiring” nature of God – whose head fills the last three heavens.

195 This description of paradise continues through the rest of chapter 8 and into chapter 9, where Enoch sees the resting place of the righteous.
And in the sixth heaven, Enoch sees God’s footstool, before the grand finale of the seventh heaven, with its theophany,

And those men picked me up and led me into their midst. And they said to me, ‘Be Brave Enoch! Don’t be frightened!’ (3) And they showed me the Lord, from a distance, sitting on his exceedingly high throne. For what is on the 10th heaven, since the Lord is present there? And on the tenth heaven is God, and it is called in the Hebrew language Aravoth. And all the heavenly armies came and stood on the ten steps, corresponding to their ranks, and they did obeisance to the Lord. (2 Enoch 20:2-3)

While the continuation of the heavens to the tenth heaven is a later interpolation, these three heavens are reifications of the grandeur Enoch witnesses in the seventh heaven and the placing of a last few celestial tropes ‘forgotten’ in earlier versions of the text, namely the figures of the zodiac (2 Enoch 21). It is in the seventh heaven that Enoch witnesses the angelic enactment of the divine liturgy (2 Enoch 20). Enoch’s heavenly tour is, then, a fulsome tour that culminates in a theophany coupled with the witnessing of the angelic liturgy of the celestial temple.

Much of what Enoch sees in 2 Enoch is material taken from various parts of 1 Enoch, namely the Book of Watchers, the ascent of Enoch (1 Enoch 14-16), and Enoch’s tour to the ends of the earth (1 Enoch 17-36), which have been reworked and reorganized to some extent. In the case of Enoch’s tour, in 2 Enoch we find the sites visited are no longer at the edges of the earth, but rather in the heavens. It seems that already at the time of 2 Enoch there was a desire to move mythic sites off the face of the earth and into the heavens.

In contrast to 2 Enoch’s multi-leveled heaven, which holds all the mythic sites within itself, stands the Apocalypse of Zephaniah’s account of heaven. The Apocalypse of Zephaniah (ApZeph) is likely also a Jewish work of the 1st century CE, most likely produced in Egypt. As we lack both the beginning and end of the text, it is hard to say very much definitive about it. The portion surviving is an ascent of a dead soul, often identified as that of the prophet

196 Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven, 38.
Zephaniah, into heaven. The text is confused, seemingly, over the nature of the heavens. The heaven described in the Ahkmimic version appears to be a single plane and while the soul sees both a gated and beautiful city and Hades, the exact location of these places is less than clear. The city and Hades may, in fact, reside on the same plane [of space] as the earth, or they may be located in the first layer of the heavens. In Clement’s Stromata, there is a quote, perhaps from this text, in which Zephaniah has made it up to the fifth heaven, where he finds enthroned and diademed angelic ‘lords,’ each in their own temple and singing praises “to the ineffable most high God” (Stromata 5.11.77). Thus, according to Winternute’s proposed reconstruction, in the full text, Zephaniah achieved a full tour of the heavens, before then undergoing his own personal judgement and second (and final) entry into the heavens as a transfigured and semi-angelic figure, which is preserved in the Ahkmimic portion of the text.

Martha Himmelfarb, in her work on the text, does not deal directly with the section preserved in the Stromata, mentioning in a note that it does not work with the heaven described in the Ahkmimic text, which appears to consist of a single plane. Himmelfarb, however, argues that

---

198 Here, I will refer to the protagonist as Zephaniah, for the sake of clarity, although nowhere in the text is the hero called by name. Leif Carlsson, in his study of ascent texts, sees this opening funeral scene as key to the whole narrative, and categorizes it as a “death-oriented” heavenly journey text. Round Trips to Heaven, 162.

199 But I went with the angel of the Lord, and I looked in front of me and I saw gates. (2) Then when I approached them I discovered that they were bronze gates. (3) The angel touched them and they opened before him. I entered with him and (4) found its whole square like a beautiful city, and I walked in its midst (ApZeph 5:1-4).

200 At 10:1-2, having explored Hades and getting into a boat on the sea that separates Hades from all else, the narrator sails into the horizon, which opens to allow entrance into the heavens. The issue of the city is a bit more difficult to sort out, Winternute titles that section, “Vision of the heavenly city,” suggesting that while the narrator is not yet in heaven, he does get to see the celestial city. In the Visio Pauli, the author suggests that the new Jerusalem – or City of Christ, is already in existence and is located on the same plane as the earth, but on the far side of the ocean. Here, the author may be suggesting the same idea, but it is not clear. Winternute notes that it appears that the author wants to imply that the contents of this city are all “secret lore” that cannot be revealed to those still living, by having the narrator state that “my mouth was shut therein,” (5:6). Indeed, the narrator mainly describes the sort of gates he sees at the city.

201 This follows Winternute’s assessment of the text as we now have it. I find it dubious to assume that Clement’s Zephaniah and this one are the same, but accept Winternute’s findings for the purpose of this study. Winternute, “Apocalypse of Zephaniah,” 498. Wright, in his piece on the text, argues that Clement had a later recension of the text, where Zephaniah does ascend through multiple heavens, but that this copy is closer to the original, which followed the “journey to the ends of the earth” motif found in the Book of Watchers. Wright, The Early History of Heaven, 156. Carlsson appears to accept the passage in the Stromata as authentic, and Winternute’s interpretation the most trustworthy, though later on in his study of ApZeph, he suggests that the text does appear to suggest that heaven, hell, and the earth are on the same plane. Round Trips to Heaven, 153 and 158-9.
the gated city vision and the visit to Hades both occur in the heavens. This means that the sea Zephaniah sails across is likewise a heavenly sea. Thus, according to Himmelfarb’s interpretation, Zephaniah receives a tour of the heavenly city, Hades, and the dwelling place of the righteous, many of whom are heroes of the mythic past. While in the surviving portions of the text, Zephaniah does not receive a theophany, he might have in the full version, particularly if the portion found in the Stromata is actually part of this text. I do not wish to make such an argument based on lacunae and speculation, but I review the Apocalypse of Zephaniah here as an example of a fragmented apocalypse from the 1st century CE, where the lack of a theophany appears to be due to the broken text. Martha Himmelfarb noted in her study on priestly investiture in ascent texts, that in ApZeph, the hero at first cannot understand the angels’ prayers, but once he is placed in the boat and given an angelic robe, he not only understands the angels, but also joins in their praises (ApZeph 3:3-4). According to this reading, it appears that at this point the hero has joined the heavenly priesthood and the place the boat takes him to, filled with biblical heroes, is perhaps the forecourt of the heavenly temple. Thus, while the descriptions are somewhat lacking, it appears that the idea of heaven as a temple is present in ApZeph. Indeed, Carlsson suggests, in his study of ApZeph, that not just the temple, but the whole of Jerusalem is used as a model for the entire heavenly world.

The Apocalypse of Abraham is another text best preserved in Slavonic recensions, and it is, therefore, also quite difficult to be sure of its earliest forms. Our earliest manuscripts date from the 14th century, though Horace Lunt has shown these manuscripts all stem from a Slavic

---

202 Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven, 53-55.
203 As we saw above in the overview of 3 Baruch in that text there is at least one heavenly lake.
204 Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven, 54.
205 If Zephaniah has joined the heavenly priesthood here, it would seem that he is a lesser priest, for he still cannot freely interact with the angels nor the biblical heroes he meets across the sea.
206 Carlsson, Round Trips to Heaven, 159.
207 Kulik, Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha, 2-3.
proto-text, likely translated in the southern Slavic regions in the 10th-11th centuries.\textsuperscript{208} In terms of ancient witnesses to the text, the earliest certain passage comes from the second century CE, Clement’s \textit{Recognitiones} 32-33.\textsuperscript{209} Despite the Christian preservation of and witness to the text, it is clear that the text was a Jewish text, originally written in Hebrew and composed in the wake of the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem (described in chapter 27 of the piece).\textsuperscript{210}

The majority of the text of the \textit{Apocalypse of Abraham} is not Abraham’s ascent into the heavens. In fact, the ascent as it is now preserved has Abraham travel directly up to the seventh heaven, where he has a theophany of the blazing and enthroned God. Indeed, Abraham can only make out the throne and its chariot, his angelic guide informs him that he cannot look upon the figure in it:

\begin{quote}
And we ascended <like great winds to the heaven which was fixed on the expanses. (5) And I saw on the sky,> on the height <we had ascended,> a strong light which cannot be described. (6) And behold, in this light a fire was kindled [and there was] of a crowd of many people in male likeness. (7) They were all changing in appearance and likeness, running and being transformed and bowing and shouting in a language the words of which I did not know. (16, 1) And I said to the angel, “Where, thus, have you brought me now? For now I no longer see, because I am weakened and my spirit is departing from me.” (2) And he said to me, “Remain with me, do not fear! (3) He whom you will see going before both of us in a great sound of \textit{ qedushah} is the Eternal One who had loved you, whom himself you will not see. (4) Let your spirit not weaken <from shouting>, since I am with you, strengthening you. (17, 1) And while he was still speaking, behold, a fire was coming towards us round about, and a sound was in the fire like a sound of many waters, like a sound of the sea in its uproar. (ApAb 15:4-17:2)\textsuperscript{211}
\end{quote}

Following this overpowering experience, Abraham looks around him and takes in the sights of the seventh heaven,


\textsuperscript{209} Kulik, \textit{Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha}, 3.

\textsuperscript{210} For Hebrew as the original language of \textit{ApAb} see Kulik, \textit{Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha}, 61ff.

\textsuperscript{211} All quotations from the Apocalypse of Abraham are taken from Alexander Kulik’s translation from the Slavonic, in his \textit{Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha}. 
And while he was still speaking, and behold, the levels opened, <and> there are the heavens under me. And I saw on the seventh firmament upon which I stood a fire spread out and light, and dew, and a multitude of angels, and a power of the invisible glory from the Living Creatures which I had seen before. (19:4)

which contains fire, dew, light, and angelic and celestial creatures there (19:4). Below him, Abraham sees the sixth heaven with its “incorporeal” and “spiritual” angels, who do the bidding of the fiery angels surrounding him in the seventh heaven. Then Abraham sees down into the fifth heaven with its “host of stars,” who control the “elements of the earth” (19:9). We do not know what is located in heavens one through four, for next Abraham is allowed to see all the way down to the earth, spread out beneath him. Below him, Abraham sees many things, including “the abyss and its torments,” (21:3-4), apparently located beneath the earth, and the Garden of Eden, which he describes, “And I saw there the tree of Eden and its fruit, and the spring, the river flowing from it, and its trees and their flowering, and I saw those who act righteously. And I saw in it their food and rest” (21:6). This passage continues for ten chapters and Abraham never resumes his discussion of the heavenly realms that lie between him and the earthly tableau.

As this brief review of these texts has shown, texts describing the heavens varied widely in form and content in the period just before and directly following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Heaven appears in a variety of forms, from a singular plane (Ahkmimic ApZeph), to eight heavens (ApAb), to seven well laid out heavens featuring, amongst other sites, the Garden of Eden and Hades (2 Enoch). Amongst this variety, there are key sites that overlap in the texts, although their location within the cosmos varies. Thus, we see the Garden of Eden, Hades, the celestial temple, and the enthroned God all appear in most of these narratives. These sites are mythic sites and, as such, powerful sites. They are also precisely the sites (and sights) denied Baruch in 3 Baruch. If these sites are the standard ones for a tour of the heavens around the time of the second temple, both before and after its destruction, then why would Baruch’s

212 Carlsson argues that the appearance of Leviathan makes clear that this place is located beneath the earth, following earlier Israelite beliefs about the structure of the universe. Carlsson, Round Trips to Heaven, 136.

213 This is the tentative view on the text, if Clement’s quote is rejected. This is implied by Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven, 53; Carlsson’s confused revision to his early pro-Wintemute stance also suggests a single plane heaven model for ApZeph. Round Trips to Heaven, 158-9.
tour lack visits to these places? What is the reason behind these texts inclusion of these sites for their seers and to what is 3 Baruch responding (and what is it rejecting) by denying its protagonist them?

In the previous chapter, I looked at descriptions of heaven and the heavenly temple in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, and used ideas of monumentality and *ekphrases* of ancient temples to unpack those descriptions. I noted that Lefebvre had been very astute in his observations regarding monumental spaces, which he argued were never the same, but constantly changing and reshaping, because they were “shot through with a knowledge – i.e. a mixture of understanding and ideology.”

While in that chapter I was specifically looking at the monumentality of the heavenly temple, here I open up the possibility of what ‘monumental’ can mean, suggesting that the heavens of antiquity as a whole might be read via this spatial lens. For what space could be more dependent on “a mixture of understanding and ideology,” than these complex celestial realms, whose permutations seem nearly endless? Coupled with this constant change, Lefebvre argues, is the constant attempt for a monument to remain, in appearance, static and unchanging, offering one coherent narrative and hiding all other possibilities for that place. We see something similar going on in these diverse descriptions of the heavenly realms and their mythic places. Heaven is meant to be a monolithic place, that has and will always be the same, yet from text to text we see a different heavenly layout and hear of changes made in the heavens, caused by actions mainly related to or located upon the earth.

In addition, in these texts, these descriptions are not delimited to the celestial temple, but instead encompass tours of all of the heavens. The idea of the narrator in each piece being a celestial pilgrim, with an end goal of the celestial temple and/or a theophany, is the same for the ascent

---

214 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 143.
215 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 143.
216 In 2 Enoch, we hear of the re-use of the Second Heaven as a holding pen for the fallen watchers, and of the mourning by their not fallen brethren in the fifth heaven (although Enoch fixes the problem of a lack of angelic praise in this heaven, by rebuking them); in ApoZeph, we hear of the establishment of Hades in the heavens, following the flood (6:15-16); and in both *ApAb* and 2 Baruch we hear of God’s preparation for the problem of sinful people (*ApAb* 21:7ff) and the destruction of the earthly temple ahead of time (2 Baruch 4), in the case of the temple, 2 Baruch informs us that the true and real temple is safely located in the heavens, far out of the reach of the Romans.
texts reviewed here. It seems that there is a pattern underneath the variety of these texts, a ritual to these ascents. Thus, we turn again to Jaś Elsner’s idea of “ritual-centered visuality,” which I also discussed and utilized in the last chapter on the Shirot. In Elsner’s definition of the term, he notes that such a visuality creates a map of ritual correctness, and that this sort of topography “shows a ritual-sensitive visuality in which the pilgrim-viewer submits to the liturgical rule book of a holy site in order to be offered its sacred experience.”217 For this “pilgrim-viewer” the desire for the experience of the sacred is the most important part of the site. Note that for the “pilgrim-viewer” of the ascent texts I am discussing here, the most important part of the heavens is the locus of God, enthroned and ensconced in the heavenly temple and the verbal assurances he offers of the world still being under his control. There is, however, a series of events and the visiting of certain places that surrounds this singular and most important place and viewing. Thus, even Abraham, who flies on the wing of a pigeon directly to the highest realm of heaven (ApAb 15:2-7), receives a glimpse of the lower heavens in tandem with his theophany. The order in ApAb is backwards, but present.

In my study of the Shirot, I argued that the tour of heavens offered by those poetic texts only made sense if read ritually, that a “ritual-centered visuality” guided the descriptions offered, making for what to an outsider, or one less familiar with the texts, looked like a confused, redundant, and hyperbolic description of the heavenly temple, but to an insider was a thorough, if still overpowering, tour of the temple that was simultaneously the heavens. In these later ascent texts that I have just reviewed, it appears that something similar is happening with respect to the way the tours work. In these texts, however, the end goal is not the witnessing of the Sabbath sacrifices, being enacted in perfection by the angelic priests,218 but rather a touring of the sites of heaven, which leads up to a theophany, which is then followed by a long series of revelations regarding the world, the state of the Jews in it, and the future plans of God for both. Thus, these celestial pilgrims must first witness the various mysteries of the heavens, growing in their understanding of the ways of the celestial spheres, prior to receiving a theophany and prior to receiving divine secrets about the future. I noted in the last chapter that this style of visuality is

218 Although, see 2 Enoch 20, where he appears to witness the divine liturgy of the angels, who surround the throne of God, in what appears to be the heavenly temple.
the sort Lefebvre envisions for his *espace conçu*, which encompasses the work of first creating and then manipulating the markers a culture holds as important through visual cues or guides. Here then the ritual of this visuality is not the ritual of the heavenly temple per se, but rather the ritual viewing of the various places of the heavens, spots culturally important to Jews during the second temple period. This sojourned leads to the celestial pilgrim becoming more like the angels. Transformation into an angelic-like being prepares the seer for the revelations he receives following the theophany at the end of the celestial pilgrimage. The journeys in these texts, then, are required in order for one to receive the revelations. Rather than the *ekphrasis* of the celestial temple architecture, in these texts we receive descriptions of various heavenly locales, which, when read together, create a potent site for both the theophany and the subsequent revelations. We see an entanglement of mythic sites being maneuvered into a single and coherent narrative through the use of the monumentality of the heavens as a whole. In this way, the journey prepares both the seer and the reader/listener for these revelations, through a visual narrative that, with the exception of the fragmented and incomplete *ApZeph*, concludes in a theophany, which then sets the stage for serious discourse about God’s plan for all creation, and, more importantly, the Jewish people, both in the present and in the future.

If this is the case for other 1st century CE ascent texts, what do we make of *3 Baruch*’s understanding of the heavens and its lopsided tour, with its abrupt end? *3 Baruch* appears to be rejecting this narrative of an ascent from mythic place to place, culminating in a theophany and the visual assurance of the continued workings and magnificence of the celestial temple. In doing so, *3 Baruch* rejects a monumental reading of the heavens, where a logical progression from site to site together creates a magnificent whole. Yet, *3 Baruch* does offer hints that the celestial temple is still intact and fully functional, even as it denies Baruch entrance. How then might one read the places of *3 Baruch* in a productive manner and why is the text structured in

---

219 For the idea of these seers becoming angelic priests, see Martha Himmelfarb’s piece, “Heavenly Ascent and Priestly Investiture,” in *Ascent to Heaven*, 29-46.

220 The seeming exception to this is the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, with its unique trip straight to the highest heaven. But even here, Abraham must first ascend all the way to the seventh heaven, where he has an overpowering theophany, and only then receives revelations. In this case, these revelations include the descriptions of the highest heavens. Thus the interlinking of journey, celestial vision, and revelation is unbroken even there. See, however, Andrei Orlov’s understanding of the temple, visions, and the power of the aural over the visual in *ApAb*, in his essay, “The Aniconism of the Celestial Temple: the Above of the Divine Voice,” in *Heavenly Priesthood*. 


such a different way than other contemporary ascent texts? It seems that in 3 Baruch two intertwined, but distinct, things are occurring. On the one hand, following the angel’s opening rebuke of Baruch, one is not to look for the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem any time soon, if ever. In the second place, the tour allows for evidence of the continued workings of the heaven, despite the disastrous state of things upon the earth, and in Jerusalem in particular. Together, these two ideas suggest that Jerusalem is not the centre of the universe and that the destruction of its temple by the Romans does not equal the end of celestial time; rather, celestial time operates wholly unrelated and unaffected by events on the ground. Because of this fact, however, those who come from or have contact with the ground cannot access the heavenly temple, which, presumably, keeps cosmic time. In order to read out the spatial evidence for these observations, I turn from Lefebvre and his idea of the monumental, to Gaston Bachelard and his ideas of smaller and more particular places.

3.6 Bachelard’s Poetics of Space

Biblical scholars have not yet mined Gaston Bachelard’s work, particularly in his book *The Poetics of Space*, for ways of reading and understanding the spaces of their respective texts, and, to some extent, this makes sense for Bachelard was fixated by the home, intimate places, and miniatures; one does not immediately see ways of mapping such places onto the cosmos. But, despite this, the celestial spaces of 3 Baruch would seem to fit well with portions of Bachelard’s observations on the poetics of space. Bachelard wrote *The Poetics of Space* as a lucid yet dreamlike manifesto for the home and the imagination, at a time when France and the rest of the Western world was beginning to ‘modernize’ and to abandon homes for apartment buildings.\(^\text{221}\)

Thus, Bachelard’s plea for the importance of the home in a time of change might map onto the plea of 3 Baruch that its readers take solace in their time of change. For example, in Bachelard’s chapter on the house, Bachelard brings up the idea that “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.”\(^\text{222}\) If this is so, then it follows that those who have lost their home(land) must also have lost the space in which they

---


could (day)dream. And this loss of place and of dream is what one sees at the opening of 3
Baruch, where the temple (which is God’s terrestrial house) lies in smoldering ruins. While
other apocalypses, such as 2 Baruch or the Apocalypse of Abraham seek to reassure their readers
of the existence of the celestial temple via magnificent visions of it, 3 Baruch does not use this
sort of rhetoric, but instead dwells in this liminal space and time created by the loss of the temple
on the earth and the lack of a place for these rich dreams of the celestial sphere to occur. In 3
Baruch with the loss of the temple, terrestrial time stops and remains paused at the end of the
book, there is no earth-shattering unfolding of the new temple at the end of this narrative, such as
in Revelation or 4 Ezra.

3 Baruch, however, does not dwell in the despair of the loss of the temple; this bewailing is
quickly brushed aside at the start of the narrative.223 Rather, in 3 Baruch one sees the taking of
cultural memories and mythic places and the inscribing of them in the heavens, where they will
be safe from appropriation and defamation. Here, again, one sees ways of understanding this in
Bachelard’s work, for he calls on each person to “speak of his roads, his crossroads, his roadside
benches; each one of us should make a surveyor’s map of his lost fields and meadows,”224 which,
in many ways, is precisely what 3 Baruch seeks to do. 3 Baruch strives to create a cosmic map of
the various important topoi of the formative myths of the past world. Bachelard cites Thoreau as
evidence for this practice, who “said that he had a map of his fields engraved in his soul,”225
which, ostensibly, allowed Thoreau to know that these fields were safe no matter where he
traveled. And so 3 Baruch seeks to assure its readers that despite a lack of access to the temple,
terrestrial or heavenly, the important places of the past remain safely held in the heavens, waiting
for a future return to the way things were. A map of the spaces and places lost with the
destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the explicit subjugation of the Jewish people has been
created, not on earth, but in heaven. One sees here an overlap with the texts explored above, but
also a tension. In those texts, we saw that the touring of certain heavenly sites created the

223 “And behold, as I was weeping, and behold, an angel of the Lord appeared before me and told me, ‘Be silent, O
his beloved man! It came to Jerusalem to accept this.” (Prologue 3). Further on, the angel again orders Baruch
saying, “Cease to provoke God” (Prologue 6).

224 Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, 11.

225 Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, 11.
monumental space of the heavens, which culminated in the arrival at the throne room and the visual assurance of the functioning of the celestial temple and a promise of earthly restoration. Here, in *3 Baruch*, we see a more resigned and melancholic response to the destruction via this mapping of “lost” places, preservation of the past is the foremost concern in this situation, not the tantalizing suggestion of an imminent restoration.

In addition, this inscribing and retelling alters the past and creates the possibility of new, if distant, futures, but despite this kernels of the original stories remain. One sees this in chapter four, where Baruch twice requests a view of “the tree through which the serpent led Eve and Adam astray,” (4:6 and 4:8S), but receives instead first a tale and description of the planting of the Garden of Eden and then a lengthy excursus on the evil of the tree, which it turns out is a vine, and led not only to Adam and Eve’s banishment, but also to the sin of Noah. The angelic guide, Panuel, offers this expanded retelling of the old myth, rather than admit Baruch to the garden, or offer him a description of what the garden looks like at present. Here, again, we see a different treatment of this mythic place than in other 1st century CE texts. For example, in 2 *Enoch*, Enoch not only visits paradise in the third heaven and offers a rich description of the place, but he also sees “the tree of life” and offers an even longer description of it. In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the Garden of Eden is still located on the earth, but Abraham is allowed to peer down into it, and sees its contents and its denizens, which he describes briefly. In contrast to these accounts, in *3 Baruch*, the garden appears to be off limits to everyone at present, a part of the past no longer physically accessible, even to the righteous, of which Baruch is an exemplar. Consequently, these bits of earlier myth are caught up in this web of description that pin them safely in the cosmos, out of reach of everyone but certain angels, such as Michael, and, of course, God himself. Thus, in the case of *3 Baruch*, it would seem that the cosmos is God’s soul, where his fields and meadows are kept safe, until God sees fit to restore the old order on behalf of the righteous. The complete and utter sealing off of the Garden of Eden from everyone

---

226 “And in the midst (of them was) the tree of life, at that place where the Lord takes a rest when he goes into paradise. And that tree is indescribable for pleasantness and fine fragrance, and more beautiful than any (other) created thing in existence. And from every direction it has an appearance which is gold-looking and crimson, and with the form of fire. And it covers the whole of Paradise. And it has something of every orchard tree and of every fruit” (*2 Enoch* (J) 8:3-4).

227 “And I saw there the tree of Eden and its fruit**, and the spring, the river flowing from it, and its trees and their flowering, and I saw those who act righteously. And I saw in it their food and rest” (*ApAb* 21:6).
makes clear the unfinished nature of the world in which Baruch lives, highlighting 3 Baruch’s
different understanding of and response to the reality of the Jewish people in the wake of the
destruction of the second temple.

3.7 The Continuation of Cosmic Time in 3 Baruch’s Heavens

This does not mean, however, that 3 Baruch suggests time writ cosmic has stopped. 3 Baruch
suggests that cosmic time continues onward in the heavens, largely unaffected by the events of
earth. Here, we see a heavy drawing on the traditions regarding the workings of the heavens set
down in the Book of Watchers and reused in 2 Enoch. As Baruch tours each realm, the time of
the cosmos carries on, despite attempts at interference from the terrestrial realm. Thus, in the
first and second heaven, those who tried to access heaven unbidden via the tower of Babel, are
now penned in and left for all eternity as strange creatures (2:1-3 and 3:1-5). In the third heaven,
all the unrighteous souls are cast into the bottomless Hades, while the sun and moon continue
their sojourns out and around the earth each day (chapters 6 and 9). The sun’s crown may
become tarnished by the sin and corruption of the earth (8:1-5) and requires a heavenly cleaning
each day (8:4), but the course of the sun remains unchanged. Likewise, the moon continues her
journey around the earth each night, even though she does penance for looking on as Adam and
Eve sinned by waxing and waning (9:7). The time of the luminaries continues unabated, and
while the events of earth may affect their physical appearance, these events do not affect the time
the sun and moon keep. Kept safe from the unrighteous of the lower heavens, above the sun and
moon in the fourth heaven, the righteous dwell on their lake, just as they have, and just as they
will, until a future date not yet known, floating upon a sea of stasis (10:1-7). The destruction of
the temple on earth and the total subjugation of Judea do not matter to these celestial denizens,
whose patterns continue unaltered, or in these celestial places, where rhythmic time continues
unabated as it always has.

The angel Panuel grants Baruch actual visions of these places and entities throughout the
narrative, explaining what they are and how they function despite the state of the world below.
But what about the celestial temple and its worship cycle? As I have already mentioned, Baruch
does not see the temple, or the enthroned God, despite Panuel promising him just such a vision
The celestial temple, with its holy of holies for the throne of God is a key place in earlier myth and is not a Hellenistic inclusion to the celestial sphere, as the sun and moon in their chariots are. Most Jewish apocalyptic texts starting with *1 Enoch* and continuing on past *3 Baruch* spend large swaths of text describing the nature of the temple and its orderly sacrifices, impressing upon their readers the continuation of heavenly worship, even as chaos reigns on earth and the temple in Jerusalem lies either in ruins or in squalor, rendering it unfit for sacrifice and worship. In my brief examination of *2 Enoch*, the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* above, I discussed how these texts are all informed by the idea of heaven as a temple, with *2 Enoch* offering an explicit tour of the site, and *ApAb* describing what appears to be the celestial throne room. Even *2 Baruch* offers a clear riposte to any who question the existence of the heavenly temple; it is still in the heavens, safely in God’s hands and remains there unaffected by the actions of humans on the earth (*2 Baruch 4:2-7*). The question then becomes, given this lack of a description of the celestial temple, is it still functioning in *3 Baruch*’s heaven?

The celestial temple is still functioning in the heavens of *3 Baruch*, completely unaffected by the events on earth in a way that differs from the heavenly luminaries continued existence and order following the destruction of the temple. One cannot, however, read this heavenly temple via the lens of Lefebvre’s monumental space. Here, the idea of grandiosity is lost, for there is no description to sustain it. One needs to look elsewhere for a way to explain this temple, which seems to exist more as a memory than as an accessible and tangible place. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard admits that “the real houses of memory, the houses to which we return in dreams, the houses that are rich in unalterable oneirism, do not readily lend themselves to description.”

It would seem that the author of *3 Baruch* would agree with this observation, for there is no description of God’s house in the text, the terrestrial model of which now exists only in cultural memory. Bachelard further suggests that descriptions of these places can never do more than “communicate to others…an orientation towards what is secret without ever being

---

228 “you will see the Glory of God” 4:2b, 6:12, 7:2, 11:2, and 16:6.

229 See for example, the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, *2 Baruch*, several of the books of *1 Enoch*, and *Revelation*.

able to tell the secret objectively." 231 Here I think we get to the real issue in 3 Baruch: the text can only orient the reader towards the celestial temple, without ever giving it an actual description. Indeed, there is no description of the temple, just as there is no description of the current state of the Garden of Eden in the third Heaven, because Baruch does not see either and, therefore, having only been oriented toward them by his angelic guide, can only orient the reader toward them as well. The angels, presumably under the order of God, deny Baruch visions of these primordial sites that have existed since the beginning of time. These sites belong to and still operate under the old time of a different world and Baruch belongs to a new and transient reality that does not have access to these sites, yet. 232 I add the caveat “yet” because Baruch is promised a view of the ‘glory of God,’ and because it appears that the lake of souls is only a stop on the heavenly journey of righteous souls (following 16:6). Therefore, at some point after this rupture in terrestrial time, the righteous, including Baruch, will have reached a level of purity that allows them to rejoin the cosmic order of angels and have access to these sites that still operate according to the time before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. Until then, these sites must exist only in dreams, set apart from all humanity, even from pious Baruch, who witnesses mysteries of God never seen by another human (17:1).

This depiction of the celestial temple is quite different from depictions of the celestial temple found in other texts from the 1st century CE, such as 2 Enoch and the Apocalypse of Abraham. Whereas in 3 Baruch access to the temple has been lost, and thus there is no description of it, in other texts of the time, the descriptions of the throne room scenes are quite rich. For example, in 2 Enoch the whole of the seventh heaven is the heavenly throne room, featuring fiery angels, cherubim, seraphim, multiple many-eyed thrones, in addition to the Lord enthroned on an “exceedingly high throne,” apparently watching the divine liturgy of the angels (2 Enoch 20). In the Apocalypse of Abraham, the throne room is likewise filled with angels, fire, dew, brilliant

231 Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, 13.

232 In the case of the Garden of Eden, in 2 Enoch, the fact that the Lord walks in that place is made explicit (2 Enoch 8:3). Could it be that this fact – the physical presence of the Lord in that place meant that people felt this sacred place needed to be relocated from the edges of the earth, which were quickly being conquered, mapped, and subjugated, most recently by the Romans, up into the heavens, a space still safe from colonization and appropriation? Whereas that might be a view expressed in several different texts of the 1st century CE, the issue of the celestial temple needing to be kept locked up and away seems to be a uniquely Baruchic issue – both 2 Baruch and 3 Baruch are at pains to make clear the removed nature of the heavenly temple.
light, and the Lord seated in a throne chariot, which is encircled by celestial creatures, which appear to be cherubim and seraphim (ApAb 18-19). Interestingly, in the Apocalypse of Abraham, the interconnectedness of the celestial temple and the earth is made clear, by the chain of command described at the end of chapter nineteen, where the angels of the seventh heaven command the angels of the sixth heaven, who command the hosts of stars of the fifth heaven, which operate upon “the elements of the earth” (19:7-9). This is in sharp contrast to the locked up and inaccessible nature of the heavenly temple in 3 Baruch, where nearly everyone is stopped at its outer threshold.

In the present time only the archangel Michael, apparently as heavenly high priest, has access to the celestial temple in 3 Baruch. Indeed, nowhere does the text suggest that any other angelic beings are allowed past the gates of the fifth heaven, at this present moment. Instead, Michael collects flowers and prayers from angels, as Panuel explains to Baruch at the gates of the fifth heaven, “This is where the prayers of men enter” (11:9). Thus, it seems that though the celestial temple is off limits to not only Baruch, but also many of the angelic cohort, it is still in operation and God still metes out punishment and reward to all upon the earth. The work of the celestial temple continues on, unabated and unaffected by terrestrial affairs. So much so that no one in contact with the earth is allowed access to this place. Michael serves as the medium between the enthroned and inaccessible God and the angels in charge of those upon the earth (12:5 and 15:1-16:5). Thus, while the celestial temple and the work of God and the angels does not change due to events on the earth, people on the earth are still very much affected by the goings on of the heavens.

In this aspect, one does see overlap with other texts’ understanding of the celestial temple and its continued operation in the heavens. 3 Baruch is not arguing against the presence or reality of the heavenly temple, instead it is arguing against the use of the heavenly temple as proof of the imminent restoration of the world below. By refusing Baruch entrance into the celestial temple, 3 Baruch argues against other narratives that ascend from mythic site to mythic site, culminating in the temple, and a vision of God, who announces a swift approaching change of events down below. 3 Baruch suggests no such imminent alternation to the status quo below, and even suggests the righteous in heaven are also in limbo for the moment. God remains in the heavens and his temple continues to operate, but when humans, even righteous ones, will be allowed re-entry is not revealed. The message of 3 Baruch is clear; waiting for a restoration on the earth is a
waste of one’s time and energy. If Baruch cannot gain admittance to the courts of heaven, how can anyone else hope to?

3.8 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explored the mythic sites of the heavens in 3 Baruch in an attempt to better understand its use of the motif of denial as a key element. To do this, I looked first at other apocalypses and ascent texts from the 1st century CE and examined how these texts describe and use the various places of the heavens and what larger project lies behind these scenes. I argued that Lefebvre’s notion of monumentality can help one understand these attempts to paint the grandiosity of the heavens through the connecting of various disparate parts. I then suggested that in 3 Baruch we find a very different approach to the celestial sphere and the accessibility of its places, advocating for a different approach to reading these spaces, via the lens of Gaston Bachlard’s work on the poetics of space. In doing so, I demonstrated that in 3 Baruch, the spaces into which the angels deny Baruch entrance are as important to the world view and theology of the text as the spaces Baruch successfully visits. 3 Baruch plays with both the spatial and temporal parameters of the cosmos to demonstrate the unconquerable nature of the God of Israel, despite the destruction of the earthly temple in Jerusalem. Thus, while 3 Baruch is an off-kilter apocalypse, working with space and time in a manner very different from our own conceptions and the conceptions of other texts of the same genre, I have shown that it ultimately offers a message that is, in some ways, very similar to other apocalypses. The old, or cosmic, time, which the terrestrial temple marked is still the time of the heavens, which remain unaffected by the events of the earth. This time is now separate from, but still affects those upon the earth – the righteous and the unrighteous. While time in the post-temple world upon the earth is currently in stasis (as noted above on page 80), 3 Baruch assures its readers, albeit elliptically, that the celestial temple continues to operate and keep this cosmic time. Someday, the righteous, including Baruch will have access to the mythic topoi of this time, namely the Garden of Eden and the celestial temple, with its glorious throne room, but until then they must remain righteous in life and accept a pure and tranquil life upon the lake of the fourth heaven following death. Only in a future now hidden will the righteous regain admittance to these places that for now can only exist as shadowy memories. This view of the heavens and workings of the cosmos is overshadowed by the destruction of the earthly temple here, a fact that must be come to grips with in the centuries following this act and eventually manifested in early Jewish
artwork of the Byzantine era. I will explore these artistic depictions in my final chapter, but will first turn to an examination of the earliest extant explicitly Christian apocalypse.
Chapter 4

4 The Heavenly Holdings of Souls: the Visio Pauli's Confused Cartography

While 3 Baruch is best preserved in Christian manuscripts, and as such has Christian interpolations within it, as we saw in the last chapter, it began life as a Jewish apocalypse, which explored the post-70 realms of the Jewish heavens and the temple therein. The question then remains, how did early Christians conceive of the heavens, their topography and the role of the heavenly temple within them? In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Christians developed their own ideas of the heavenly realm through a case study of what would become the prototype for the majority of Medieval Christian apocalypses, the Visio Pauli (the Latin Apocalypse of Paul, hereafter Vis. Paul). This style of heavenly tour features the heavy use of Greco-Roman tropes and ideas about the cosmos and the afterlife to create very Hellenized versions of the heavens. This hybridization is quite different, however, in form than the hybridization of the later Jewish Apocalypses, such as we saw in 2 Enoch and 3 Baruch. These newly minted Christian heavens are much more interested in the spaces of the afterlives of humans and in linking the cosmos to the heavens than their Jewish predecessors were.

The Vis. Paul is a good example of the Hellenized heaven emerging in early Christian thought. While Vis. Paul also holds various mythic topoi within its heavens, the setup of this heaven is very different from the Jewish heavens in texts from the late Second Temple period through the later apocalypses. Notably, the geography of this heaven is confused and key places and geographical features appear at multiple points in the narrative. Unlike in 3 Baruch, one can’t create a completely coherent geography out of these places; like 3 Baruch the geography is a part of a larger narrative and strives to make clear a certain point, but here again the point diverges between the early Jewish apocalypse and the later Christian one. Despite its relative obscurity in today’s world, Vis. Paul was extremely popular in both early and Medieval Christianity.

---

translated into numerous languages, existed in multiple recensions, and delineated the form of a Christian apocalypse for hundreds of years. As such, this archetype’s depiction of the heavens is the ideal case study for explicitly Christian depictions of the heavens in antiquity. Here, I will open with the issue of dating the apocalypse, briefly look at this issue’s importance to my own study of the places of *Vis. Paul*, move on to an examination of *Vis. Paul* in relation to other apocalypses, examine the places of heaven, the places of earth, and the spaces that are neither heaven nor earth visited in the course of the tale, and close with a look at one feature seemingly omitted from the cosmos of this apocalypse – the heavenly temple. In this way, the chapter serves three purposes: in the first place it offers an in-depth study of the nature of the heavenly topography in late antique Christian thought, second it serves as a foreshadowing of issues of similarity and difference, fights for ownership and discourse between Jews and Christians of late antiquity that I explore in the next chapter, and third it offers the most up to date reading of the nature of relationship between the numerous topoi that Paul visits in his extensive travels.

## 4.1 Introduction to the *Visio Pauli*

Much like 3 *Baruch*, *Vis. Paul* was originally composed in Greek, but the surviving Greek manuscript is not the best textual witness to the original, being severely shortened. One should note though, that the publication of the Greek text by Tischendorf in the mid-19th century marked the beginning of the modern study of *Vis. Paul*. The best copy we have is one of the Latin versions (*L*1), which dates to the 9th c CE and is housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris. This is the same manuscript that M.R. James published in 1893. The Latin translation of the text is thought to date earlier than the creation of the manuscript; scholars in the

---

234 Here, obviously, I am interested in studying only the earliest permutations of this text, but for a study on its existence in the Middle Ages, see Peter Dinzelbacher, “La ‘Visio S. Pauli’ circulation et influence d’un apocryphe eschatologique,” *Apocrypha* 2 (1991): 165-180.

235 There are three Greek manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Paul* extant, a fragment of ch. 45-46, (Gr. 1), housed in the Bodleian Library at Oxford; and an abridged version of the text, (Gr. 2), emplaced in a panegyric on Paul, which Tischendorf published in 1866, and which survives in two late manuscripts, Monacensis Gr. 276 (Gr. 2 M) from the 13th century, and l’Ambrosianus Gr. 895 (Gr. 2 A) from the 16th century.

late 19th and early 20th century proposed that it stemmed from the fifth or sixth century, based on philological grounds, but R. Casey argued that it dated to the 4th century, and suggested that Augustine’s references to Vis. Paul are to this Latin translation, not the Greek original. The text was very popular in both antiquity and the Middle Ages; translations of it appear not just in Latin, but also in Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Georgian, Old Church Slavonic, and Syriac. The Latin translation (L1) had a healthy afterlife in medieval Europe, and versions of it appear in various European languages, including Czech, French, and German. In addition to the translations, we also have a strong history of “daughter texts” for Vis. Paul, including the Apocalypse of the Theotokos and the Apocalypse of Anastasia in the Greek tradition and several Ethiopic Apocalypses, namely the Ethiopic Apocalypse of Mary, the Ethiopic Apocalypse of Baruch, and the Apocalypse of Gorgorios. As R. Casey noted in the early 1930s, the problem when studying Vis. Paul is not one of a lack of sources. Here, I will be working from the long Latin version, from which M. R. James made the editio princeps, and which was republished in

---


239 Anthony Hilhorst, “Apocalypse of Paul: History and Afterlife,” 3. See also Piovanelli’s discussion on the Medieval manuscripts in “The Miraculous Discovery of the Hidden Manuscript,” pages 28-29, as well as in his piece, “Les origins De L’Apocalypse De Paul,” Apocrypha 4 (1993): 25-64. R. Casey, back in the 1930s, expressed surprise that the Apocalypse of Paul was the second most popular Christian Apocalypse after Revelation, seeing as “its description of the afterlife is long, rambling, and badly put together,” “The Apocalypse of Paul,” 1.


241 Jane Braun in Tales from Another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha, (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007) offers a careful study of these two later medieval texts and how they interact with and build on their Pauline predecessor. For a discussion of the Apocalypse of Paul textual family and a précis of each of the Ethiopic texts see Martha Himmelfarb, Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature; (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 19-23.

242 Of the number of various manuscripts of the Apocalypse of Paul surviving, R. Casey remarked, “Instead of having to depend on scattered quotations, scraps of papyrus, or a stray version, the student of Paul is embarrassed by documentary riches which both enable him to determine its original contents with reasonable certainty and furnish solid information about its history and transmission,” “The Apocalypse of Paul,” 1.
As our earliest text is a Latin translation from the 9th century, the question remains, when was *Vis. Paul* composed? This is a debated issue, with strong proponents for the various suggestions. While James suggested a date in the late fourth century for the book when he published the English translation, this idea did not carry the day. The dominant narrative stems from R. Casey’s work on the text in the 1930s, when he offered the first serious analysis of the apocalypse (after Tischendorf and M. R. James), but unlike Tischendorf and James, Casey used multiple manuscripts for his study, which affected the findings considerably. Casey argued that *Vis. Paul* was written by an Egyptian monk not later than the 4th century. He suggests that the original apocalypse opened with a Mount of Olives setting following the opening of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, something that was elided in later editions, and was then replaced with the tale of the document’s miraculous discovery in Tarsus, which in turn was cropped from even later editions. At the end of his study, Casey traces mentions of the text through time, beginning with Origen, whom he suggests must have known the original version of *Vis. Paul*. Casey also argues that Prudentius knew the Latin translation of *Vis. Paul*, and if he wrote his work, the *Cathemerinon*, well before 404 CE, it seems that the apocalypse itself must be a 4th century text.

---


244 Montague Rhodes James, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), 525. “Sozomen’s story is that which appears in our book; and we need not doubt that this Apocalypse made its appearance in the last years of the fourth century.”


246 Casey, “The Apocalypse of Paul,” 29. The opening was only one part of this “rambling” apocalypse that was repeatedly cropped by scribes and editors eager to trim its bulk.

247 The citation in question comes from the *Nomocanon* of Bar Hebraeus, who quotes an otherwise unknown fragment of Origen in 7.9, which Casey translates as follows, “the opinions of the Epistle to the Hebrews are the Apostle Paul’s but the style is someone’s who recalled and wrote down those things which the Apostle said. And there are those who say this was Clement and others that it was Luke. But in the whole church in which it is [found], it should be accepted as Paul’s, but the Apocalypse of Paul with other apocalypses and the Teaching of the Apostles and the Epistle (manuscript reads plural erroneously) of Barnabas and Tobit and the Shepherd and Son of Sirach are accepted in the church. But many do not accept the Book of the Shepherd and the Apocalypse of John.” Casey, “The Apocalypse of Paul,” 26-28. But, see the opinions of Piovanelli below on this citation.
century, if not an early/mid-4th century work, but this is all speculation on Casey’s part.\textsuperscript{248} Casey suggests the text traveled from Egypt to North Africa, then to Spain and onward into Europe. Sozomen appears to have known \textit{Vis. Paul} in Constantinople (\textit{History of the Church} 7.15), meaning it must have reached there no later than the mid-5th century, and from there permutations of it traveled through the Balkans and into Russia, likely in the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{249} Casey’s extremely careful and thorough scholarship on \textit{Vis. Paul} led to this narrative of dissemination being the accepted one for some thirty years.

The next scholar to weigh in on the issue of the date of composition was Theodore Silverstein, whose work in the early 1960s argued that the year meant by the author of the Tarsus Prologue of \textit{Vis. Paul}, when he wrote “in the consulship of Theodosius Augustus the Younger and Cynegius,” was the year 420 CE.\textsuperscript{250} Silverstein argued that the text of the extant Greek, Long Latin, and Syriac versions all stemmed from a common 5th century work, which was written no later than 450 CE, and then back-dated by the author to 420 CE.\textsuperscript{251} Silverstein built on the groundwork of Casey, and further developed this dominant narrative of a first edition written in the 3rd century and the Tarsus Prologue a later addition to a second edition. This was also in direct confrontation with the original dating of the Prologue version of the text, by Tischendorf. While Tischendorf had identified the Prologue’s two rulers as Theodosius the Elder and Gratian, giving a date of composition around 380 CE, Silverstein argued philologically for reconstructing the names to Theodosius Minor and Flavius Constantius, who were Consul of the East and West, respectively, in 420 CE.\textsuperscript{252} Curiously, while Silverstein offers a thorough philological study of the names in the Prologue to argue for his re-dating of that part of the text, he simply notes that if Origen and Augustine both knew some version of this \textit{Vis. Paul} before 420 CE, then Casey’s argument for a proto-\textit{Vis. Paul} written in the mid-3rd century “would still appear from all we

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{248} Casey, “The Apocalypse of Paul,” 28-29.
\bibitem{249} Casey, “The Apocalypse of Paul,” 31-32. See also Jan Bremmer, “Christian Hell: From the Apocalypse of Peter to the Apocalypse of Paul,” \textit{Numen} 56 (2009): 298-325, for more on Sozomen’s rejection of the text as “ancient.”
\bibitem{251} Silverstein, “The Date,” 336.
\bibitem{252} Silverstein, “The Date,” 340.
\end{thebibliography}
know to be reasonable” and would clarify the persistent problem of Origen citing a book not yet written, even according to its back-dated prologue.

Anthony Hilhorst agrees with Silverstein’s line of argumentation and thinks that the date in the Prologue is clearly the “re-publication” date of the text, not the date of composition. Hilhorst follows Casey and Silverstein in citing the fragment of Origen that mentions Vis. Paul as proof of the Prologue marking a second (and altered) edition of the text, though Hilhorst notes that this tidbit is preserved only in a late Syriac document. Thus, if Origen is referring to the Vis. Paul that we know, then it must have been in circulation in the first half of the third century CE, if not earlier. Hilhorst and Silverstein have been the leading voices in the field of studies on Vis. Paul and, as such, their modification of the Casey two edition model has been the dominant paradigm for many years.

More recently, however, Pierluigi Piovanelli in the early 1990s, began to suggest that Vis. Paul was originally composed between 395 and 416 CE. Piovanelli rejects the citation of Origen as proof that Origen knew Vis. Paul and argues instead that the first extant mention of the apocalypse is by Augustine, hence Piovanelli’s terminus ante quem of 416 CE, the date of Augustine’s Treatise on John, wherein the passage appears. Piovanelli also argues that all extant copies of the text, “including the Coptic version,” come from a single Greek original, which included the Prologue, and entered the world not earlier than 395 CE and no later than 416

---

253 Silverstein, “The Date,” 347.
255 The fragment is found in the writings of Bar Hebraeus, who wrote in the 13th century CE. Despite this, most scholars accept the fragment as authentic. Hilhorst, “Apocalypse of Paul: History and Afterlife,” 5.
256 Hilhorst, “Apocalypse of Paul: History and Afterlife,” 5. But see also Piovanelli below.
258 Piovanelli, “Les origines de l’Apocalypse de Paul,” 45-48. Indeed, Piovanelli points out that not all scholars accept the Bar Hebraeus citation as coming from Origen, but suggest that instead it may be a later interpolation (either to the Greek, or even the Syriac), and argues that in any case, this disputed passage and the undisputed passage of Origen (from his Fifth Homily on Psalm 36) are not referencing the Apocalypse of Paul, but a different text. Piovanelli reiterates this point in his essay, “The Miraculous Discovery,” 48.
Piovanelli argues contra Silverstein that the Theodosius in the Prologue is actually Theodosius the Elder, not the Younger, who reigned from 379-395 CE, and under whom “the definitive victory of the Nicene form of Christian monotheism over Roman polytheism, as the official religion of the Roman Empire” occurred. Piovanelli does this through an exhaustive study of all the various textual witnesses and a comparison of the names listed in the prologue. Piovanelli notes that the use of the name Cynegius as the second individual mentioned in the section on the discovery of the text in Tarsus, and that a Cynegius was the praetorian prefect in the Eastern empire through 388, the same year that Theodosius I entered Italy to confront his pagan opponents. Thus, for Piovanelli, the Prologue is an integral part of the original text, placing it carefully and securely under “the truly exceptional reign of this orthodox and pious emperor,” a trope utilized by other Christian authors of the time. While Piovanelli is arguing against the long-standing dominant narrative, in many ways his view echoes the original proposed date of Tischendorf, albeit through a different line of argumentation, and, of late, his dating has gained traction with other current scholars of Vis. Paul.

Jan Bremmer, most recently, agrees with Piovanelli’s observations on both the spurious nature of the Origen citation, as well as the general dating of Vis. Paul. Bremmer argues that the version we have is not a second edition, but the first edition and points out that the translator of

260 Piovanelli, “Les origines de l’Apocalypse de Paul,” 51-52. Piovanelli has a helpful chart of the various textual witnesses and their names for the rulers of the time on page 52.
263 Piovanelli, “The Miraculous Discovery,” 39-40. Piovanelli cites the homily, On Mount Coscam, as an example of this practice.
265 Jan Bremmer, “Christian Hell,” 304. Bremmer argues persuasively that the Bar Hebraeus citation is not from Origen, noting that the Bar Hebraeus passage does not offer a source for his quotation and argues that Origen actually appears to have allowed only one apocalypse into his canon – Revelation.
the original Latin edition clearly misread “Theodosio Aug. II,” as meaning Theodosius II, when in fact the abbreviation clearly states that Theodosius the Elder was Consul a second time at the time of the “discovery” of the text. Bremmer goes one step further than Piovanelli by offering a clear argument for the citation of Cynegius in the prologue beyond his convenient date of death in 388 CE. Cynegius was also a Christian leader, who both defended monks and ascetics and backed the destruction of pagan sanctuaries across his domain, thus Bremmer argues that the date of “discovery” is set as an honorarium to a “spiritual friend,” of the author, who is clearly either an ascetic himself, or a supporter of them. Bremmer further observes that it was only at the end of the fourth century that Paul suddenly rose to prominence in both the eastern and western churches, making a later date of composition a better fit for an apocalypse featuring him as the central character. Bremmer sets the composition of the original Greek text in Egypt, in a monastic milieu around 400 CE, and argues that the Latin translation was only made at the end of the 5th century, and is the version we know today.

Here, I find Piovanelli’s and Bremmer’s arguments for dating persuasive and agree that the text was only composed in the very late 4th century, around the year 400 CE and began life with its current Prologue attached. As such, the text is the youngest of those surveyed by some three hundred years, but is contemporaneous with the earliest of the mosaics surveyed in the next chapter. Given the nature of the discourse around the depictions in these art works, it is prescient to focus on an explicitly Christian text from the same era as the mosaics, as a means of looking at the nature of the Christian heavens of the time and the places they include and the places they do not include in their topographies. My exploration of the heavenly landscape of Vis. Paul in this chapter will serve to foreshadow my observations regarding scholars’ attempts at reading polemic into the artwork of the same era.

266 This observation is important as it is a refutation of Silverstein’s proposed permutations of titles from Latin to Greek and back again. Silverstein, “The Date,” 337-341.
4.2 The Relation of the *Visio Pauli* to Other Early Apocalypses

M.R. James noted that *Vis. Paul* and the *Apocalypse of Peter* shared many parallels, and thought that this pointed to *Vis. Paul* being a direct descendent of the *Apocalypse of Peter*. The areas that James marked as clear parallels between the two texts are of all varieties, but many are focused on the sufferings of the sinners in hell. As my study is not interested in the workings of hell, but in the geography of heaven, this debate of in/dependence of *Vis. Paul* on previous apocalypses is not critical to the findings of my work, but I will review it briefly here. Following James, R. Casey, in the 1930s, suggested that *Vis. Paul* was dependent, to some extent, on both the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*. Martha Himmelfarb, in her study of ancient tours of Hell in the early 1980s, argues that while the author of *Vis. Paul* might have known the *Apocalypse of Peter*, she found no evidence of direct literary borrowing in *Vis. Paul*. She further argues that by the time of *Vis. Paul*’s composition, there was already a genre of Christian tours of hell, and that if more of these survived, the fact that *Peter* and *Vis. Paul* are merely two examples of a developing genre would be apparent. Himmelfarb then offers a line-by-line dismissal of James’ line-by-line comparison of passages from the two apocalypses to prove her point. In relation to *Vis. Paul*’s relation to the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, Himmelfarb again argues that *Vis. Paul* is a later and Christian example of a developing tradition, but is less zealous in her attempt to argue against the dependence of *Vis. Paul* on the earlier text. Indeed, Himmelfarb notes that there are three places of striking similarity between the two apocalypses, while also noting that the content of *Zephaniah* missing from *Vis. Paul* is all content that would be in conflict with Christian beliefs and ideals. Thus, while Himmelfarb argues that all three apocalypses are examples of a genre from various stages of development, she is only passionate about proving that *Vis. Paul* is not a literary descendent of *Peter*.

---

271 Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 144.
272 Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 144-147.
Much more recently, scholars have reassessed both James’ and Himmelfarb’s claims of Vis. Paul’s dependence on other texts. Hilhorst, in his overview of Vis. Paul and its reception, notes that the apocalypse exhibits clear parallels with not just Peter and Zephaniah, but also 1 Enoch 1-36 (i.e. the Book of Watchers) and 3 Baruch. Hilhorst admits though that while some of these similarities are striking, particularly certain passages from Zephaniah, none are so particular as to warrant the argument that Vis. Paul was *literarily* dependent on any of these earlier texts. This does, however, suggest that the author had read, or was familiar with the traditions of these particular works. Indeed, Bremmer has suggested that Himmelfarb oversteps herself in her zeal to prove non-dependence of Vis. Paul on Peter and argues that “the author of the Apocalypse of Paul most likely knew the Apocalypse of Peter and borrowed some elements from it.”

Bremmer further suggests that Peter was still clearly a Jewish apocalypse in many respects and that its out-of-date (for Christians) views on heaven, hell, and the torments of the unrighteous, led to its eventual abandonment in favor of the avant garde Vis. Paul, with its focus on sinners. Still, Bremmer’s comparison of the two texts leads him to conclude that the author of Vis. Paul took the list of Peter and reworked it (badly) to fit the new mores and beliefs of Christianity in the late 4th century. Thus, perhaps for this study, the most important observation regarding the dependence of Vis. Paul on Peter is that the evidence points to a late 4th century date of composition for Vis. Paul.

### 4.3 The Places of the Heaven in the *Visio Pauli*

Even as it echoes passages and ideas from the Book of Watchers, 3 Baruch, and Zephaniah, Vis. Paul diverges from its Jewish predecessors both in the meaning of the heavenly sites that Paul visits and the overall reason for the descriptions of the topography of the celestial spheres. I will first give an outline of the book as a whole, and then look at the actual tour that Paul takes within the book. Thus, one can divide the book up into the following sections:

---

274 Bremmer, “Christian Hell,” 302, see also footnote 18 on that page.

275 Bremmer, “Christian Hell,” 302. See also Bremmer’s comparison, in chart form, of the various punished and their punishments in both texts on pages 307-8.

Table 4.1

These divisions are the standard scholarly way of looking at the piece, but they obscure the immense amount of traveling from here to there and in and out of heaven that Paul does in the apocalypse. Therefore, one needs to look at the narrative as a sequence of journeys undertaken by Paul. In chapter 3 Paul explains that he was raised to the third heaven, but this is just a setup of the story; only in chapter 11 does Paul enter heaven with his angelic guide, “And I followed the angel, and he led me into heaven,” (ApPaul 11). In chapter 19 Paul states that he is “raised” to the third heaven, which implies that he only made it as far as the first heaven in his initial ascent. In chapter 21 Paul travels to an undisclosed location to fulfill the statement in 2 Corinthians that he “heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat”


(12:4b). Paul then descends from the third heaven to the second heaven and from the second heaven to the firmament, and exits through the gates of heaven. Once outside the firmament and its gates, Paul finds himself at the great river that encircles the earth – the ocean. He then travels across the ocean to the Land of Promise, which appears to exist outside of both heaven and earth in chapter 22:

And I looked around upon that land, and I saw a river flowing with milk and honey, and there were trees planted by the bank of that river, full of fruit; moreover, each single tree bore twelve fruits in the year, having various and diverse fruits; and I saw the created things which are in that place and all the work of God, and I saw there palms of twenty cubits, but others of ten cubits; and that land was seven times brighter than silver. And there were trees full of fruits from the roots to the highest branches, of ten thousand fruits of palms upon ten thousand fruits. The grape-vines had ten thousand plants. Moreover in the single vines there were ten thousand thousand bunches and in each of these a thousand single grapes; moreover these single trees bore a thousand fruits.

Still in chapter 22, Paul then ascends from the Land of Promise and crosses the Acherusian Lake to the City of Christ. Paul travels about the City of Christ, both outside and within its (twelve) walls from chapter 23 to chapter 30. A brief description of the city is offered in chapter 23, and expanded upon through a tour in chapters 24-30:

And there were twelve gates in the circuit of the city, of great beauty, and four rivers which encircled it. There was a river of honey, and a river of milk, and a river of wine, and a river of oil. And I said to the angel, ‘What are these rivers surrounding the city?’ And he said to me, ‘These are the four rivers which flow abundantly for those who are in this land of promise; the names are these: the river of honey is called Pison, and the river of milk Euphrates, and the river of oil Gion, and the river of wine Tigris.

In chapter 29, Paul has reached the center of the city and the angel reveals to him that the City of Christ is also the second (i.e. “heavenly”) Jerusalem, waiting until Christ’s reign to make its worldly debut. In chapter 30 one finds a confused reference to the Seventh heaven, where God dwells, an idea missing from the book’s cosmology up until this point. In chapter 31, Paul descends from the City of Christ, re-crosses the Acherusian Sea and then crosses back across the ocean, making clear that he did, in fact, travel outside of heaven and earth to reach the City of Christ:
When he had ceased speaking to me, he led me outside the city through the midst of the trees and far from the places of the land of the good, and put me across the river of milk and honey; and after that he led me over the ocean which supports the foundations of heaven. *(ApPaul 31)*

Paul then travels west towards the setting sun and re-crosses the ocean, apparently on its west-most side. Next, Paul witnesses hell, which is across a river of fire and northward. Paul’s tour of hell lasts from chapters 32-42. In chapter 43, Paul looks up and the heavens open above him, allowing Michael and other angels to descend into hell, while Paul can see the heavenly throne room up above him, in the heavens. Following this scene, in chapter 45, Paul travels to Paradise, which, this second time, is clearly Eden:

> And I followed the angel by the swiftness of the Holy Spirit, and he placed me in Paradise and said to me, ‘This is Paradise in which Adam and his wife erred.’ I entered Paradise and saw the beginning of waters, and there was an angel making a sign to me, and he said to me, ‘Observe the waters, for this is the river of Pison which surrounds all the land of Evila, and the second is Gion which surrounds all the land of Egypt and Ethiopia, and the third is Tigris which is over against the Assyrians, and another is Euphrates which waters all the land of Mesopotamia.’ And when I had gone inside I saw a tree planted from whose roots water flowed out, and from this beginning there were four rivers. *(ApPaul 45)*

Scholars debate the relation of this second paradise to the first one Paul visits, as well as its exact location in the cosmology of the piece. The original close of the apocalypse must be lost or this second visit to paradise a later addition, for the piece breaks off with Paul still in paradise and in the midst of discourse with various figures of note from the Hebrew Bible.
Here is a table, reconstructing the apparent cosmology and geography of *Paul*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st heaven/firmament/site of judgment of Souls</th>
<th>Acherusian Sea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd heaven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd heaven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th heaven</td>
<td>{City of Christ/Jerusalem}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th heaven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th heaven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Heaven – throne of God</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hell</th>
<th>River of Fire</th>
<th>Ocean (west)</th>
<th>Earth</th>
<th>Ocean (east)</th>
<th>Land of promise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 4.2

While scholars admit, more or less charitably,\(^{279}\) that *Vis. Paul* is a reworked pastiche of ideas, visions, and sources, the question remains how exactly our author conceived of all these varieties of the cosmos fitting together into a coherent map of the heavens, or if this idea of a coherent map of the heavens was even a concern. One such issue is the seemingly sudden appearance of a seventh heaven in chapter 29, when the text up to that point appears to have assumed a three-tiered model of heaven. Additional issues include Paul’s double visit to paradise, the fact that these two visits appear to be to different paradises, and these paradises’ relation to the land of the blessed, as well as to the city of Christ, which all house various righteous and godly people in them. Casey, in his study of *Vis. Paul*, noted that the geography of its heaven “is a curious combination of Greek and Jewish tradition,” and sees “Orphic” eschatology as the source of the Acherusian lake, the fiery stream, and the land of the blessed.\(^{280}\) Further, suggests Casey, “[t]he distinction between the paradise of the third heaven, the ‘land of promise,’ and the city of Christ

\(^{279}\) With James’ statement that the author “is combining different sources in a very unintelligent way,” the most blunt of the observations. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 526; but see also the above discussion of this.

\(^{280}\) Casey, “The Apocalypse of Paul,” 19.
produces a confused eschatology and was probably due in the first place to an attempt to conceal the combination of three accounts of heaven.\textsuperscript{281} While scholars, such as James, Casey, and Himmelfarb, note that these visions stem in part from the \textit{Apocalypse of Zephaniah},\textsuperscript{282} \textit{Zephaniah} endorses a very old one plane model of heaven, and, thus, the various localities of Vis. Paul’s heavenly places cannot be traced to \textit{Zephaniah}. Likewise, Casey notes overlap in some of these descriptions with passages in the \textit{Apocalypse of Peter},\textsuperscript{283} but in \textit{Peter} the apostle has a vision, but does not ascend (or descend) anywhere,\textsuperscript{284} so the book lacks a cosmology upon which the author of Vis. Paul might have built Paul’s tour. While the author of Vis. Paul did borrow from these Greco-Roman and early Christian sources to describe the places of Vis. Paul’s cosmos, the actual situation of different places and their relation to one another appears to be the unique creation of the author’s imagination.

It appears, therefore, that part of the confusion of this cosmology stems from the inability of the author of Vis. Paul to reconcile in full a Greco-Roman understanding of the cosmos with a Jewish based understanding of the heavens, which leads to the placing of both the land of promise (which Casey calls the land of the blessed) and hell outside of the text’s cosmology, strictly speaking, but also, seemingly outside of the text’s geography. Both the land of the blessed and hell appear to float in a space that is neither celestial nor earthly. While James’ observation on the (deficient) abilities of the author certainly has textual ground on which to stand,\textsuperscript{285} this problem would have been perplexing to many in antiquity. Several different models of both the heavens and the cosmos were circulating, with various backers and differing claims to legitimacy. Rather than choose one, here the author of Vis. Paul has chosen to combine them. While the end result is jarring to the modern reader, the technique seems to have

\textsuperscript{281} Casey, “The Apocalypse of Paul,” 19.
\textsuperscript{282} See my discussion of the \textit{Apocalypse of Zephaniah} in the preceding chapter of this work.
\textsuperscript{283} Casey, “The Apocalypse of Paul,” 20.
\textsuperscript{284} The Akhmim version of \textit{Peter} suggests that the place of righteous is “outside of this world,” but how one gets there (up, down, to the side?) is not clear, nor is this place’s relation to the heaven that open at the end of the apocalypse and houses some of the righteous made clear; in contrast, the Ethiopic version states that the righteous go to “a great garden,” but that garden is not described as either terrestrial or non-terrestrial. See Elliot’s parallel translation of the two texts in his \textit{The Apocryphal New Testament}, 610-11.
worked, for Vis. Paul remained a read text well into the Middle Ages, while its predecessors Peter and Zephaniah fell by the wayside in antiquity. This, of course, does not entirely explain the inability of the author to come up with a coherent cosmology, as we saw in the last chapter with 3 Baruch, other authors were able to conceive of relatively coherent cartographies of heavens that were full of places inspired by Greco-Roman ideas. In particular, the author’s inability to find a satisfactory place for the land of the blessed and of hell is curious, and here again, note that in 3 Baruch one finds the decision to simply place these places in various areas of the heavens, albeit in a carefully orchestrated plan, so that the hellish regions are not near to the more sacred and pure places. Two questions emerge from this observation. First, is there a true cosmology in Vis. Paul? And second, why move the land of the blessed and hell to outside of this cosmology? The next sections of this chapter will address these issues.

4.4 A Cosmological Introduction? The Opening Scene of the Visio Pauli as Cosmology

When looking at the overall cosmology of Vis. Paul, no scholar has set their sights on the opening scene of the apocalypse itself, chapters four through six, where Vis. Paul recounts the decrying of humanity by various places in the cosmos.

(4) For indeed the sun, the great light, often addressed the Lord saying, ‘Lord God Almighty, I look out upon the impieties and injustices of men; permit me and I shall do to them what are in my powers, that they may know that you are God alone.’ … (5) ‘Sometimes the moon and stars addressed the Lord saying, ‘Lord God Almighty, to us you have given the power of the night, how long shall we look down upon the impieties and fornications and homicides done by the sons of men? Permit us to deal with them according to our powers, that they may know that you are God alone’ … (6) And frequently the sea exclaimed, saying, ‘Lord God Almighty, men have defiled your holy name in me; permit me to arise and cover every wood and orchard and the whole world, until I blot out all the sons of men from before your face, that they may know that you are God alone.’ (ApPaul 4-6)
Indeed, these chapters are not a well-studied section of *Vis. Paul*, for they are generally considered the set-up for the following scenes of judgment and, thus, ignored. Most pointedly, J. M. Rosenstiehl, in his look at Paul’s itinerary in the apocalypse, states that he will be focused on, amongst other things, the *places* of the apocalypse, but sets this section aside as part of the ‘introduction,’ which he finds unimportant to his study. Even scholars who address this section of the text tend to do so in a very cursory manner. For example, while Tamás Adamik mentions this scene in his piece on the relationship of *Vis. Paul* to fantastic literature, he mentions all the complaints as a single unit, which he compares to the list of sins complied by Hesiod in *Works and Days*. Adamik does not see a need to look at the three different entities complaining, but instead focuses on the nature of the complaint itself—the disgracing nature of humankind. Claude Carozzi, in his monograph on *Vis. Paul*, did take up these opening passages, when arguing for a highly structured and well-laid out schematic for the narrative of the apocalypse, based on the creation narrative of Genesis. Carozzi, however, sees the listing of these celestial orbs as an oblique reference to the creation narrative and, thus, also categorizes them as a set-up for the rest of the narrative, seeing a parallel between the journeys of Paul on the one hand and the march of cosmic/mythic history on the other hand. Thus, Carozzi sees the list of created entities at the start of *Vis. Paul* as a foreshadowing of sorts for the end scene, when Paul returns to paradise, which Carozzi interprets to be the earthly paradise. Lastly, Kristi Copeland, in her unpublished dissertation, remarks upon the entities making these accusations. But this is only to observe that these sections help support the view of Egypt as the site of composition, for they mirror the hermetic text, *Kore Kosmu*’s list of elements

286 An excellent example of this is J. M. Rosenstiehl’s treatment of the ‘opening scene’ of Paul, which he delineates as chapters 3-10, and addresses in a brief paragraph, wherein he makes no mention to any of these places. Rosenstiehl, “L’itineraire,” 199.
condemning humankind. Copeland notes that in *Kore Kosmu* the elements are fire, air, water, and earth, and suggests that the author of *Vis. Paul* knew at least this section of *Kore Kosmu*, or the tale it recounts, but changed the elements into places of the cosmos – the sun, the moon and stars, the ocean, and the earth itself. Curiously, though Copeland’s dissertation is an examination of the geography of *Vis. Paul*, she does not consider why the author would be interested in changing the elements of *Kore Kosmu* into actual places of the cosmos. If one looks at the structure of the section, the piece begins with Paul mentioning his ascent to the third heaven, so the reader anticipates that the journey begins in the 3rd heaven, Paul then shifts to a discussion of the sun and the moon and the stars, and from there to the ocean and the water, which appears to be a reference to the waters of the firmament, following Genesis (Gn 1:6-8), from the waters Paul then moves to the earth.

I propose that this section is an opening cosmology in miniature – the sun and moon and stars are located in the second heaven and the first heaven is made up of the firmament, bordered by the ocean, and the earth is (logically) below this. While this cosmology is not well laid out here, such a reading is supported by the later peregrinations of Paul across these regions. It also suggests that at this point the author of *Vis. Paul* is adapting a classic multi-level understanding of the heavens – above the earth is the firmament, above the firmament are the sun and stars, serving as they did in *3 Baruch* as a permeable barrier between the sinful on earth and the righteous and angelic up above. In the third heaven, which Paul visits, we find these righteous, safely away from the sins of the earth thanks to the double barrier of water and fire below them.

---

292 Copeland, “Mapping the Apocalypse,” 43.
Here is a second table of the heavens of *Vis. Paul*, which illustrates this reading:

| 3rd Heaven – Gates of Paradise, Paradise |
| 2nd Heaven – Sun, moon, and stars       |
| 1st Heaven - Firmament                  |
| --- waters above ---                   |
| Earth                                   |

Table 4.3

Reading these first few narrative chapters this way does several things. First, it suggests that the author did have some idea of a cosmology, when sitting down to write this apocalypse. While the author was combining a variety of different cosmologies, these seem to form a coherent and singular cosmology in his/her mind. This opening set up suggests that for all the creation of places horizontally situated to the earth, these places do not replace the laterally situating of key places above the earth. Thus, the expansion of the cosmos to either side of the earth does not replace the pre-existent idea of a stack of heavens above the earth in *Vis. Paul*. Here we see a combining of different sorts of cosmic geographies, effectively creating all the different sorts of places needed for the narrative of the apocalypse. This set up gives the reader a sense of place when reading the rest of the apocalypse and fulfills, in a strictly delimited way, the required cartography of the cosmos needed in an apocalypse.

In the second place, this set up leaves open the number of heavens conceived of by the author – three or seven, but allows for a seven-heaven schematic. While this set up would allow for only three planes of heaven, if paradise and the throne room of God share a plane, it also allows for a seven-heaven schematic, if we assume that the author has internalized concurrent plans of the heavens that place paradise in a middle-level of the heavens, with the throne of God in the very highest level of the heavens. The fact that in chapters 14 through 18 the judging of souls appears to occur in the first heaven makes it possible that at this point the throne of God is located down in the first heaven; but, even if the author were following a three level heaven on account of 2nd Corinthians, it makes no sense to crowd the lowest heaven with the celestial spheres and the throne of God. This also goes against previous ideas about the nature of the heavens – God’s throne must be in the highest heights of heaven, irrespective of how many heavens a text
suggests. It is better to assume that while God judges souls, who are located in the first heaven, the throne room of God is located in a higher heaven. This is made explicit in chapter 29, when the angel explains that the thrones of God and of Christ are located in the seventh heaven. Thus, in the case of the judgment scenes of chapters 14-18, it is possible that as in chapter 44, when in hell, which is below and to the west of heaven, Paul looks up and sees the heavenly throne room high above, so in these scenes, God looks down to the first heaven from his throne room up above. While this means that until Chapter 29, the author might be conceiving of a three level heaven, it seems more likely that the throne room must be in the seventh heaven for the whole of the apocalypse. This is the viewpoint taken by J. Edward Wright in his work on ancient heavens, who believes the author merely limits Paul’s journey to the first three of these seven heavens in keeping with the description in 2 Corinthians, \(^{293}\) which is a logical interpretation of the data.

Overall, and as I further argue below, this sketching of the cosmos in the introduction and lack of precise development of it later, suggests that the primary interest of this apocalypse is not the charting of the cosmos. Rather, this opening introduction creates the stage upon which the focus of the apocalypse can be placed – the fate of the soul after death. Thus, the lack of any description of the royal throne room – in the seventh heaven or elsewhere, and the lack of any mention of the fourth through sixth heavens anywhere; in \textit{Vis. Paul} we hear only of the places that matter for issues of life after death. This rudimentary bit of cartography creates as much of a map of the cosmos as is necessary for a tour of the individual spots of the deceased souls’ afterlives. While individual places will get fuller descriptions elsewhere, the introduction offers the only clear cosmology in the entire text. The focus of the spatial and geographic bits and pieces that appear throughout the text as a whole serve a different purpose than the revelation of the secrets of the nature of the cosmos. To what that end is I now turn in the next section.

4.5 The Problem of Placing the “Land of Promise” and the Purpose of Cartography in the Visio de Pauli

One thing such a reading of the opening paragraph does not do is help to clarify the location of the land of promise (terra repromissionis),\(^\text{294}\) which Paul visits in Chapter 21. This is in large part because the land of promise is one of the places of Vis. Paul that are not located in the heavens, but on the far sides of the ocean that encircles the earth. If there is one aspect of the cosmology and/or geography of Vis. Paul that is well studied, it is the placement of this land of promise. That does not mean, however, that this has led to scholarly consensus on its location. Indeed, there are nearly as many interpretations on the cosmology of Vis. Paul as there are published pieces about the text.

James, when he published the English translation, did not dwell on the overall cosmology of the piece, and makes no comment on the land of promise and its location, but he did claim that Paul only visits one paradise – not two – and that he does so twice (at chapter 19 and again at chapter 45).\(^\text{295}\) J. Edward Wright, in his brief treatment of Vis. Paul, suggests that the land of promise be seen as a slightly Christianized Land of the Blessed, and that as such, it should be understood as existing outside of heaven, and on the far reaches of the earth (i.e. not beyond the ocean).\(^\text{296}\) The place of torment is opposite it in the west, and thus the two are like magnetic poles on each side of the earth. Himmelfarb appears to hold with a 3-heaven schematic, with the land of promise, the City of Christ and hell all outside of heaven, but as she is not interested in the geography and cosmology of the text, she does not offer a definitive or clear reading of the relation of these places to one another. She does, however, think that the second visit to paradise is to the same paradise that Paul went to the first time – the paradise of the third heaven.\(^\text{297}\) As we saw above, Carozzi, in his unique reading of the text, agrees with James in so far as he thinks there is only


\(^{296}\) Wright, Early History, 162.

\(^{297}\) Himmelfarb, Tours of Hell, 17.
one paradise visited, but he sees this as the earthly paradise of Genesis, not a heavenly one. As for the land of promise, Carozzi understands it also to be terrestrial and located in the far east of the earth. Anthony Hilhorst, in a piece on paradise in *Vis. Paul*, comes to the conclusion that “there is still good reason to equate third heaven and Paradise,” thus deciding that James’ (and Himmelfarb’s) interpretation of one paradise, but two visits is best. Lastly, Rosenstiehl, writing in the late 1980s, proposed that one cannot know where the paradise of *Vis. Paul* is located, because the text appears to be an earlier *katabasis* of Paul, with two major insertions, chapters 19-21, the visit to the third heaven, and chapters 45-51, the visit to paradise. Rosenstiehl argues that this makes clear that the third heaven and paradise are not the same place, but he notes that because there is no directive as to the location of paradise in 45-51, we never can know where it fits into the text’s cosmology.

Casey, in his work on *Vis. Paul*, focused on the conflation of and confusion over the various paradisiacal places in the text – the paradise found in the third heaven, the ‘land of promise,’ and the City of Christ. Casey suggests that here one sees the seams of the text and a combination of three different accounts of heaven into one. In addition, Casey sees this work as a cut-and-paste job between Jewish, Greco-Roman, early Christian, and “Orphic” beliefs about the afterlife and the places of the heavens. While Casey is referring to “Orphism” in the old sense of the word, Radcliffe Edmonds III’s recent categorization of ancient “Orphism” as composed of

---


299 Carozzi has a helpful chart of his interpretation of the cosmology of Paul at the end of his book, *Eschatologie et Au-Delà*, 316.


Classical *bricolage*, following Lévi-Strauss, suggests that Casey’s link between ‘Orphism’ and *Vis. Paul*, while outdated, points to one way of viewing the geography and cosmology of the apocalypse – a *bricolage* of places important to Christians of the late 4th century.

This idea of the author of *Vis. Paul* as *bricoleur* allows one a different way to explore why the spaces of *Vis. Paul* are structured as they are and the places of *Vis. Paul* set as they are. For, according to Lévi-Strauss the *bricoleur* works with “messages” that “have to some extent been transmitted in advance,” meaning that the work of the *bricoleur* is “the continual reconstruction from the same materials.” Here, rather than stick with the Saussurian idea of “signs” and “symbols” that Lévi-Strauss uses, I substitute ‘places’ – all pre-existent to *Vis. Paul*, and all rebuilt and re-placed (rather than replaced) into a heavenly and cosmic tableau. The places that appear in *Vis. Paul* are not there to offer a new and dazzling tour of the places of heaven, but to create places that represent all of humankind – all the sorts of the ‘wicked’ and all the sorts of the ‘good.’ This idea of ‘place’ comes from the work of Edward Casey, whose work I discuss at length in the first chapter of this work. Casey argues for the primacy of place over space and suggests that places gather and that, in fact, “places are the condition of possibility for human culture itself.”

Thus, here we will look at the nature of the places that gather in *Vis. Paul* to create the cosmos as a whole, a new and Christian cultural phenomenon.

In *Vis. Paul* we see a lack of concern over the exact geography of the world, cosmos, and heavenly realms, and instead a focus on accounting for everything and everyone in the world, through the creation of places – topoi – for them. In *Vis. Paul* there is a move away from the careful mapping of the heavens and the various mythic topoi of the past for a focus on the places of people who were contemporaries of the apocalypse. If you are someone who performed the will of God, despite your own misgivings, you will go to the “path of the prophets” by the river

---


308 Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place,” 34.
of honey in the city of Christ – precisely (ch. 25). But, if you were an ascetic of proud heart, you will be left just outside the city of Christ, but still within the land of promise - precisely (ch. 24). The topoi of Vis. Paul are micro-topoi, accounting for each and every sort of person in the world. The grander geography and cosmology only exists in so far as these micro-topoi cluster together and their clusters make up the pre-existent mythic topoi of paradise, hell, the land of promise, and the city of Christ. For Edward Casey tells us that places gather and in Vis. Paul we see the gathering of micro-places into larger pre-existent places, that the author has placed in the approximate locations of these places in other cosmologies and apocalypses.

Take the City of Christ for an example. Confusingly located seemingly within the land of promise, but separated by both water and walls from that land, its location is also somewhat mysterious in the text. Not only is the City of Christ bounded by the four rivers of honey, milk, wine and oil, but it is also bounded by the prophets, the innocents slain by Herod, the patriarchs and saints, and the ones who gave up everything for devotion to God, respectively; in addition each of these boundaries and sites swells daily as more believers of different types arrive and are properly sorted – the ones who did the will of God, the ones who lived in total chastity, the ones who were exemplary hosts of strangers, and the ones who totally devoted themselves to God, respectively. In this way, the borders of the City of Christ exist as much to delineate the city, as they do to create places for the various Christian righteous. As Bachelard observed, points on a horizon create “so many nests of solitude” in which a viewer might dream of living,\(^{309}\) or, in this case, might dream of spending all eternity. Along the banks of the rivers outside the city of Christ one sees the various nests available for all eternity, should one prove worthy in one capacity or another.

The innovation in Vis. Paul is in the focus on the micro rather than macro with respect to place and site. Precision is only necessary in the listing of places for all the different sorts of people there are, not in the location of certain spots.\(^{310}\) A hybrid heaven and earth allow for the space needed to emplace all these different micro-topoi in the apocalypse. This mixing of grander geographies leads to the confusion over both the placement of the land of promise and in its

\(^{309}\) Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, 172.

\(^{310}\) One sees this made manifest in the variety of people one finds in these various celestial and hellish regions.
relation to ‘paradise’ – for the importance of the land of the blessed lies not in its cosmic geography, but in its micro-geography, in the placement of so many different sorts of the blessed. Because paradise also consists of the concatenation of a series of spots of the righteous, they are hard to keep straight. The old mythic sites have been reconceived and the logic that created them and kept them distinct has vanished and been replaced with a new logic that approaches spatial organization in a very different manner. Indeed, Bachelard writes that “one must go beyond logic in order to experience what is large in what is small,” and this seems to be the rule by which an approach to the cosmic space of Vis. Paul needs to be accomplished. Only by understanding the focus of the apocalypse as being on the listing of micro-sites over the creation of a coherent cosmic geography, does one see the logic of the places of Vis. Paul. When read in this light, however, it does become clear that the land of promise is not the same as paradise.

Paradise does appear to be located in the third heaven, and it serves mainly as the repository of the mythic righteous from the Hebrew Scriptures, though Mary and her angelic attendants wander its groves (ch. 46). Here, with the logic of so many micro-sites making up a single large mythic site, it follows that a mythic site so bound up with the tales of not just the Hebrew Scriptures, but of the book of Genesis – the paradise of Adam and Eve, would become the site made up of the eternal resting places of the righteous from that book in particular (seventeen of the thirty-four total human inhabitants mentioned).

This focus on minutiae over the huge structure of the cosmos is a marked shift from other depictions of the heavens that pre-date Vis. Paul. While others suggest that this change in the nature of geographic depictions and the ensuing confusion over where places actually are within the cosmos of Vis. Paul come from the poor editing job of the “author” of Vis. Paul, whether through the more charitable view that the author took a katabasis and turned it into an apocalypse, or the less charitable view that the author was not a skilled wordsmith and did not notice the obvious “seams” in his editing job. These explanations of authorial error focus on what scholars see as the bungling of a proper cosmic tour in Vis. Paul, but what if one instead explains these errors not as sloppiness due to stupidity, but inelegance on the cosmic scale due to a shift in focus from the cosmic to the minute? That is to say, what if the oddity of the cosmic

---

311 Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, 150.
geography is the cost of the shift from seeing the cosmos as the realm of the chosen few (if any), a place of hidden wonder available to only a handful, to the view that the cosmos is the repository of the places of the afterlife, where each and every soul upon the earth will find an eternal place (or nest)? If one looks at the geography of Vis. Paul in that light, one sees just how “Christian” an apocalypse Vis. Paul really is. The role of the heavens, and wider cosmos, is to house the souls of the dead – both righteous and unrighteous.

In this light the exact nature of the land of promise becomes clear – it is the repository of the souls of certain sorts of the righteous. Thus, where the land of promise belongs in the wider cosmos is of no importance. The land of promise exists in Vis. Paul as the concatenation of micro-places, the eternal nests of the righteous and holy believers. The gathering of these micro-places creates the place of the land of promise, but how this site relates to the wider cosmos is not important in Vis. Paul. The focus of the heavenly tour in Vis. Paul is not about the revelation of a hidden cosmic geography, but about the fate of the dead – every last one of them. In chapter 13, Vis. Paul makes this clear, when “Paul” tells his angelic guide, “I wish to see the souls of the just and of sinners going out of the earth.”³¹² Paul’s interest, and the focus of the book, is on the individual soul’s place in the hereafter, not a cartography of the cosmos. Therefore, Rosenstiehl was correct when he suggested that one can never know the exact placement of the land of promise, this is because it exists only as a gathering of micro-sites of the righteous, not as a site of terra firma, denoted on a map by Paul, one who has gained special knowledge and access to the heavens. If it were not for the outline of a cosmology that occurs in the introduction, the place could float free through the cosmos, tethered to nothing. As it is, the primary nature of the land of promise is the gathering site of so many micro-sites of righteousness, the location of this larger site is both secondary and determined by the rudimentary and borrowed cosmic geography of Vis. Paul.

4.6 Addendum: The Lack of a Heavenly Temple in Visio Pauli

One place that is simply missing from Vis. Paul is the heavenly temple. Not only is there no temple in the city of Christ, only an altar, on which no sacrifices seem to take place, there is also

³¹² “Et dixi angelo: Volegam uidere animas iustorum et peccatorum exeuntes de mundo.” (Paris Manuscript, Silverstein and Hilhorst).
no temple in the heavens that receives any mention. Several scholars have discussed the way Christians reconceived of the locus of the heavenly temple on the earth as moving away from the physical temple in Jerusalem and the concurrent removal of a temple from the imagined new/heavenly Jerusalem.\(^{313}\) This was a process some scholars see present in the letters of Paul,\(^{314}\) meaning the moving of the heavenly temple into the body of Jesus Christ and his followers predates the composition of the *Vis. Paul* by several hundred years. This view of the church as the earthly successor to the temple continues to appear in various early Christian writings, though the meaning of this fact differed from century to century and thinker to thinker. Thus, Irenaeus and Tertullian both thought that there would be an eventual restoration of a Christian Jerusalem, Origen believed that Jerusalem would remain a celestial city, apart from the corrupting earth.\(^{315}\) Helena, the mother of Constantine, believed in building the new and Christian Jerusalem in the face of the old and razed Jewish Jerusalem (to paraphrase Eusebius). In this new Jerusalem, there was a new and Christian temple – the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.\(^{316}\) Even while these various early Christians conceived of this transferal of the heavenly Jerusalem to Christians in a variety of ways, the reconceiving in each case of the temple is clear. How then does the temple-less heaven of *Vis. Paul* fit into these various Christian understandings of the new Jerusalem and the replacement of the temple with the body of Christ? Earlier, I discussed the pastiche that is *Vis. Paul* and the variety of sources that informed its composition. It seems likely that the author knew at least some of these ideas, if not all. Indeed, in chapter 30, in the midst of the City of Christ, Paul discovers that he is in Jerusalem – “And the angel said to me, ‘This is David; this is the city of Jerusalem, for when Christ the King of Eternity shall come with the assurance of his kingdom, he again shall go


\(^{314}\) Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 253. In the case of 1 Cor 3, Beale’s view is a firmer one than Fey’s suggested possible view, which predated and informed Beale. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 147.

\(^{315}\) Barker, “Jerusalem the Golden,” 7. See Origen’s *Celsus* 7.28.

before him” (Vis Paul 30). Thus, it appears that the eschatology of Vis. Paul agrees with Ireneaus and Tertullian, but this Jerusalem will lack a temple. It is possible the author agrees with those who see a temple on the earth as unnecessary in the new Christian age. No longer needed on the earth, there is likewise no need for a heavenly archetype of the temple. This is certainly one way to read out the disappearance of the temple from the Vis. Paul. But, there is another, when one understands that the focus of Vis. Paul is on micro-topoi over the macro sites of the cosmos, this disappearance of the heavenly temple also becomes logical. The heavenly temple is not a site that lends itself to the housing of micro-sites within or even around it. The heavenly temple is a marker of the earlier Jewish understanding of the heavens as the site of God’s house and the angelic host. In addition, the heavenly temple speaks to a time of extremely limited access to the heavens. In Vis. Paul there is simply no interest in the idea that the cosmos is a locked up secret, the knowledge of which sets one apart from other people. Rather, the cosmos has become a repository of all the souls of those who walk the earth. It is now important for everyone to know about the cosmos, for their eternal fate is located somewhere in it. As such, the heavenly temple is of little use to this new understanding of the heavens in particular, as it was only ever open to the angels and the souls most like the angels in purity, righteousness, and devotion to God. Other mythic sites on the macro scale appear in Vis. Paul because they allow for the gathering of souls to them, good souls to paradise and/or the land of the blessed, exemplary souls to the city of Christ, and wicked souls to various regions of hell.

While the heavenly temple is never mentioned, or visited in Paul’s peregrinations, the idea of the heavenly throne room does appear. According to chapter 42, the throne room is in the seventh heaven, and in addition to the throne of God, it also holds a curtain and an altar. It appears then that if there is a temple still in heaven, it must be in the seventh heaven. But, this placing of the temple in the seventh heaven is not a claiming of the space as Christian, so much as an altering of what the heavenly temple is and its importance, or lack of importance in this new Christian understanding of the places of the heavens. The throne room is both locked away in the seventh heaven and also visible to everyone down in hell, which is not what one would expect based on the past examples of the heavenly temple that we have seen. While certainly inaccessible to sinners, the idea that everyone, even those in hell could see the throne room suggests a sea change in the meaning and function of both the heavens and the idea of a heavenly throne room, which is tangentially tied to the idea of the heavenly temple. There is no claiming of the temple
here. Rather, there is clear claiming of God and the nature of access to God – a much opened up process from previous times. The intercessions of the holy ones do not fall on deaf ears. Rather, they permit the opening up of the heavens, allowing even the most depraved a glimpse of the throne room – something that used to be witnessed by prophets alone (i.e. Isaiah). Here, one then, sees Vis. Paul working with pre-existent ideas and notions, but presenting them in a slightly different and rethought fashion.

4.7 Conclusions

The loss of the original conclusion of Vis. Paul is lamentable and it would be wonderful to know how the tale originally ended. Was the end note triumphant, hopeful, admonishing, or something else entirely? The conclusion, however, would likely not clarify much in terms of the narrative arc or the exact placement of various sites throughout the cosmos. The Visio Pauli marks a departure in the nature and primary focus of the genre from cosmic tour and teleological journey to the heart of the cosmos – the temple of God, and instead offers a meandering tour of the micro-topoi of the eternal places of souls. The organization of the geography and cosmology of the text is not centered around the location of the standard macro-sites from the mythic past, but instead a list of all the different sorts of souls in the world. On account of this change in the principle of organization, there is neither a real narrative arc nor a clear and well demarcated cosmic cartography in the text. The only real cosmology is offered in the opening scenes of the apocalypse itself, chapters three through six. This rough outline of cosmic places gives Vis. Paul the necessary scaffolding to emplace the micro-places of the afterlife that are the chief focus of the apocalypse. The existence of the macro places, paradise, the land of promise, hell, and even the different levels of heaven itself, are necessary only in so far as they allow concatenations of these micro-places to become more real to a reader, who would be familiar with the geography and layout of these mythic sites. Vis. Paul depicts a change occurring in Christian belief in and understanding of heaven from an inaccessible place of wondrous mysteries and increasingly awe-inspiring places to the place of first judgment and then eternity for all the souls of the earth. This idea of heaven as the eternal place for everyone on the earth led to this refocusing away from the macro to the micro, as the curious faithful (and likely wayward too), became curious about where exactly they would end up in the hereafter. Having looked at this changing way of understanding the purpose of heaven and the way Vis. Paul’s lacking cartography highlights this
shift in this chapter, in the next chapter I explore the artistic depictions of the heavens that were beginning to appear at the same time that Vis. *Paul* was first circulating.
Chapter 5

5  Tessellated Territories: Mosaic Maps of the Late Antique Jewish Heavens

In the last three chapters of this work, I have looked exclusively at textual depictions of the heavens, even when making use of theories from art history to aid in the explication of these complex topographies. Here, I turn to early Jewish art and ask what these works can help tell us about ancient understandings of and beliefs about the heavens. Here, the preceding chapters’ findings in texts about heaven are used in this chapter to help elucidate the meaning of these various artistic depictions of the heavens. Indeed, it is through recourse to the topography of these textual heavens that I argue for reading these pieces of art as maps of the heavens, for they are opaque with respect to meaning. Not only is there a shift here from the textual to the material, but this also requires a leap forward in history, as the first through third centuries CE are lacking in examples to discuss. In addition, here I enter a highly fraught area of discussion, that of the early post-temple, but pre-rabbinic, synagogue. While much work has been done of late on the origins of the synagogue and its development in Palestine, as well as the diaspora, here I address these issues only when they intersect with the focus of this chapter, which is the artwork of these synagogues, particularly the mosaics. While this project is very much a series of snapshots into both the constancy and the changing nature of the antique heavens across time, place, and religious group, in this chapter observations catalogued and explored in the last three chapters will be reintroduced as evidence for the discussion of this chapter, which centers around a set of late antique synagogue mosaics from Roman Palestine, which feature imagery that surprised the first excavators of them.

These figured mosaics of late antique synagogues are full of complex and often opaque meaning. Beginning with Erwin Goodenough and carrying through until today, many scholars

---

have posited widely differing interpretations of these mosaics. Frequently, these scholars place the mosaics and wall art of the early Byzantine churches in dialogue with these synagogue mosaics, in an attempt to better understand the rich symbolism of these scenes, as well as to highlight what they see as an implicit fight for ownership of these particular symbols that was occurring between the two religions. Indeed, sometimes it seems that there is only one debate with respect to synagogue mosaics: determining exactly how these mosaics are in ‘dialogue’ with the emerging world of Christian art of the Byzantine period. Here, I both expand the discourse on synagogue mosaics and move it in a different direction than those who place them as a locus of Jewish-Christian tussle, by focusing on reading the mosaics as depictions of the heavenly realms. In doing so, this chapter builds on portions of the work of both Rachel Hachlili and Jodi Magness and is in direct contradiction not only with rabbinic readings of the mosaics, as exemplified in Ze’ev Weiss and Yaffa Englard’s interpretations of the mosaics, but also to Seth Schwartz’s work on ‘decoding’ synagogue mosaics.\(^{318}\) Here, I suggest that in light of the way Jews of the late Roman and early Byzantine periods depict heaven and the heavenly temple in texts, one can read these mosaics as symbolic depictions of the heavens. In contrast to other recent readings of these mosaics as the intellectual property of the elite, I argue that most community members entering these synagogues would have understood these mosaics as maps of the heavens. I will open with a brief overview of the mosaics in question, move on to a survey of the current scholarly opinions on the matter and close with a reading of the mosaics as mini and opaque maps of the divine realm utilizing some of the theoretical ideas I employed in the last chapter, in particular the work of Ethington and Casey on the mapping of the past, which I believe one sees being done physically in these mosaics.

5.1 The Synagogue Zodiac Mosaics

Synagogue mosaics and their surprising anthropomorphic images have long interested scholars. Not only do some mosaics feature clear depictions of humans, but others go further and showcase a zodiac in the center of the work. Currently we know of six late antique Palestinian synagogue mosaics that feature a zodiac in one of the registers of the design, these are Hammat

Tiberias, Bet Alpha, Na’aran (‘Ein Duk), Huseifa (‘Isfiyā), Khirat Susiya, and Zippori (Sepphoris). There are far more than six theories for what these images represent, for every scholar seems to have his/her own opinion as to why late antique Jews suddenly took to overtly non-Jewish images for the purposes of their religious iconography in the second half of the fourth century CE, as well as why they continued to utilize these images, in particular that of the zodiac, for the next 150 years, until the end of the sixth century CE. When discussing these synagogue mosaics, it is also important to note that archaeologists have located and explored more than six antique synagogues. Some of these synagogues may well have featured mosaics similar to the six recovered, but it is impossible to know at this point. It is, however, curious that the only known zodiac mosaics come from synagogues located “at home” in Roman Palestine and not in the diaspora, where one might have expected to find a more lenient attitude toward clearly non-Jewish iconography. Of the six synagogues only three are well studied, Hammat Tiberias, Sepphoris and Beth Alpha (See Images 1 (Hammat Tiberias), 2 (Sepphoris), and 3 (Bet Alpha) in Appendix A). Because of the paucity of publications on Na’aran, Huseifa, and Khirat Susiya, I refer to them only tangentially in this chapter, focusing my inquiry on

---


320 For example, a synagogue of the “Galilean” style was excavated in Meroth, which featured a mosaic floor. The mosaic, however, was later removed and replaced with a stone pavement, meaning we do not know what the imagery of this mosaic was. Z. Ilan, “The Synagogue and Beth Midrash of Meroth,” in Ancient Synagogues in Israel (ed. Rachel Hachlili; BAR International Series 499; Oxford: BAR 1989), 21-42. See also Gideon Foerster’s analysis of their findings in his piece, “The Ancient Synagogues of the Galilee,” 301.
Sepphoris’ elaborate mosaic and then examining Hammat Tiberias’ and Bet Alpha’s mosaics in light of my findings as comparanda. Indeed, Huseifa, Susyia, and Na’aran all suffered at the hands of late antique aniconists, and it is difficult to state definitively what their mosaics contained.  

Further, the use of Hebrew to label the various parts of these zodiacs, rather than Greek, which is found elsewhere in the synagogues, is also puzzling. At Sepphoris, the designers used both Greek and Hebrew to label the different parts of the zodiac, a unique feature (see Image 4 in Appendix A). While all six of these synagogues’ mosaics share several themes, images, and similar layouts, each is a unique creation that reflects the congregation that commissioned the piece and the artist who executed the work. For example, the worshippers at Sepphoris were comfortable with the anthropomorphic depiction of the months, in rectangular panels, but did not feature a human figure inside the central chariot, substituting the sun itself instead (see Image 5 in Appendix A). In contrast to Sepphoris, the three synagogue mosaics with the zodiac centres preserved (Hammat Tiberias, Na’aran, and Bet Alpha) all feature an anthropomorphic figure in the center of the chariot, seemingly the Greek god Helios himself (See Image 6 in Appendix A for the Bet Alpha Helios).

\[321\]

This is particularly true of Susyia, which has three layers of mosaics in its main chamber, with the middle one featuring the figured mosaic under discussion here. Indeed, the claim that Susyia belongs in the list of synagogues featuring a zodiac is a precarious one, as all that is there now is what David Milsom terms a “divided circle,” Milsom, Art and Architecture of the Synagogue, 467. The excavators assume, with good logic, that the mosaic removed and replaced with “a geometric pattern with a rosette at its center,” was a figural zodiac, whose depictions of humans made it anathema to later aniconic members of the synagogue (Gutman, Yeivin, and Netzer, “Excavations in the Synagogue at Horvat Susiya,” 126). In addition, this mosaic at Susyia, while featuring tropes found in these other synagogue mosaics deviates sharply in layout, with the temple façade flanked by menorot in front of, and facing towards, the secondary bema (and purported torah niche), which is in the northeast of the room. The rest of the mosaic runs east to west and is oriented that way: geometric design panel featuring birds and octagons whose images no longer survive, the possible zodiac panel in the middle, and a hunting scene along with Daniel in the lion’s den at the western most end. This incongruous design may, in part, be due to the layout of the room, which is longhouse style east-west, but oriented North toward Jerusalem (a highly unusual format), (Gutman, Yeivin, and Netzer, “Excavations in the Synagogue at Horvat Susiya,” 124), but it suggests that while the artists at Susyia knew that others were employing these scenes in their synagogue floors, they did not know the order in which other synagogues placed them.
Until relatively recently, scholars and laypeople alike read late antique Judaism through the prism of Rabbinic texts. This gave a skewed perception of formative Judaism, one that is still being corrected by archaeological finds. Thus, when archaeologists uncovered the first synagogue zodiacs, the images created quite a stir as they were completely unexpected. Archeologists also found the sort of mosaic they expected in some of these synagogues: pure geometric designs with no animals, humans, or even recognizable plants, featuring dedicatory inscriptions. In the six synagogues with the elaborate mosaics featuring the zodiac, however, these geometric designs create borders and fill blank space in the main chamber of the synagogue, or are relegated to the side and entry chambers, such as the one at Hammat Tiberias (See Image 7 in Appendix A). The main portion of the synagogue floor, the part visible for the majority of the service, is covered in these large mosaics that feature images and figures of all types.

5.2 Early Scholastic Reception of the Synagogue Zodiac Mosaics

Early scholars, intrigued by these mosaics, put forth various theories for who the Jews behind the designs were. Goodenough famously argued for non-Rabbinic so called ‘Hellenistic Jews’, who had fully appropriated the iconography and some of the beliefs of their gentile neighbors. Eliazer Sukenik believed these mosaics were proof of a belief in “black magic,” “evil spirits,” and astrology among late antique Jews. Lucille Roussin argued that some Jews actually worshipped Helios as a minor deity. Since then, scholars have offered various other theories,

---


which have built on Goodenough’s assertion that a non-rabbinic branch of Judaism created these figural mosaics. These theories, however, reject the idea that the makers of the synagogue mosaics were fully Hellenized, and instead focus on the fact that synagogues flourished for years without support from the rabbis. Thus, other normative forms of late antique Judaism clearly embraced not only synagogue worship, but in some cases artwork based on Greco-Roman models as the decoration for these synagogues as well.

5.2.1 Hachlili’s Art Historical Reading of the Zodiac Mosaics

One of the earliest and most detailed readings of the synagogue zodiac mosaics was done by Rachel Hachlili in the late 1970s, though Hachlili focuses on the centre zodiac panels of the mosaics alone. Hachlili pinpoints the style of these zodiac mosaics as coming from the Antioch school of mosaic design and traced the development of the floor zodiac design from the 1st century CE ceiling depictions (the temple of Bel at Palmyra) to the 4th century mosaics at Carthage. While the style and form of the synagogue mosaics came out of this Roman Near Eastern tradition, they are unique both with respect to other floor zodiacs and with respect to one another. Thus, Hachlili sees the synagogue floor mosaics as another phase in the development of the floor zodiac mosaic, a fourth and seemingly wholly Jewish phase. Hachlili further subdivides the phase into two parts: those closely aligned with the Antioch school (Hammat Tiberias and Huseifa; see Image 8 in Appendix A for the Tiberias symbols) and those executed by Jewish artists (Bet Alpha and Na’aran; see Image 6 in Appendix A for the Bet Alpha symbols), where the difference is marked by the Jewish artists’ use of what she terms a “literal iconography” for the representations of the zodiac signs. Thus, at Hammat Tiberias and Huseifa one sees the standard Roman iconographic depictions of the zodiac signs, such as Sagittarius and

---

327 But see also Emmanuel Friedheim’s nuanced argument regarding the Rabbis as the de facto leaders of the majority of Palestinian Jews from the 2nd century CE onwards, even while recognizing the presence of non-rabbinic Jews of various stripes amongst them. “Sol Invictus in the Severus Synagogue at Hammath Tiberias, the Rabbis, and Jewish Society: A Different Approach,” RRJ, 12.1 (2009): 89 – 128.


329 Hachlili, “The Zodiac in Ancient Jewish Art,” 64.
Aquarius, whereas at Bet Alpha and Na’aran, the artists created their own iconography based on a literal depiction of the icons, thus one finds an archer and a water bearer on the floors, which lack the visual cues to mark them as representing Sagittarius and Aquarius. These images are instead literally an archer and a water bearer; they have lost their larger identity. In contrast, the Antioch-influenced artists used stock Roman symbols for the signs of the zodiac, employing the full Roman visual vocabulary for the zodiac. In this case, it seems that the Jewish artists would have been given descriptions of the Antioch-inspired mosaics and asked to execute ones in like fashion. Because these artists apparently lacked access to the style books of the Antioch school, or were not trained mosaic artisans, the end result was of a different style than the ones made by artists familiar with the Antioch style.

Hachlili, having offered a thorough analysis of the style of the zodiac mosaics, concurs with Michael Avi-Yonah’s early assessment that the zodiac functioned as a calendar for the synagogue community. Hachlili sees this Jewish zodiac mosaic as a combining of two different stylized calendars, the agricultural and the astronomical. According to this reading, the unification of the seasons, zodiacal signs, and the sun god altogether created something new: a Jewish liturgical calendar. The emergence of the synagogue as the new cultic centre of nascent post-70 CE Judaism created a need for these public liturgical calendars, as the ritual acts once performed by the priests at the temple unexpectedly had to become rites enacted by the community. For the community to enact the rituals, they needed to know when they occurred, for the temple no longer existed to keep sacred time. Thus, for Hachlili, the sudden emergence of these zodiac mosaics in the 4th century was a result of the combining of the new need for a public liturgical calendar with incoming art styles from a nearby and also non-

331 The art historian Meyer Shapiro devoted a whole essay to the Bet Alpha mosaic in 1960, where he suggested it was the work of “an original artistic mind belonging to a nonclassic culture,” rather than an untrained artist. “Ancient Mosaics in Israel,” in Late Antique, Early Christian and Mediaeval Art: Selected Papers, (New York: George Braziller, Inc.: 1979), 20-33, 27.
333 Hachlili, “The Zodiac in Ancient Jewish Art,” 76.
334 Hachlili, “The Zodiac in Ancient Jewish Art,” 76.
monotheistic art centre. Through a creative reworking and combining of various motifs, a new mosaic and a new way of tracking the yearly liturgy emerged. While Hachlili was working before all six of the synagogue mosaics had come to light, her careful observations and serious consideration of the wider world in which these mosaics existed is still of great use, as I will show below. Indeed, no other art historian since Hachlili has so seriously engaged with the forms and artistic schools out of which these mosaics came.

5.2.2 Mosaics as Polemic

More recently, several scholars, Ze’ev Weiss, Yaffa Englard, and Joan Branham have argued that these mosaics must be read as examples of propaganda in an ideological fight. They differ in their understanding of both the opponent in and exact nature of this fight. Weiss and Englard jointly see the mosaics as part of a larger polemic against the rapidly spreading and strengthening religion of Christianity, though their respective arguments differ, whereas Branham sees the mosaics as the artistic depiction of an internal fight amongst Jews. Weiss sees the Sepphoris mosaic and the mosaic at Beit Alpha as both essentially telling the same pictorial narrative, in which these two mosaics attempt to reclaim key mythic stories from the Christians, such as the Akedah, that is, the binding of Isaac, which makes up the bottom panel of both mosaics.335 According to Weiss, these mosaics also speak to a future redemption of the Jewish people and the reestablishment of the temple in Jerusalem in their upper most registers, thereby speaking against the Christian understandings of an imminent new Jerusalem, with Jesus as the new High Priest.336 The zodiac that fills the space between those two pictorial acts of Jewish claiming then represents the link between the two narratives – God’s power as sole ruler of the universe and God’s ability to fulfill both narratives on account of this.337 Thus, as God kept his promise to Abraham, so shall he keep his promise to the Jews in their current temple-less condition.

Yaffa Englard chooses to read out the synagogue mosaics in a midrashic manner, and sees them as symbolic of key ideas for the ideology of late antique Judaism. Thus, the anthropomorphic

335 Weiss, “Between Rome and Byzantium,” 381.
charioteers are not Helios \textit{qua} Helios, but rather anthropomorphic depictions of the sun.\textsuperscript{338} When these anthropomorphic suns are coupled with the zodiac figures, who are representative of the stars generally speaking, they together become the celestial witnesses to the everlasting covenant God made with both the people of Israel and King David (see Psalm 89:29-38 for the literary reference to this, though Englard’s overall Psalms based reading incorporates Psalms 132 and 72 as well).\textsuperscript{339} This reaffirmation of the covenant with Israel and their King David is, then, \textit{contra} the Christian claim to God having formed a new covenant with them through Jesus.\textsuperscript{340} Thus, while Weiss and Englard conduct their readings in very different ways, they reach the same conclusions regarding the mosaics – these mosaics are refutations of Byzantine Christian claims to mythic stories from the past as well as to God himself, something that cannot be abided.

In contrast to both Weiss and Englard, Joan Branham has suggested that the locus of discord and of polemic with respect to these mosaics was not with Christianity, but with the remnants of Temple-based Judaism.\textsuperscript{341} Branham argues that the synagogues of Late Antiquity were in a difficult position with respect to their attempts to give honor to the fallen temple, look forward to the coming of a new temple, but also in the space between these two temples function as the locus of liturgy for Judaism. This three-part agenda for the early synagogues informed their art, as the décor of the space came to represent and speak to these three very different issues. Thus, Branham sees synagogue artwork making manifest the “constant equivocations, indeterminancies, and pluralisms” of late antique Judaism.\textsuperscript{342} Branham offers a reading of the Beit Alpha synagogue mosaic that reflects this multivalent interaction with Judaism past, present and foretold. While Branham’s suggestion that the Rabbis were the ones responsible for the smoothing of this transition and the substituting of the synagogue for the temple seems

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{338} Englard, “Mosaics as Midrash,” 197.
  \item \textsuperscript{339} Englard, “Mosaics as Midrash,” 197.
  \item \textsuperscript{340} Englard, “Mosaics as Midrash,” 209.
  \item \textsuperscript{342} Branham, “Vicarious Sacrality,” 321.
\end{itemize}
misguided,\textsuperscript{343} her overall focus on the mosaics as speaking to inter-Jewish debates and issues, rather than external ones, is a focus well placed and yielding of more interesting finds than the anti-Christian polemic argument. In the next section of this chapter, I explore the evidence we have for the artistic depiction of Hebrew Bible scenes in Christian artwork and compare these findings with Weiss and England’s claims.

5.3 Trends in the Depiction of Hebrew Bible Scenes in Late Antique Christian Art

While the image of late antique Christianity and Judaism as a Jacob and Esau relationship has remained popular of late, there is no need to make it the onus for every aspect of late antique Judaism, particularly with respect to the material features. We saw above that the use and artistic deployment of the same stories and tropes by both Christians and Jews in the late Roman period is a key tenet of this claim that the synagogue art is anti-Christian polemic. While it is true that Christians did (and still do) interpret certain scenes from the Hebrew Bible as foreshadowing the events in the life of Christ (the Isaac cycle being the most obvious), the artwork that Weiss chooses for his comparison comes from churches in Rome and Ravenna – sites far from these Palestinian synagogues. Interestingly, while Weiss chooses several public pieces of art from large churches as his comparanda,\textsuperscript{344} the majority of surviving Christian art from the early years of the religion tells a slightly different story than the one Weiss suggests, with his carefully curated collection of examples.

Indeed, the earliest surviving explicitly Christian artwork, the frescoes of the Roman catacombs, contains the most depictions not of Isaac, but of Jonah, a figure that does not appear in the

\textsuperscript{343} Branham, “Vicarious Sacrality,” 343.

synagogue zodiac mosaics. Indeed, Jonah appears just under one hundred times in the catacomb frescoes, while Abraham and Isaac appear some ten times. Jonah, with his watery tale of rebirth, was a perfect figure for Christians to adopt as their biblical example *par excellence* of baptism. Besides Jonah, we find Noah in the ark, who holds the second highest number of appearances, a mere dozen, Moses striking the rock, Daniel in the lion’s den, the three pious young men in the furnace, and Susanna all depicted alongside the occasional Isaac in these early frescoes. We find only one of these images in the surviving synagogue mosaics, that of Daniel in the lion’s den, at Na’aran and Susyia and both those are somewhat tentative attributions. In addition, Christians were fully reinterpreting these stories to speak to Christian beliefs and practices, just as they had the *Akedah*. This Christian interest in Jonah over and above that of Isaac is found in the frescoes in the Cubicula of the Sacraments in the catacomb of St. Callistus, where Jonah appears four times and Isaac only once. The fact that this was very private art, and not public, meaning Jews likely would never see it, is not an issue here, for this artwork was in Rome, meaning the makers of the synagogue mosaics likely would never have seen the frescoes, even if they had been public art. It is highly unlikely that the makers of these mosaics, local craftsmen, would have travelled to Rome. And herein lies another problem with Weiss and Englard’s claims that these mosaics are anti-Christian Polemic, they rest their claims on artwork from Rome and Ravenna, not art of the Eastern empire. Because Hachlili


has shown that these mosaics’ designs come out of the Antioch school, it seems that looking at Christian art, which also comes out of the Antioch school, or is at least from the East, would allow one to better gauge whether these mosaics are, in fact, engaged in anti-Christian polemic. John Herrmann and Anniewies van den Hoek have shown that early Christian art varied greatly between the West and the East of the Roman Empire not only in terms of artistic style, but also in terms of the tropes, symbols, and even the exact biblical narratives chosen for representation.\textsuperscript{350} Thus, one should ask: to what Christian narratives were these Jewish artists exposed, particularly in art?

### 5.3.1 African Red Slip Ware and Christian Iconography

One form of art that was spread throughout the empire, both west and east was African Red Slip ware (ARS), which came from what is now Tunisia.\textsuperscript{351} The clearly Christian ARS ware of the late Roman period was public art, in so far as it was produced and consumed publicly, and these vessels also feature a similar range of Hebrew Bible characters, all appropriated by Christians to stand in for key Christian ideas.\textsuperscript{352} On the ARS and lamps of the same era, Abraham and Isaac are in company with Daniel, the three young men in the furnace, the miracles of Christ, and possibly Thecla as well; all tales of deliverance from danger of the deadly sort.\textsuperscript{353} This use of the Akedah as one of a series of tales explaining the saving power of God was the standard artistic use of the tale for Christians from the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century through the 6\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{354} It appears that in artwork, both fresco and pottery, Isaac was not immediately turned into a prototype of Christ, nor was the tale given more weight than other similar tales of salvation through faith. Unlike with the catacomb frescoes, it is possible that these vessels and lamps were known to the artists that made the synagogue mosaics, but it seems unlikely that they would have used their mosaics to speak to the iconography of Christian lamps. But what of the larger issue at hand – what these

\textsuperscript{350} Anniewies Van Den Hoek and John J. Herrmann, Jr; Pottery, Pavements, and Paradise: Iconographic and Textual Studies on Late Antiquity (VCS 122; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 365ff.

\textsuperscript{351} Van Den Hoek and Herrmann, Jr; Pottery, Pavements, and Paradise, 65.

\textsuperscript{352} Van Den Hoek and Herrmann, Jr; Pottery, Pavements, and Paradise, 67.

\textsuperscript{353} Van Den Hoek and Herrmann, Jr.; Pottery, Pavements, and Paradise, 90.

\textsuperscript{354} Van Den Hoek and Herrmann, Jr.; Pottery, Pavements, and Paradise, 90; see also a critique of this idea from Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art, 74ff.
frescoes and lamps represented for the newly created religion and why these particular images were the ones used. A problem with Englard’s claim is that while Christians did appropriate the Isaac cycle as their own, they did not only appropriate Isaac and his near sacrifice, which weakens the claim that the use of the Akedah in the synagogue mosaics was an attempt at Jewish re-claiming of the scene.

5.3.2 The Byzantine Christian Mosaics of Syria

This leads one to ask, what of the Christian mosaics in the East, particularly those coming out of Antioch and the wider realm of Roman Syria? In his study of early Roman churches in Syria, Ignacio Peña noted that while these Syrian churches were certainly not without decoration, the decoration they did have was mainly painted plaster walls that no longer survive, and carved decoration of pillars, lintels, and the like.\(^\text{355}\) In addition to these, on occasion a church also had mosaic pavements, though the evidence for mosaics is sparse, preserved in only a handful of locations; Peña lists only the churches at Kharab Sultan, Maʿarata, Jabal Zawiyye, Has, Rayan, and Huarte as containing preserved mosaic floors.\(^\text{356}\) It would be helpful if we knew what the wall decorations looked like, given the rich iconography of the house church in Dura Europos, from two hundred years before these more substantial churches, but as we do not have the wall decoration of the synagogues in question, this matters less than it would otherwise. In contrast, we can place the Syrian Byzantine church mosaics in conversation with the Palestinian Byzantine synagogue mosaics.

Peña notes that the surviving church mosaics of Syria are devoid of figures for the most part, and consist primarily of “geometric and organic motifs,” though the church at Maʿarata featured


images of animals and human.\textsuperscript{357} In addition, the Syrian churches never have mosaics in the apse of their churches, which for them represented heaven. In contrast, the naves of these churches represented the earth, and as such, were allowed more expansive decoration, in the form of these floor mosaics.\textsuperscript{358} Janine Balty’s work on Syrian Byzantine mosaics bears out Peña’s claims to a certain extent; she notes that Syrian churches of the mid to late 4\textsuperscript{th} century employed mosaics only as floor decoration, much like the synagogues of Palestine.\textsuperscript{359} In these early mosaics, it seems that the Syrian Christians were very conservative in what they would allow inside their places of worship as decoration, for all of these mosaics are primarily geometric in form, featuring various combinations of crosses, hexagons and octagons.\textsuperscript{360} Balty notes that this conservative and geometric form of floor mosaic is found, not just in mid to late 4\textsuperscript{th} century Byzantine Syrian churches, but also in the synagogue of Apameia, which was dedicated in 392 CE. The Jews of Apameia were apparently influenced by their Christian neighbors’ artistic preferences more so than their far-flung Jewish brethren.

Balty notes that only at the end of the fourth century CE, does a break from these strictly aniconic and purely geometric mosaics occur in Syrian churches, displayed best in the mosaics of the church at Khirbet Muqa, which features images of birds, plants, and vessels.\textsuperscript{361} Unlike the synagogue zodiac mosaics, the catacomb frescoes, or the ARS vessels, these mosaic figures do not depict a biblical narrative, but instead a general image of the bucolic. This bucolic imagery had further developed by the mid fifth century CE, exemplified by the mosaics of the church at Tayyibet el-Imam, which features not just birds and plants, but also fish, animals, and buildings.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{357} Peña, \textit{The Christian Art of Byzantine Syria}, 86. Note – these were the mosaics surviving in the mid-1990s when Peña conducted his research, we do not know how many of these remain in existence.\
\textsuperscript{358} Peña, \textit{The Christian Art of Byzantine Syria}, 86.\
\textsuperscript{359} Janine Balty, “Syrische Mosaikkunst,” 100. This is in contrast to the use of wall mosaics in Hellenistic Antioch, an art form that returned with the Islamic conquest of the region.\
\textsuperscript{360} Balty, “Syrische Mosaikkunst,” 100.\
Lacking human figures, the mosaics of Tayyibet do have the earliest surviving Syrian Christian mosaic iconography – the centre of the scene is the lamb of Christ, reclining beneath a canopy, with the four rivers of paradise flowing out about him in the foreground, while in the background two sacred loci of Christianity are depicted – Jerusalem and Bethlehem. In the latter half of the 5th century CE, mosaics mixed the two forms together, with the borders of main room mosaics and small side rooms consisting of geometric patterns, and the centre sections of main room mosaics featuring animals and plants. While Balty suggests that the mosaics of the mid-5th century were the ones to influence the mosaics of greater Arabia and Palestine, it seems that in the case of the synagogue mosaics, they follow the pattern of the late 5th century mosaics, rather than those of the mid-5th century, featuring as they do geometric patterns in the borders and side rooms and their figural mosaics in the middle of the main room.

It appears that the Syrian Christian mosaics offer little in the way of iconography to which the synagogue mosaics might be responding. The focus on geometric, vegetal, and largely faunal decorations does not point to the usurping of Jewish themes and tropes in mosaic artwork, but a deep-seated concern over avoiding inadvertent idolatry within the sacred space of the Byzantine church. Indeed, we find this concern made law in the Imperial Edict of 427 CE, which forbade placing crosses on the floors of churches, lest someone walk over the holy symbol. As Rina Talgam has pointed out, this meant that the designers of church floor mosaics had far less freedom in innovation that did their counterparts designing wall mosaics. This resulted in the designers’ use of these overtly ‘secular’ images that were popular throughout the empire at the

---

363 Balty, “Syrische Mosaikkunst,” 102. Though, Balty notes that the mosaics of a lowly rural church and the mosaics of the Cathedral of Apameia were not in the same league, nor did they follow the same style rules of composition.
365 Cod. Just. 1.8.1; Latin in Corpus Iuris Civilis (ed. by Theodor Mommsen and Paul Kreuger, 3 vols; Berolini: Apud Weidmannos, 1889); also Edict of Theodosius 2, in Cyril Mango, The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453, Sources and Documents (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 36.
time, particularly in houses, for the flooring of churches. While scholarly debate exists on how to read these overtly non-religious images in the early Christian churches, this debate centers around the question of whether the images are allegorical in nature or not. Those who see the imagery as allegorical, however, do not see the imagery as representing biblical stories, but general ideas, such as God’s love for his people, the prize of immortality, or what an ideal and Edenic world will look like. Thus, it seems that the Christian mosaics of the style adopted by the ancient Palestinian synagogues do not use biblical imagery and would not have pushed the Jewish artists employing their styles and techniques to introduce anti-Christian rhetoric into their floor designs. The question then remains, was there an active artistic polemic in existence in Palestine between the Christians and Jews to which these mosaics might respond and with which they might engage?

5.3.3 The Mosaic Floors of Palestinian Byzantine Churches

Rina Talgam’s work on the mosaic floors of ancient Palestinian mosaic floors in both synagogues and churches suggests that there likely was not such a pictorial polemic, and, further, argues that polemic is not the only way to read these mosaics. Talgam notes that the Byzantine churches of ancient Palestine featured (in order of subjects with the most appearances to subjects with the least appearances): animals and rural life scenes, hunting scenes surrounded by geometric carpets, Nilotic scenes, landscapes featuring buildings, the months of the year (personified), the four seasons, the earth with the sea, and portraits of church benefactors. In terms of biblical narratives, only Jonah, the cured crippled man with his mat on his shoulders, and Isaac appear. Talgam, like Weiss, notes that this use of Isaac’s story in both church and synagogue art speaks to concurrent interest in the same biblical tale and agrees that the use of the story is completely different for the two religions. Talgam, however, does not see this as

necessarily representing polemic, but instead suggests that this might also represent mutual interest in the same topic or cultural borrowing, whether this borrowing was Christian or Jewish, Talgam cannot say.\textsuperscript{371} Indeed, Talgam does not see the use of Isaac in these mosaics as the most interesting, nor the most important overlap between the art of ancient Palestine churches and synagogues. Lee Levine has noted that for all the overlap in style between late antique Palestinian synagogues and churches, the content of the church’s mosaics differs greatly not only from the local synagogues, but from Byzantine art work around the greater Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{372} Talgam seems to concur with this idea, but sees the depiction of temple-related iconography in both settings (Jewish and Christian) as worthy of investigation. The use of temple-related imagery does, after all, occur in more synagogue mosaics than does the use of the Isaac cycle. Whereas in the synagogue mosaics it is the cultic implements that appear most frequently, in the church mosaics, one sees mainly the sacrificial victims, in particular the bulls of Psalm 51, who in the end times “will be offered on your altar” (Ps 51:19). Again, Talgam sees these temple-related depictions as pointing to similar, but ultimately very different ideas. Thus she sees both religions’ use of the idea of the Jerusalem temple in their art as eschatological, pointing to the end times and the state of Jerusalem at that time, but she notes that the eschatology implied was very different from each other. In the synagogue depictions of the temple implements and/or the temple itself one sees faith in the future restoration of the earthly Jerusalem and its temple. In contrast, in the Christian mosaics one see reference to the future heavenly Jerusalem promised in Revelation.\textsuperscript{373}

In the end, Talgam does not rule out the possibility that these mosaics were tools deployed in a “fight for possession”\textsuperscript{374} of the narratives at hand, but she suggests they could also stem from the use of a common source, or simply show evidence of cultural borrowing between the two

\textsuperscript{371} Talgam, “Synagogue and Church Mosaics in Palestine,” 102-3.
\textsuperscript{373} Talgam, “Synagogue and Church Mosaics in Palestine,” 108.
\textsuperscript{374} Asher Ovadiah, “Artisans and Workshops in Ancient Mosaic Pavements in Israel,” in \textit{Art in Eretz Israel in Late Antiquity: Collectanea} (Sonia Mucznik, Asher Ovadiah, and Yehudit Turnheim; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2004), 85-96, 92-93.
religious groups. The two groups were, after all, both inspired and working with mosaics from the same places in the Roman Near East (mainly Antioch and Constantinople), so it follows that they might also work with the same biblical narratives, or employ the same artisans. Indeed, if that last idea seems far-fetched, it is worth noting that the artists responsible for the Jewish synagogue artwork at Bet Alpha, Marianos and his son Hanina, also made the mosaics in the Bet Shean A synagogue, which is widely considered to be a Samaritan synagogue. Talgam also advises caution concerning the conclusions one draws from these mosaics, before anyone does a study on surviving wall mosaics of late Roman urban centers. I suggest that equally, if impossibly, helpful would be the knowledge of what the wall art of these synagogues looked like, something we likely will never know.

In light of this, it seems that not only do the artistic motifs of the zodiac synagogue mosaics not need the idea of polemic to have meaning, but the Christian art with which they were in contact was largely lacking in the very subjects that would inspire such polemic. Those depictions that overlap between the two religions can be explained, as Talgam demonstrated in several different ways, none of which can we prove definitively at this point. If there is polemic in these synagogue mosaics, it seems likely that it comes from a different source than the Christian ones. The idea that the mosaics, because they appear so strange to our modern eyes and assumptions (stemming from an overvaluing of the Second Commandment’s effect on early Judaism), had to be polemical seems unnecessary. Branham speaks to this with her claim that these mosaics address the “indeterminancies,” as well as the “pluralisms” of late antique Judaism and its


376 Talgam, “Synagogue and Church Mosaics in Palestine,” 110; see also Michael Avi-Yonai, Art in Ancient Palestine, 327. Avi-Yonah suggested that the mosaic floors of the Gaza synagogue, the Ma’on synagogue, and the Shellal church were all created by the same artisans – the “Gaza School” of Mosaicists, an idea criticized, but not disproved. For a critique see Hachlili, Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel, 310-16; but see Asher Ovadiah’s medial view on the matter as well, “Artisans and Workshops in Ancient Mosaic Pavements in Israel,” 91-93.


378 See my comments above regarding this lack with respect to the early church wall decoration as well. While the Talmud Yerushalmi claims that, “In the days of R. Yohanan they began depicting [figural images] on the walls, and he did not object,” (Y. Avodah Zarah 3,3, 42d), we have no surviving proof of this in Palestine. Lee Levine has looked at the (scant) evidence of synagogue wall art, which consists of evidence of a menorah in one synagogue and some inscriptions elsewhere. Levine, Visual Judaism, 234-235.
adherents. Perhaps then, these people did not, and we should not, read these mosaics as a simple black and white narrative. They are, after all, creations built of thousands of multicolored tesserae.

5.4 Mosaics as Maps: a Non-polemical and Spatial Reading of the Synagogue Zodiacs

Here, I am not interested in leaping into the fray with yet another theory about the precise identity of the Jews who designed and constructed these zodiacs of late antique synagogues, it seems likely that one cannot neatly box them into a single category nor ever prove this categorization definitively. Instead, I am interested in looking at the way the mosaics, in their entirety, might tell a story to the ancient worshippers within the synagogues, whosoever those worshippers might be. It seems likely that this artwork, as Branham suggests, was internally motivated, rather than externally motivated. I do not think, however, that one need read these mosaics in the light of any sort of polemic. They seem to offer up a rich pedagogical tale for Jewish worshippers, who know how to read the symbols. This is akin to Englard’s desire to read the mosaics out with the aid of texts, though I differ from Englard in the choice of texts and the manner of reading the mosaics. I find Englard’s theory both too apologetic and too dependent on explicitly rabbinic modes of interpretation. While examples of some rules of interpretation used by the Rabbis appear in much earlier texts, such as 4QMMT, to argue for a midrashic interpretation of the mosaics supports the old paradigm of rabbinic Judaism as the dominant and normative Judaism of late antiquity. Englard has demonstrated what one finds if one reads these pieces of art out via a rabbinic prism, but what happens when one chooses a different style of Judaism as one lens? In many ways, this is the more enriching question to ask. Similarly, my understanding of the mosaics builds on Ze’ev Weiss’ reading of the panels of the synagogue mosaics together as a narrative of sorts, though my reading differs in the interpretation of what this narrative is and how these images depict it. While Weiss compared only Sepphoris and Bet Alpha, the synagogue mosaic at Hammat Tiberias (Image 1 in Appendix A) also has a

379 The title of Englard’s piece alone alerts one to her dependence on Rabbinic modes of interpretation.

similar pictorial layout of its panels to those two synagogues. Indeed, Hammat Tiberias, Na’aran and Bet Alpha all share a single basic three-part pictorial layout, a point I return to below.

I propose that the synagogue mosaics of Hammat Tiberias, Sepphoris, Na’aran, Bet Alpha, and likely also Huseifa, are all schematic maps of the general Jewish heavens that began to develop in the Second Temple Period and exploded in late antique understandings of the nature of the celestial spheres. I am not suggesting that these mosaics all tell exactly the same narrative, nor do I suggest that they share a one-to-one correspondence to any single text from the period, rather I believe they reflect a general change in the understanding of the divine realm as a multi-layered place, with specific locations for different important celestial topoi. The Judaism of the late Second Temple and immediately following periods that were not Rabbinic in form were quite interested in the heavenly realms and this interest is exhibited not only in their texts, but also in their artwork.

As a demonstration, I will examine the Sepphoris mosaic first and in the most detail, as it is the most complex of the synagogue mosaics, perhaps leading to it being both the most popular and the most published of all six. Below is a picture of the mosaic as a whole, with a line drawing by Weiss. I have placed the numbering system used by Weiss and the other excavators to the left, so you can see which panel is which. Beginning at the bottom, panels seven and six tell the two intertwined stories of Isaac’s miraculous birth and his salvation from sacrifice, both mythic, but firmly terrestrial events. The next panel, five, contains the huge zodiac, with the sun in a chariot at the center. The placement of the zodiac in the center marks a break from the mundane and terrestrial and a move to the lower celestial spheres. How many spheres this large zodiac portrays, one really cannot know, there was no consensus in antiquity over the placement of the sun, moon, stars, and planets into celestial spheres. Following the zodiac, panel four consists of abundant offerings, all of the items needed for a full sacrifice at the temple. In the third panel one sees the actual altar of the temple, with the golden basin on the right hand side, but Aaron, visible only by his name and a little of the left side of his robe, stands before it, making the scene

381 Panel seven is very damaged and this reading of it as Isaac’s birth announcement is the interpretation favored by the excavators, but see Seth Schwartz’s critique of such an elaborate reading based on such a small portion of mosaic, particularly one that seems to show a woman standing in the doorway of a built structure, rather than peeking from behind a tent flap. Schwartz, “On the Program and Reception of the Synagogue Mosaics,” 169.
a wilderness tabernacle scene.\textsuperscript{382} Immediately above, in the second panel is the temple, or at least a tabernacle, flanked by two huge menorot, the menorot at least are temple based iconography. At the top of the mosaic there is a dedicatory wreath, flanked by two lions, symbols of Judah and, following Schwartz, likely apotropaic in nature.\textsuperscript{383} Here is a graph, which shows how the three Jewish texts divide the heavens into realms, with the line drawing of the Sepphoris mosaic to the left.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sepphoris Mosaic</th>
<th>Panel Numbers</th>
<th>Heaven</th>
<th>2nd Enoch</th>
<th>3rd Baruch</th>
<th>Apocalypse of Abraham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="Image1" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Panel 1</td>
<td>7th heaven</td>
<td>Throne of God</td>
<td>??????</td>
<td>Power of invisible glory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="Image2" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Panel 2</td>
<td>6th heaven</td>
<td>Footstool of God</td>
<td>??????</td>
<td>Spiritual angels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="Image3" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Panel 3</td>
<td>5th heaven</td>
<td>Non-fallen Watchers</td>
<td>Gates with Angelic High Priest</td>
<td>Starry powers and elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="Image4" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Panel 4</td>
<td>4th heaven</td>
<td>Sun and moon</td>
<td>Plane with righteous</td>
<td>??????</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="Image5" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Panel 5</td>
<td>3rd heaven</td>
<td>Paradise and a terrible place</td>
<td>Sun and moon, paradise and Hades</td>
<td>??????</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="Image6" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Panel 6</td>
<td>2nd heaven</td>
<td>Imprisoned angels</td>
<td>Plotters of Tower</td>
<td>??????</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="Image7" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Panel 7</td>
<td>1st heaven</td>
<td>Elders ruling stars</td>
<td>Builders of Tower</td>
<td>??????</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 The Various Schematics of the Heavens (sketch of panels by author)
As I mentioned above, there are three other synagogue mosaics, which though they differ in stylistic details, hold to the same general schematic, Hammat Tiberias, Na’aran, and Bet Alpha. At Hammat Tiberias, the earliest of all six mosaics, there is a simple tripartite division, with the zodiac in the middle register, the temple façade above it in the top register, and a dedicatory inscription, flanked by lions on either side below (Figure 1 in Appendix A). At Bet Alpha, the latest in date of the six mosaics, the tripartite division remains, with the zodiac still in the middle register, and the temple façade above in the top register, below it, however, is the mythic scene of the binding of Isaac (Figure 3 in Appendix A). At Bet Alpha, the lions are in the top register, aligning more with Sephoris than Hammat Tiberias. At Na’aran, the mosaic is badly damaged, but it also consists of a tripartite layout, with the zodiac as the middle register of the three. The top most register contains the temple façade with flanking menorot (Figure 9 in Appendix A), and, notably, a figure in the orant stance, flanked by lions, believed by the excavators to be the prophet Daniel. Thus, we see the focus on a different figure from the mythic past at Na’aran than at Sephoris. The bottom register, which is also the largest of the three, contains a carpet mosaic of geometric designs with medallions featuring flora and fauna (Figure 10 in Appendix A). As I noted above, the synagogue mosaic at Huseifa is similar in its tripartite division of the floor, although it does not feature a temple/tabernacle façade section, instead the only temple related iconography it holds are the menorot that flank the dedicatory inscription in the bottom panel. At Huseifa, however, one does see a progression from a bucolic carpet mosaic in the second register to the zodiac mosaic in the top most register. Thus, it is

---


386 Benoit and Vincent, “Un Sanctuaire,” 169. This was originally conjecture, but reconstruction of the inscription surrounding the figure, suggests that it reads “Daniel Shalom,” in Hebrew.

387 Benoit and Vincent, “Un Sanctuaire,” 168. The ancient aniconists apparently found these animals offensive, and hacked them out of the floor along with the Zodiac figures and the human images of Daniel and Sol, the personified and chariot driving sun. This damage is recorded in the sketches and pictures at the end of Benoit and Vincent’s article, in plates 7, 14-21.

388 Michael Avi-Yonah and Na’im Makhoul, “A Sixth-Century Synagogue at ‘Isfiyā,” *QDAP* 3(1933): 123-124. Because of this, and the amount of space given to each register, it is surprising that no temple façade panel was included in the design.
possible that a similar notion to the Hammat Tiberias/Sepphoris layout was at work here, with the mythic space of Eden coupled with the solar level of heaven depicted at Huseifa.

Rina Talgam notes that the most basic understanding of these mosaics is a three-panel schematic, featuring the temple/tabernacle nearest to the wall facing Jerusalem, a biblical scene farthest from the wall facing Jerusalem, and the zodiac filling the space between these two scenes. \(^{389}\) At Sepphoris the artist split up the cultic paraphernalia into several panels, making for a higher number of registers to convey the same idea, but Hammat Tiberias, Na’aran, and Bet Alpha all combined the tabernacle scene with the cultic paraphernalia into a single register. Talgam does not, however, offer a clear explanation for this iconography, nor the meaning of its very specific layout, however the depictions of the three key parts are artistically presented. Jodi Magness, in her recent work on the figure of Helios in the zodiacs of these synagogue mosaics, suggests that the zodiac does in fact, represent the celestial sphere. \(^{390}\) She, however, does not take up Weiss’ suggestion to read the mosaics out as a narrative and hence, does not reach what I think is a logical continuation of her heavenly-sphere hypothesis. Magness instead takes her interpretation of the mosaics in a mystical direction and suggests that displaced Zadokite priests used the mosaics in rituals akin to Merkabah and Hekhalot mysticism, \(^{391}\) an argument as intriguing as it is improbable. Here I take Magness’ suggestion about the zodiac as symbol of celestial sphere one step further and propose that the zodiac marks the start of the celestial spheres in these mosaics and that the panels that are above the zodiac and thus both closer to the bema and to Jerusalem (if only by a bit) than the other panels are the upper realms of heaven. Thus, the tabernacle/temple image is in fact the celestial temple, which remains untouched by the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans and whose cult continues unperturbed, as it did prior to the existence of an earthly temple and still does despite the lack of an earthly temple now.


\(^{391}\) Magness, “Heaven on Earth,” 41.
The fact that the heavenly temple’s cult remains in full operation is driven home by the presence of all the cultic paraphernalia around and immediately below it. This reading of the mosaics does not so much disagree with Weiss’ interpretation of this panel of the mosaic, as smooth his interpretation out and make it not only a temporal reading of God’s covenant in the past and in the future, but also a spatial reading, as it depicts the current sacrifices in the pure and unblemished celestial temple. Talgam, following Levine and Fine, sees the merging of the synagogue with the Tabernacle and the Temple in this scene, suggesting a “multi-layered” interpretation of the panel.\(^{392}\) All three scholars suggest that this art is part of the concurrent blurring of the synagogue with the temple – changing the synagogue from a meeting place to a sacred place, more specifically into a miqdash me’at, a substitute for the temple.\(^{393}\) As I discussed in chapter two, when looking at the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, the blurring of the wilderness tabernacle with the Jerusalem Temple was already occurring in Second Temple attempts to describe and explain the nearly inconceivable splendor of the heavenly temple. It appears then that this tradition of both tabernacle and temple, rather than either tabernacle or temple when discussing the heavenly temple continued into early Judaism and the mosaic artwork manifested this idea pictorially. This is most obvious at Sepphoris, with the depiction of Aaron alongside images from the temple cult.

This pictorial depiction of an ongoing process of redescription and conflation of places within post-earthly-temple Judaism suggests that these mosaics are in some ways maps of where Judaism comes from, the mythic past, and where it is headed: towards a renewed access to the heavenly temple and its cult. In the introduction to this work, I discussed how the historian Philip Ethington has argued that all “knowledge of the past … is literally cartographic: a

\(^{392}\) Talgam, “Synagogue and Church Mosaics in Palestine,” 105. But see David Milson’s refusal to see all of these “façades” as so many little temples in these synagogues, suggesting that they are instead, depictions of the various torah shrines of these synagogues. The shape and style of these Torah shrines were, however, influenced by the temple. Milson, Art and Architecture of the Synagogue, 56ff.

\(^{393}\) For another example of this phenomenon, see the recently uncovered carved stone (table?) from the synagogue at Migidal. The stone is covered in temple related motifs, including a schematic drawing of a temple on one side. In an early publication, Mordechai Aviam suggests that the table served a liturgical purpose, as the resting place of the Torah scroll, when it was read. Mordechai Aviam, “The Decorated Stone from the Synagogue at Migidal: A Holistic Interpretation and a Glimpse into the Life of Galilean Jews at the time of Jesus,” NT 55(2013): 205-220.
mapping of the places of history.” Ethington, working with ideas originated by the philosopher Edward S. Casey, suggests that “a place is more an event than a thing,” that these “places gather,” and that “places are the condition of possibility for human culture itself.” I used this idea of the gathering of cultural places in the last chapter, with my exploration of the confused cartographic descriptions of the *Visio Pauli*. There I was dealing with written descriptions of the places that together make up the heavens. Here, in these synagogue mosaics, we find a map of these celestial spots, gathered and inscribed. Returning to Ethington’s work, I discussed above his suggestion that the places of the past be called topoi, after Aristotle’s idea of topoi and the ancient Greek practice of using physical locations to anchor memories – the building of memory castles. Ethington suggests that these topoi both “collapse time” and “touch the ground,” ideas that are intriguing with respect to what the scenes in these synagogue mosaics could represent. Might one consider these synagogue mosaics as relatives of memory castles, containing within them both mytho-historical and mytho-cestial topoi? Edward Casey, both responding to and building on Ethington’s claims of historical events as topoi, suggests that the idea of boundaries is a key aspect of this argument that Ethington passed over. Casey notes that boundaries are both pliable and porous, whereas borders are rigid and foreclosing. Casey argues that boundaries “demonstrate so tellingly that history occurs as place,” that “boundaries are where places happen,” and that boundaries are in and of themselves “events.” I suggest that these synagogue mosaics place various topoi of the past and the heavens within reach of those who are righteous within their respective communities. This is a good way to think about the meaning of these mosaics for these communities.

395 Ethington, “Placing the Past,” 482.
396 Ethington, “Placing the Past,” 483.
397 Ethington, “Placing the Past,” 484-5.
399 The inscriptions in the mosaic floors of these synagogues are mainly in praise of community donors, who not only promised funds, but actually gave them. See especially the inscriptions of Hammat Tiberias, M. Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias, Early Synagogues and the Hellenistic and Roman Remains: Final Excavation Report*, 53-62, but also the inscriptions at Susyia, Na’aran, and the Greek inscription at Bet Alpha; S. Gutman, Z. Yeivin, and E.
As a boundary to create an event for the gathering of topoi within Judaism, the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE is a clear historical one. While this disaster was a watershed event for Judaism, it did not offer a complete break with or walling off from what happened before, it merely changed the way one might access these events and topoi. The temple in Jerusalem was gone, but the stories, lore, and past remained. There was a need for the drawing of new channels and connections between the events that came before and the present and for the creation of new paths to legitimate these claims through heavenly approbation. The mosaics of these synagogues then became the loci of these various mytho-historical and mytho-celestial places, a map knitting these places together, “collapsing time” (*mythic* time here), and creating a new topography for this newly recreated religion. Not only do these mosaics create a clear link to the events of the past, but they also offer a place for heaven to “touch the ground” and reveal its cosmic workings to those deserving of such access. In these synagogue mosaics, we find pictorial attempts to render concurrent ideas about the heavens, their mythic loci, and the complex interrelation of these loci to one another and to the larger heavenly plan.

In my introduction, my suggested reading of these synagogue mosaics is not only aided by Ethington’s observations on the nature of the past, but is also in direct contradiction to Seth Schwartz’s critique of all interpretations of late antique synagogue mosaics thus far expounded, setting his sights on the work of Weiss and Englard in particular.\(^{400}\) Schwartz rightly argues that we cannot use rabbinic texts to understand the synagogue mosaics, but I believe he wrongly argues that we cannot assume, or imagine that, these people had access to any texts besides the ones that compose the Hebrew Bible.\(^{401}\) Studies of canon formation in early Judaism and Christianity have shown that texts long lost were once as popular as current “canonical” pieces

---


\(^{401}\) “By contrast, no patrons of late-antique Jewish funerary or synagogue art can definitely be connected to any corpus of literature except the Hebrew Bible.” Schwartz reiterates this point later on, “We do not know who they or the other congregants were, what, if anything, they read or heard read aside from the Hebrew Bible, or what it was that shaped their intellectual and religious environment.” Schwartz, “On the Program and the Reception of the Synagogue,” 166 and 171.
and that these different texts existed side by side for years in various faith communities.\(^{402}\) Schwartz is correct that we cannot prove these people read any of these texts, but his refusal to allow for the ideas they contain to have been circulating in late Roman/early Byzantine Jewish circles seems far too stringent. Surprisingly, Schwartz himself uses early medieval liturgical poems to read out these synagogue mosaics,\(^{403}\) which seems a more dubious technique than Englard’s overtly Rabbinic mode of interpretation based on Hebrew Bible texts. At least Englard’s technique was in practice by some groups of Jews in late antiquity, whereas Schwartz’s poems would not be composed until several hundred years after the last zodiac mosaic was installed in a synagogue floor. Schwartz admits his analysis is structured to suggest ways viewers might have interpreted the artwork,\(^{404}\) but this also does not answer the question of why these specific symbols, often in a similar schematic, were installed in synagogue floors in the fifth century.

Bianca Kühnel, in her work on the reuse of non-Jewish symbols in these zodiac mosaics, suggests that the clear overlap between these floors, “suggests a common source that overrode local interests,” further suggesting that the variations account for “the broad identification and intimate understanding of a general message.”\(^{405}\) This seems a medial position between Weiss and Schwartz, and an idea that deserves exploration – what might this common source be that inspired these mosaics? It seems highly unlikely that one would find any single text that agrees with the schematic of any of these mosaics, let alone all of them with their unique variations. I, however, think that one can see these mosaics as maps of a general schematic that begins with a locus in the mythic past of the terrestrial sphere, followed by the start of the celestial realms

---


\(^{404}\) “It should be unnecessary to add that there is no way to prove that these piyyutim and others like them really were understood by their audience as commentary on synagogue art.” Schwartz, “On the Program and the Reception of the Synagogue,” 176.

\(^{405}\) Bianca Kühnel, “The Synagogue Floor Mosaic in Sepphoris,” 31-43.
marked by the sun, moon and stars, and capped by varying numbers of panels depicting the
celestial temple and its fully functional cult. This mapping mirrors various textual accounts of
the heavens from the end of the second temple through the late antique period of Judaism.
Indeed 2 Enoch, which dates to just prior to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the
Apocalypse of Abraham and 3 Baruch, which both date to the years just following the destruction
of the Second Temple, that is, the late 1st century, and the redacted and Christianized version of
the Testament of Levi all break heaven into multiple spheres. Each of these texts appears to
favour a seven-heaven schematic for the heavens, though I discussed above how Baruch only
tours five realms of heaven in his trip. These texts represent a variety of early Jewish
understandings of the celestial realm, as well as other beliefs and ideas that fell out of favor in
the forms of Judaism and Christianity that emerged and flourished in the medieval era. The fact
that these texts predate the mosaics by several years actually strengthens the idea that the
designers of these mosaics might have been familiar with these texts themselves, for they were
widely disseminated by the late antique period. In addition, the fact that so many early Jewish
texts that differ on various points of belief should all agree on the broad outlines of the territory
of heaven suggests that a multi-leveled heaven, with the sun and stars serving as a fiery barrier to
the purer heights, and a functioning heavenly temple was a common belief amongst Jews at the
time.

In these texts, one notes that the sun, moon, and even the stars all serve to create a barrier of sorts
between the lesser realms of heaven, which often include places of punishment and the upper
realms of heaven, where the celestial temple, the glory of God, and the purest and most powerful
angels dwell. This solar barrier is in different realms in all of the texts, the fourth realm of 2
Enoch, the third realm of 3 Baruch, and the fifth realm of the Apocalypse of Abraham,
suggesting a general understanding of the sun and moon occupying a place in the middle of the
heavenly realms, but no fixed or singular understanding of the exact realm in which they, as
anthropomorphized beings, dwelled. In addition, while the solar layer of the heavens appears to
serve to block the pollution of earthly sin from ascending into the purer heights of heaven, in all
of these texts certain righteous ones are allowed through the barrier. Thus, the zodiac

406 Namely, the angels and the respective heroes of each text – Abraham, Enoch, and Baruch.
represents a permeable barrier, highly effective at keeping the rabble of the earth out of the heavens, but allowing the worthy through to at least view, if not visit, the heavenly temple. Casey might see this as a celestial boundary rather than as a barrier, around which the topoi of the mythic past can gather, populating the celestial realm with the places of most importance to the foundation of this newly Temple-less religion.

Thus, one can read the synagogue mosaics in light of this general understanding of the celestial bodies creating a boundary between the terrestrial sphere and the heavenly spheres above. Each mosaic differs slightly because the understanding of the division of the heavens into various realms, with the sun and moon’s realm as a barrier between the impure and the pure, is quite general and not set into one fixed model. The terrestrial scenes likewise differ from mosaic to mosaic, based on the preference of each community for a certain mytho-historical tale over and above other ones. The tales most important to the community, for whatever reasons, are the ones depicted as the historical terrestrial scene. This setting of the terrestrial scene in the past parallels the apocalypses’ use of figures and events (most often the destruction of Solomon’s Temple) as their starting points, rather than the raw reality of the temple-less present. While the authors of the texts employed this technique for the purposes of literary freedom, in the mosaics we see the topoi of the past carefully placed next to the topoi of the heavens, thereby assuring the viewer of the intactness of both traditions, despite the lack of the old focal point of past, present, and the celestial realms: the Jerusalem temple. This is, of course, in addition to the fact that artistic license allows for differing interpretations of this idea of the celestial sphere; the various mosaics all appear distinct, as different artists designed and constructed them. Thus, the mosaics are symbolic maps of the heavenly spheres, which can be read by those with a general, but not overly specialized, knowledge of the concurrent trends of heavenly exploration. This is the sort of person one would find going into these synagogues in the Galilee to worship, mainly non-specialists with basic, but not expert, understandings of current trends in cosmology, as well as knowledge of the tales of the patriarchs of the past. These mosaics then do not represent highly esoteric knowledge that only the most educated can grasp, but instead depict various artistic interpretations of general late antique Jewish notions of the Heavens. Contra both Magness’ and

\[407\] Contra Magness’ larger and rather complicated suggestion that these were used in Hekhalot style mystic trances.
Schwartz’s suggestions that this artwork was aimed at certain elites within the community, the basic meaning of the mosaic would have been clear to most in the community, though the well-read and highly educated may, admittedly, have had more nuanced appreciations of the artwork.

5.5 Polemic or Cultural Borrowing: Physical Places as the Cosmos Writ Small in Late Antiquity

This understanding of the mosaics as maps of the celestial spheres does bring attention to the fact that from the fourth century CE onwards Christians were also identifying the physical structure of a church, particularly its interior, as a mini-cosmos. One sees this idea in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*, where he explains that the church is the perfect cosmic temple, and, as such, supplants the now destroyed earthly temple in Jerusalem (Hist. Eccl. 10.4.46). This seems almost an inversion of the technique of the synagogue mosaics, whereas each mosaic, through its placing of mythic topoi in its floor, charts a path from past to present that demonstrates the constancy of the celestial temple, safe and inaccessible above the heavenly orbs. In the case of the early church, each and every church structure is the cosmic temple, and the doors to each structure mark a break between the mundane world and the celestial world.408 One notes a simple difference of understanding of these spaces and their relation to the heavens, likely stemming from the difference in eschatology between the two, noted by Talgam. Indeed, it seems that while both groups were working with the same artistic material and even, in some cases, the same stock images of the bucolic, the way these images were deployed in the churches and in the synagogues were very different. Both groups were using the same pictorial language to come up with very different statements. These statements seem to not be aimed at one another in a polemic though, but rather seem to be internally oriented, pictorial explanations for fellow believers in their particular understanding of the cosmos and its workings and relation to the earth.

This observation brings this conversation full circle in many ways, for the earliest excavators of these mosaics were much more comfortable suggesting that these synagogues’ mosaics were

408 This idea that the doors of the early churches were portals to the heavens is made explicit not in Eusebius, but in the *Testamentum Domini Nostri Jesus Christi*, 1.19. Lihi Habas, “The Bema and Chancel Screen in Synagogue and Their Origin,” in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity* (ed. Lee I. Levine and Ze’ev Weiss; JRASS 40; Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2000), 111-130, 118.
engaged in similar practices of cultural borrowing as their Christian neighbours. The ways one read a bucolic scene in a church versus how one read a bucolic scene in one of these synagogues was different, for the eschatological and even simply future expectations of each group differed. Here on these synagogue floors were the maps of the mythic places of the past and the heavens, interlinked and intertwined, and available to anyone entering the prayer hall. The past and the future too were both available to any who looked upon these mosaics and read the celestial cartography there inscribed.

5.6 Conclusions

Since the first of these zodiac mosaics came to light over seventy years ago, many theories of varying quality have appeared to explain them. In this chapter I have both built on some of these theories, and also critiqued them. I have suggested that the mosaics that feature a tripartite division of their spaces, Hammat Tiberias, Na’aran, and Bet Alpha, along with the grander layout of Sepphoris, are schematic maps of heavens and that these mosaics do, in fact, reflect late antique non-rabbinic Judaism, a type of Judaism at ease with using pagan idioms to symbolize their own beliefs and understandings in a place of worship. This is not to suggest that these mosaics represent an aberrant form of Judaism, rather that they reflect current and general Jewish understandings of the divine realm. Using the spatial terminology of the theorists Ethington and Casey, these mosaics created new maps of various mythic topoi of the past and of heaven, weaving a new reality out of these places and creating new links to a heaven seemingly cut off from the Jews with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The heavenly realm and all its various topoi are once again available to those who are worthy of it. One sees this quite clearly when one looks at the layout of the mosaics vis-à-vis the layout of the heavens in various contemporaneous Jewish apocalypses; the heavens are arranged in similar, if not identical layers in each text or piece of artwork. It seems that the commissioners and designers of these mosaics were simply bolder in depicting these celestial notions than many of their religious companions.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

At the start of my introduction to this work, I invoked Socrates’ observations on the nature of the soul’s journey in the afterlife. Having now leapt from ancient work to ancient work, creating a constellation of sorts of ancient Jewish and Christian depictions of the heavens, it is clear that this project has proven that “the path is neither simple nor single,” either for an ancient individual trying to reach the heavens or for a modern scholar trying to study them. But pointing to the complexities of these ancient heavens was neither the primary goal nor the most important outcome of this study. Rather, this study fills a void in the scholarship on these heavens, by examining the geographic and cartographic sections of their descriptions and depictions, an aspect of them overlooked until now. This void-filling allowed for this study to accomplish another goal, that of deploying critical spatial theory to successfully study the spaces and places of antiquity in a nuanced manner. Careful use of aspects of Lefebvre, Bachelard, Ethington and Casey’s theoretical work on space and place, has enabled me to think about and discuss the celestial spaces and mythic places of these diverse renderings of the heavens. Of course, the nature of this study, episodic in structure, means much work remains to be done on a variety of depictions of the heavens that I simply did not have room for in this project. I limited myself to a single example for each period, in order to allow for an expansive and encompassing study of each of the different understandings of the layout and topography of the heavens. Therefore, I looked at a poetic text from the Second Temple period, at apocalypses from around the time of the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE, explored the terrain of the earliest extant explicitly Christian heaven, and closed with an examination of a certain style of synagogue mosaic from the Byzantine era, which I argue represent maps of these heavens.

In my chapter on the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (the Shirot), I explored the realms of the heavens in poetry from the Second Temple period. I chose these poems instead of other texts describing the heavens from this era, as this project is not a study of the heavens in apocalypses, but a study of conceptions of heaven in early Judaism and Christianity, regardless of where those descriptions might be found. Much work has been done on 1 Enoch’s descriptions of the heavens, but much less work has been done on these poetic heavenly descriptions preserved in
the Dead Sea Scrolls. In keeping with other concurrent understandings of the heavens in the Second Temple period, the Shirot depict a heaven that is all temple, albeit one that appears to consist of a kaleidoscope temple housing multiple other temples within it. The heaven of the Shirot is monumental in nature and the poetics of this space are ekphrastic. I opened the chapter by discussing Lefebvre’s observations on the nature of the monumental, which is always offering multiple narratives at once, and suggested that this aspect Lefebvre observed in the monumental and descriptions/portrayals of it appeared to be what the ancients conceived of as the act of ekphrasis. I then explored modern understandings of ancient ekphrasis, utilizing Jaś Elsner’s idea of “ritual-centered visuality,” and tempering it with Andrew Sprague Becker’s suggestion that incongruity in an ekphrastic passage does not necessarily mean confusion on the part of the author (or poet), but rather that they are an attempt to recreate an esthetic experience. These songs, liturgical in nature, were likely performed, allowing for the heavens to open up around the singers, as layer upon layer of description surrounded them. In addition, I worked with Basil Dufallo’s observations regarding the implicitly political nature of an ekphrastic passage, where political is understood in a loose sense. Using these theoretical tools, I offered a careful reading of the monumental ekphrasis of the heavenly temple that is the Shirot. I demonstrated that the Shirot offer a tour of a heaven that is all heaven, as in other Second Temple understandings of the heavens, but in the Shirot this heaven has become a multi-storied, multi-structured, and multi-dimensional heaven. I suggested that this was the logical outcome of previous attempts to describe the heavenly temple as being like the earthly temple and/or the wilderness sanctuary. In the Shirot the truly incomparable nature of the heavenly temple is made manifest by the contortions of these hyperbolic ekphrastic passages.

Following this reading of a second temple text, I moved forward in time to the period just after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE. In this chapter I did turn to apocalypses, specifically the Jewish apocalypses that were written immediately before and after this cataclysmic event. My main focus was on the varied heavens of 3 Baruch, but I situated this text’s view on the heavens and their accessibility in relation to other texts from around the same time period, namely 2 Enoch, the Apocalypse of Abraham, and the Apocalypse of Zephaniah. These texts, although unique and varied, all keep the narrative focus on the celestial temple and, in the case of the two textually complete works, feature a theophany within the heavenly temple as the climatic and/or most important scene. In contrast to this open heaven (at least for the
righteous) stands *3 Baruch*’s understanding of the heavens as partially closed off in the wake of the destruction of the second temple. *3 Baruch* consists of a tour of certain mythic sites and more pointedly the denial of certain places in the heavens, including the monumental celestial temple. Using the spatial musings of Gaston Bachelard, I read out *3 Baruch* as a melancholic work demanding that the righteous both remain righteous, but give up hope in the construction of a third temple any time soon. Heaven is no longer all temple, and the temple present in the highest echelons is no longer available to mortals, even the most righteous ones, of whom Baruch is the exemplar. Yet, despite this lack of access to the temple, *3 Baruch* does agree with its contemporaries on the continued and perfect functioning of this temple, which operates unaffected by the chaos and destruction on the earth and, more specifically, in Jerusalem.

The heavenly temple has ceased being even a location on the heavenly site seeing tour of Paul in the late 4th century text, the *Latin Apocalypse of Paul* (*Vis. Paul*), which is the focus of my last textual chapter. This text’s confused layout of not just the heavens, but the cosmos as a whole, has long puzzled scholars, who have frequently written off the complexity as the result of a bad editing job and/or a less than skilled redactor. In contrast to these readings, I used aspects and ideas from the theoretical work of Casey, Ethington, and also Bachelard, to suggest that the geographic and cosmologic organization of *Vis. Paul* is not structured as earlier (and originally Jewish) texts were, with the focus on the location of various macro-sites from the mythic past, but is instead informed by a concern to take account of the final resting spots of all the different sorts of souls in the world. Thus, the opening chapters three through six offer the only real cosmology in the whole of the work, which creates just enough of a structure for the emplacing of first macro sites from the mythic past, and then onto these all the micro-places for the different sorts of people, the righteous and the sinners, who must find an eternal home somewhere in the hereafter. Thus, in *Vis. Paul* one sees a shift occurring in particularly Christian thought over the nature of heaven from one of inaccessible grandeur to a site of judgement and eternal holding for each and every soul upon the earth. With this shift in the purpose of the heavens comes the loss of importance for a clear and coherent cartographic description of the heavens. Knowledge of the inter-related nature of the various macro sites that together make up the heavens is no longer required, having been replaced with the knowledge of what happens to people in the afterlife.

In my last chapter, I moved out of textual descriptions of the heavens and into artistic depictions. I focused my inquiry on a specific type of mosaic decoration from late antiquity, the mosaic
floors featuring a zodiac in the centre of a small number of synagogues in Roman Palestine. As I discussed in my introductory remarks to the chapter, since these mosaics first came to light over seventy years ago, a great many scholars have engaged with and offered theories about them. I suggested that of these synagogues, the ones featuring three panels, with the zodiac in the centre, at Hammat Tiberias, Na’aran and Bet Alpha, along with the seven panel mosaic at Sepphoris, all function as schematic maps of the heavens. In doing so, I engaged with and critiqued the earlier work of others on these mosaics and utilized the theorizing of Bachelard, Ethington and Casey to think through the way these depictions functioned as maps. I reintroduced the heavens of 3 Baruch and the Apocalypse of Abraham, as well as 2 Enoch from chapter three, to compare their varied but similar layouts of the heavens to these similarly varied but overlapping mosaic maps. In this way I was also able to demonstrate that the use of Greco-Roman tropes and figures to represent such things as the sun or images of paradise was at work in contemporary texts to these pieces of artwork, making them part of a normative form of late ancient Judaism, albeit a non-Rabbinic one. Lastly, I suggested that these maps of the heavens would be understood by the majority of those entering these synagogues, not just the elite of the community. It seems that not only were the sponsors and artists of these mosaics more accepting of overtly polytheistic symbols in their artwork, they also saw a need to visualize and inscribe in pictorial cartography current notions of the heavens and the celestial temple.

Throughout these chapters I demonstrated that the continued interest in the topoi of the heavens, in particular the heavenly temple, but also other mythic places, occurred due to a complex set of reasons. I attempted to offer a different way of talking about these ancient heavens, by focusing on the spatiality of celestial spaces in these depictions, whether poetic, artistic, or apocalyptic. This spatial approach allows for a nuanced and focused discussion of individual texts’ goals and foci. Through the works reviewed here, I noted the way heaven appears as a magnificent locus of power, a collection of mythic spots, and in the Christian imagination, as the eternal resting spot of so many different types of souls, even while these portrayals depict heaven as stable, fixed, and unchanging. I suggested that this continued and constant interest in the heavens was a natural outgrowth of pre-exilic proclivities for seeing the earthly temple as a miniature (albeit imperfect) copy of the heavenly temple. In the case of the Shirot, tangled tours of the celestial temple served to impress the reader and/or listener with the superiority of the heavenly temple over the earthly temple, which was no longer a “perfect copy,” but instead a lesser model. In
slightly later cases, the continued expansion of the various imperial powers of the time made more and more of the “unknown” known and this meant there was shrinking space on the face of the earth for the mythic topoi of the past – the Garden of Eden the most important example of these sites. In light of this, and the existence of other places, such as the temple, in the heavens already, it made sense for these topoi to migrate up into the heavens, beyond the boundary of the sun, moon, and stars and to a place accessible only to the angels and certain righteous. This migration of mythic locales into the heavens was particularly clear in the depictions of the heavens following the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, a trend I explored in my chapters on 3 Baruch and on the synagogue mosaics. In contrast to these well-ordered, if closed off, heavens of post-Second Temple Judaism stood the heaven of the Vis. Paul. The confused cartography of the heavens in Vis. Paul speaks to the Christian appropriation of Jewish depictions of the heavens in a manner that signifies the shift in interest from Jewish preoccupation with the exact layout of the heavens to a Christian preoccupation with who dwells in the heavens. While the heavenly temple is still present, it no longer holds the importance that it did in earlier Jewish texts. The shifts in the temporality of each community are reflected in their cartographies of the heavenly realms, fulfilling certain needs of the creator and their community.

Lastly, this project has not only demonstrated the fruitful returns of focusing on the spatiality of the heavens in antiquity, but has also shown that it is possible to use various aspects of critical spatial theory in a nuanced manner to read out the spaces and places of antiquity. Both of these observations suggests that much more work could be done on the spaces and places of antiquity that would allow for a more robust conversation than has been had thus far regarding these complex and often opaque depictions, textual, artistic, or even physical. Here I only had room to offer a sampling of such depictions, but there are many more that would likely benefit from similar treatment.
Bibliography


Wright, Benjamin. “Joining the Club: A Suggestion about Genre in Early Jewish Texts.” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 17 (2010): 288-314


Appendix


Image 4: Greek and Hebrew Inscriptions on a panel from the mosaic at Sepphoris. Artstor.
Image 5: The sun, instead of Helios, in the chariot at the centre of the Sepphoris mosaic. Artstor.

Image 6: The sun god, Helios, in his chariot at the centre of the Bet Alpha zodiac mosaic. Note that the moon is present, but not anthropomorphized. Artstor.
Image 7: A mosaic in a side aisle of synagogue at Hammat Tiberias. (Artstor).

Image 8: The Zodiac at Hammat Tiberias, with stock Roman iconography of the zodiac figures. Artstor.
Image 9: Close up of the Temple/Tabernacle façade with the hanging curtain in the top most register of the mosaic at the Na’aran synagogue. Artstor.

Image 10: Close up of grapes from the bottom register of the Na’aran synagogue mosaic. Artstor.
Copyright Acknowledgements

All images in the appendix are taken from artstor, which allows for the reproduction of its images in theses, which are not published.