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Introduction

Under the title *Seeing the God: Image, Space, Performance, and Vision in the Religion of the Roman Empire* this volume presents the proceedings of the eponymous international conference which was held on June 3 and 4, 2015 at the University of Bonn, Germany. It brings together various disciplinary approaches to religious visual culture of Roman Imperial times and visualizes the entanglement of religious imagery with the visual culture of this period in general. Bridging the disciplinary gaps reveals mechanisms, such as legitimization strategies, which can be attested, for instance, through references to Imperial political iconographies in both texts and images. Understanding these mechanisms is essential as they represent articulations of the dynamics of religious practices and draw attention to various kinds of agents who acquired images for various purposes. In this regard, idolatry, 'Bilderdienst', does not serve any longer as a distinction between religious traditions. The central role of images and visual representations rather has been affirmed for nearly all traditions of the Imperial period. The scope of this volume therefore is to shed new light on the dialectics of the imagination and illustration of the divine in texts and pictures. The visual language, iconographic elements, spatial conceptions, modes of behavior, actions, and performances employed for the purpose of imagining the divine and making images visible can be found in various situations and contexts. For example, they were used to communicate political messages or express political authority. And depictions of the divine were also influential in other contexts. Such uses of visual language could be deployed both according with prevailing modes, as well as in ways that deviated from them.

The question is not just one of coding and the necessity of de-coding required in communication-mechanisms which have been outlined by Paul Zanker and Tonio Hölscher, as well as similarily by Clifford Geertz.[1] In light of the imagination and illustration of the divine we face a process of constant re-coding of meaning. The same visual cue used over a long period of time may differ in meaning from one context to the next, as well as from situation to situation. However, its meaning may also have undergone transformation if both cue and context remain the same, but the cue has likewise been employed for different purposes. A good example of this arises when a symbol has been abused.

[1] Geertz 1973, 3–30; Hölscher 1987; id. 2015, 662–686; Zanker 1987.

Asking how an idea of the divine comes into being and how the dialectics of these ongoing processes work, the contributions to this volume therefore address a number of questions:

1) In view of the various visual cues, these ought to be: Where did visual cues of the images and texts appear and possibly derive from? What do they stand for and how is their meaning transformed in the process of constant re-coding?
2) Regarding the contexts and situations in which visual cues are found: How do they affect meaning, particularly when we are dealing with standardized images? How do spatial settings direct the viewer or audience, create modes of visibility, proximity or distance to gods? What impact does performance have?
3) Concerning the recipients of the images and texts: How do the identity and particularly the disposition of the recipient influence the salience of meaning? How are processes of interpretation informed by textually induced discourses?
4) And finally: What follows from this for our understanding of the imagination and construction of the divine?

Addressing these questions from various angles, the volume comprises twelve chapters. Nine of these contributions were presented at the conference. Three additional chapters, those by Jörg Rüpke, Steven J. Friesen, and Robin Jensen, have been added to underline further aspects of the topic. The volume thus comprises contributions from experts from a wide range of disciplines oriented to different temporal and spatial locations in the Ancient Mediterranean – namely Classical Archaeology, Ancient History, Religious Studies, Theology, and New Testament Studies – and therefore creates a dialogue that moves beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. As such, it is a groundbreaking effort that seeks to offer readers a wide spectrum of accounts and approaches and to signal the importance of attention to the visual across a broad range of specializations. It functions as an invitation to others to continue along this fruitful line of investigation of visual cultures in Antiquity.

To the Classical Archaeologist, the question of how to read an image, particularly when different forms of images of the same topic (descriptive vs. narrative) exist next to each other, is most central. Extending the discussion to include observation and discussion of context and situation of related processes of the re-coding of information and the way image and space function together are of utmost interest. By paying attention at the agents behind the images and the ongoing acquisition of visual elements and iconographies, the analysis is deepened.

For the History of Religion the 'iconic turn' has led to a fruitful critique of the privileging of textual traditions and demonstrated the wide range of variants in participants' interpretation and use of images. At the same time, the dynamics of the different strategies to make the divine present and accessible and their de-

pendence on discourses to inform imagination and to limit and outlaw 'illicit' use of images is still in need of further research. Here, the conference's focus on the interplay of images and imaginaries in texts and the contributions dealing with the strategic aspects of references to and efforts in representations promise new insights in the perception of visual culture across religious traditions.

From the perspective of biblical and early Christian studies, a focus on the role of images in the culture in which Christianity developed urges movement away from a purely textual study of an emerging religious tradition. It invites a comparative and phenomenological account of the role of imagery in both textual and material forms in creating and preserving religious identity, boundaries, and understanding. For too long, New Testament and early Christian studies have left elements of visual culture aside in part because the disciplines have been dominated by the view that the earliest Jesus traditions were aniconic and in part because the disciplines has been too dominated by the view that the early church was a socially separatist movement that sought to insulate itself from its wider culture. However, a paucity of evidence in the first case does not necessarily lead to the firm conclusion that Christ religion was aniconic and while there are indeed strong invocations to separatism within many early Christian documents, the audiences addressed by them were inextricably bound up in the social and cultural currents of their contexts. Attention to the visual reveals this and urges biblical scholars not to be blind to the iconographical elements of the Greek and Roman world that shaped people, including Christians, in often unconscious ways.[2] Indeed, the irony of the exhortations to be separate is that they are often presented in ways that presume some (even if low grade) facility with the rhetorical methods of so-called pagan contemporaries.

Each of these disciplines engages the imagination and the images of the divine in different ways and builds on a long tradition of methodological approaches and research agendas as well as various forms of theoretical and conceptual systematization. Creating a dialogue between them, this volume gives essential impulses for both the overall topic and further disciplinary applications.

Archaeology has developed and refined the analytical methods to study images and objects and emphasized the relevance of their appearance, form and style. The close inspection of production modes allows for detailed insights into economic processes. The inclusion of functional contexts such as houses, sanctuaries and the spatial and topographical environs of finds in general[3] illuminates further aspects which are crucial for the analysis of the role and meaning of images and objects. Yet in archaeology, 'religion' is still too often perceived as

[2] In this regard, the essays contained in Robbins, Melion and Jeal 2017 furnish a refreshing reorientation and build on earlier treatments by Snyder 1985, Jensen 2000, Crossan and Reed 2004, Weissenrieder, Wendt and von Gemünden, 2004, Canavan 2012, Elliott and Reasoner 2011, Robbins 2016, Kahl 2010, Lopez 2008, Niang and Osiek 2012, and Maier 2013.

[3] E. g. Kaufmann-Heinimann 2007, Haug and Kreuz 2016.

limited to gods and 'belief'. The notion of religion as communication of various agents with divine and human others – as introduced by Jörg Rüpke[4] – here shifts attention onto the discursive level and the role of images and objects as media.[5] As such, they present constitutive elements of these discourses but likewise come into being through these, as is evident, for example, for temple dedications by Republican generals at Rome.

Religious studies contributes central aspects such as agency, performance and sensual experiences next to larger conceptual and theoretical frameworks concerning various notions of religion in the above mentioned examples as well as the concept of lived religion.[6] Recent studies have underlined the significance of material and visual evidence in the study of religion.[7] Their search for ways to approach these methodologically clearly benefits from the cross-disciplinary dialogue with the fields of archaeology and art history. This dialogue, however, reaches far beyond the supply of tools and the contribution of ideas: A historian of religion may ask whether the relevance of the appearance of images merely is a scholarly construction – to which an archaeologist will immediately reply that it rather was of utter importance in antiquity but followed different rules than other forms of expressions of religion did.[8] The example illustrates well the relevance of this dialogue for interpretations and the impulses given by either discipline. Material religion is, however, not only reinforcing questions of the construction of the divine, its anthropomorphism, gendering and identifiability. It is also stressing the aesthetic dimension of religion as well as its spatialised character, binding religious practices and the presence of the divine to specific places.

In an analogous way, a scholar of New Testament and early Christian origins is invited through an approach centred in the visual material culture to identify more clearly intersections of religious beliefs with larger cultural phenomena in which early Christ believers were embedded. Such an invitation seeks to move the discipline beyond a purely lexico-graphical approach to ancient texts, or to treat wider issues as mere backdrop to the important task of exegesis, and insists upon recognition of ancient Christ religion as one amongst many religions of the Roman Empire. It is against this trans-disciplinary backdrop that we raise the question: Which knowledge does it take to identify an image as representation of a deity or a space as a sanctuary dedicated to a specific cult?

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[4] Rüpke 2015.

[5] For instance: Hosseini 2008; Meyer 2008; Morgan 2011; Stolow 2005.

[6] Rüpke 2016; id. 2015.

[7] For instance: Houtman and Meyer 2012; Pezzoli-Olgiati and Rowland 2011; Morgan 1998.

[8] The example given here refers to a question addressed by Jörg Rüpke at the participants of the panel "Shaping the Divine Counterpart – Communicating Religion through Signs, Image-Objects and Architecture in Graeco-Roman Antiquity" held at the Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religion 2017 at Leuven.

The twelve chapters of the volume have been arranged into three sections comprising four chapters each. Section 1 introduces various *Forms of Imagining Divine Presences and of Referring to Divine Agents*, thus opening the discussion of what images of the divine can be – and of what is articulated through them. The chapters of this section shed light on issues such as the material conditions and visualities of divine imaginaries, as well as various kinds of evidence and the related methodological approaches.

In his essay on *Material Conditions for Seeing the Divine: The Temple of the Sebastoi at Ephesos and the Vision of the Heavenly Throne in Revelation 4–5*, Steven J. Friesen contrasts two late first-century religious phenomena from very different socio-economic contexts in Western Asia Minor – the provincial Imperial cult temple established at Ephesos in 89/90 CE, and John's vision report of the throne of Israel's God as found in Revelation 4–5. This comparison furnishes the backdrop for reflection on the difference that material conditions make in visualizations of the divine. For both phenomena, the paper focuses on financial resources, material objects and the parameters for vision, as well as language and narrative. The author concludes that the categories of classical visuality and ritual-centered visuality do not do justice to the two phenomena. The materiality of the two divine sightings – at the temple and through the text – requires us also to consider visualities of subordination and subversive ways of seeing.

Various textual remains and image-objects of deities are explored as elements of different strategies of interaction and communication of human agents with divine agents by Anna-Katharina Rieger via the rock sanctuary of Caesarea Philippi on the southern slopes of Mount Hermon. Taking into account the material particularities and the spatial setting of the image-objects and inscriptions from the area of the sanctuary itself, as well as of those referring to the latter, Rieger scrutinizes the standard academic narratives about Greco-Roman gods which often allude to literary sources or far-fetched analogies, in order to open up the interpretation to practices and experiences. Material affordances such as sizes and spatial options for interaction with the image-objects as well as epigraphic references addressing the gods are considered important tools for understanding the image-objects of gods. Extra emphasis is laid on the question of perception, as well as on the conceptualization of contexts in the archaeological method. Processed and unprocessed (stone) materials are analyzed without evaluative distinction. With this shift of perspective from a relation of image-object and viewer to a relation which encompasses human agents, materialities, a layered contextualization, as well as spatial ranges, the image-objects can be better embedded into spatial practices, individual needs, and civic conditions at Caesarea Philippi. The chapter is titled *Imagining the Absent and Perceiving the Present: An Interpretation of Material Remains of Divinities from the Rock Sanctuary at Caesarea Philippi (Gaulantis).*

Kristine Iara, in her contribution *Seeing the Gods in Late Antique Rome*, investigates the role of religious imagery in the city of Rome in Imperial times and Late Antiquity. The examination of the extraordinarily rich and manifold evidence from the Forum Romanum and the Capitoline reveals a wide range of possibilities and strategies of the ways the gods were represented and referred to. Within the overall material evidence, the anthropomorphic statue was only one among many possible ways and means to refer to the deities, rendering their presence perceivable and facilitating the communication between people and gods. Further, the particular chronological focus she adopts allows her to observe the same objects within changing conditions: progressing Christianization effected immense changes in the perception of divine representations and the interpretations of meanings.

Jörg Rüpke's contribution broadens the scope of the first section further. He underlines that gods are visible not only in the form of representation, but also through the visibility of communication with them. It is the visibility of the most prominent religious agents of the ancient city of Rome on which the chapter *Not Gods Alone: On the Visibility of Religion and Religious Specialists in Ancient Rome* focuses. It analyzes the distinctiveness of Roman senatorial priests (*sacerdotes*) during ritual action. Despite the high prestige sought and conferred by these offices, they did not appear as different from other magistrates in many instances, as they were all distinguished by a purple-edged *toga praetexta* only. The underlying logic seems to have been a division of labour, relying on a high prominence and even awkward visibility of very few priests on the one hand and the prestige conferred by these exemplary figures on the aristocracy as a whole on the other.

Section 2, *Modes of Image Creation and Appropriation of Iconographies and Visual Cues*, deepens the discussion by drawing attention to the specific appearance and iconographies used for images of the divine. These could be created but they were also appropriated from other contexts to produce specific meanings.

Richard L. Gordon focuses on images created for and employed in performative actions: In a sense, all divine images in late Egyptian religion can be thought of as 'performative' inasmuch as the ceremonies of 'opening the mouth' and 'opening the eye', i. e. the fictive calling to life of statues, were a staple of daily temple ritual. This claim, which Gordon terms 'high ritual realism', directly informed the use of divine images in temple magical practice, which was likewise a priestly monopoly. The inclusion of a divine image in a magical text was analogous to the theological knowledge required for an effective praxis. Temple practice thus had no place for the idea of imitation. Once Greco-Egyptian magical practice began to be practiced in a few large cities outside of Egypt, such as Carthage and Rome, that is, after the late second century CE, the absence of the temple context induced practitioners, even when they had access to written

formulae, to appeal instead to their own imaginations, and so to the inventory of graphic signs in the new life-context. Titled *Getting it Right: Performative Images in Greco-Egyptian Magical Practice,* this chapter focuses on exemplary cases in which such late second to late fourth century CE practitioners decided to use their own personal representations of spirit-powers that lacked a settled or agreed upon iconography to add additional authority to their *defixiones* on lead, distantly echoing the temple tradition.

In her contribution *Imagining Mithras in Light of Iconographic Standardization and Individual Accentuation,* Marlis Arnhold analyses the various forms of iconographic, motivic, and compositional consistencies present in complex representations of the tauroctony of Mithras. Asking which conditions were required and can be made out for these to have emerged, she sheds light on the production processes behind these images, including the question of where they were produced. The author argues that production was not restricted to the most important urban centers but could have taken place anywhere. Consequently the models for the various motives, iconographic solutions and modes of composition must have been easily accessible if not widely known. The frequent use of generic motives which were likewise employed in other functional contexts, as well as of easily recognizable iconographies, furthermore implies that very little knowledge was required to grasp the images' content and meaning. The god and his cult imagined in this way thus appear hardly mysterious or secretive at all.

The appropriation of existing iconographies is also argued for by Robin Jensen in her chapter on *The Polymorphous Jesus in Early Christian Image and Text*. Early Christian visual depictions of Jesus typically present him as a beardless youth, often with long, curly hair. These representations appear in scenes showing Christ as a healer or wonderworker, although sometimes also when he appears as a teacher surrounded by his apostles. Beginning in the mid-fourth century, these depictions are joined – sometimes in close physical proximity – to representations that show him thickly bearded and virile, regally enthroned, or transferring a scroll of the New Law to Peter and Paul. Such divergences in Jesus' physical depiction could be explained by the desire to express his dual natures (human and divine), affirm the futility of making a definitive image of the Divine One, or signify his different roles (teacher of true philosophy, miracle worker, ascended Lord). They also may be intended to demonstrate his superiority to the Greco-Roman gods insofar as he possesses all their characteristics and powers in himself. In other words he is simultaneously like Apollo and Jupiter, while transcending both, along with all the other gods. However, early Christian documents that report observers remarking on Jesus' varying and changing image, both in his earthly life and following his resurrection, offer another perspective. Jesus was and was not confined to one human appearance or physique. The problem of depicting Christ in visual art thus raises questions such as, what characterizes a true likeness, whether certain conventional portraits are

potentially idolatrous, and what artists intend or viewers perceive in depictions of the man-God, Jesus.

The appropriation of visual cues symbolizing specific values in narratives is dealt with by David L. Balch in his chapter on *Founders of Rome, of Athens, and of the Church: Romulus, Theseus, and Jesus. Theseus and Ariadne with Athena Visually Represented in Rome, Pompeii and Herculaneum*. The author builds on earlier research where he has argued for structural similarities in accounts of the origin of Rome and Luke-Acts' narration of the origin of Christianity. When Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Luke narrate biographies of the founders, Romulus and Jesus, and then write the history of their two institutions, the state and the church, their two narratives share thirty values. For example, both Romulus and Jesus were born by divine act; both were killed, but then appeared after their deaths. The institutions that they founded both grew by receiving foreigners, which resulted in new names: Latins and Christians. The chapter explores the influence of another founder, Theseus of Athens. Three Roman emperors, Augustus, Nero, and Vespasian, legitimated themselves not only as successors of Romulus, but also by claiming similarity to Theseus. This imperial propaganda is reflected in Roman domestic art, in frescoes of Theseus painted in houses in Rome, Pompeii, and Herculaneum. One key theme in contemporary literature and art was that Theseus founding the city was more important than his family life. Ariadne, a princess of Crete, had helped Theseus kill the Minotaur and then had abandoned her family to sail away with him. Nevertheless, the goddess Athena appeared to Theseus and demanded that he abandon her and sail away to found Athens. This Roman domestic visual culture powerfully presented imperial claims and furnishes a hypothetical backdrop for understanding the way some early Christ believers would have received Luke-Acts. Luke's narrative makes counter claims: the moral value more important even than that of family is not Rome, but Christ: 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate [his] … wife … cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:26). Both Dionysius and Luke go even further. A key story of the foundation of Rome involves the conflict between Rome and her mother city, Alba. Instead of their armies fighting, the Roman Horatii and the Alban Curiatii, cousins who love each other, 'are willing to give their lives for their country'; they are 'eager to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus' (Acts 21:13). A soldier's or a disciple's ultimate commitment is not only more important than family, perhaps including a wife, but more important than their own lives, a thirty-second value narrated in the foundations stories both of Rome and of the church.

In the final section, *Evocation of Specific Images in People's Minds*, emphasis is put on the persuasive character of the use of specific images. The essays in this section look at various methodological and theoretical tools of interpretation. In doing so they again emphasize the importance of attention to the overall visual

culture of the period framing the material each essay considers. The section starts with Harry Maier's chapter on *Seeing the Blood of God: The Triumphant Charade of Ignatius of Antioch the God-Bearer.* The paper takes up ancient and modern visual theory to show how Ignatius of Antioch (writing in the first decades of the second century) presents himself as a token of the suffering of Jesus. As such he draws attention to an anticipated gruesome execution as a criminal in a Roman arena as a picture of the divine. Ignatius regularly calls himself 'God-bearer' (*theophoros*) and in a procession to the divine. In particular the essay takes up ancient notions of ekphrasis and then locates them within a larger theorization of how to understand and interpret visual culture more generally. With the help of contemporary anthropological study of visual culture, it develops a theory of visualization and visual culture that sees the visual as encoded in a larger cultural narrative than can be recoded and then must be decoded by reference to both those larger narratives and the specific ones in media for making the divine visible. The chief medium for Ignatius is his journey to his anticipated execution. Along the way, in seven letters to churches in Asia Minor, he opposes a group he identifies as those who deny that Jesus as divinity was born or suffered. This is why he uses ekphrastic language to make his own suffering visible to his readers, so as to use himself as an image for his divinity's suffering. His entire journey thus becomes a kind of theatrical performance of Christ's suffering, one that will find its climax on the stage of the Roman arena. The paper uses the theorization of image and text by W.J.T. Mitchell who has analyzed the role of imagery in the textual communication of meaning. Mitchell argues that some forms of visual imagination accord with cultural expectations while others disrupt them by being placed in counter-cultural narratives. The essay applies this to the Roman understanding of the execution of criminals by being mauled by beasts as the erasure of social identity and the ultimate gesture of public shame and humiliation. Ignatius breaks such a coded meaning by reinterpreting his execution as an honour that confers upon him a potent identity. He thus uses visualization of his humiliating death as mirror of Jesus' crucifixion, which also, as shameful exposure, is celebrated as the manifestation of victory and honour.

In her chapter on *Space and Vision of the Divine: The Temple Imagery of the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Annette Weissenrieder, addresses the topic of the section as follows. The subject of this chapter is a spatial and temporal contextualization of the image of the temple in the letter to the Ephesians (2:11–22). Ephesians celebrates the end of ethnic and religious divisions and the peace Christ brings by inviting listeners to imagine the destruction of a temple middle wall dividing Jews and Gentiles. She invites us to consider the extent to which the image of such a wall constitutes a border and the way we should think about the middle wall. How exactly should we understand the relationship between the walls and the space in between them? The temple image is often understood as thematizing the new temple in Christ and at the same time a spiritualizing of the Jewish

temple cult by interpreting Christ's death and resurrection as the tearing down of the partition dividing Jews from Gentiles on the temple mount of Jerusalem. This contextualization is based on key terms of the text, which are hapax legomena in the New Testament and the Septuagint. But Weissenrieder invites us to expand our understanding of the term by considering its presence in domains outside of strictly textual Jewish and Christian usage, namely, in epigraphic and archaeological material. Terms like μεσότοιχον – dividing wall, but also ἀκρογωνιαῖος or συναρμολογουμένη refer to a sacred space of a pagan temple, expressly in the temple dedicated to Apollo in Didyma. Methodologically, Weissenrieder aims to show that the author of Ephesians 1–2 relies heavily on the ambivalent status of images and orients his pictorial description on the basis of visual codes in antiquity. Visual images provide a possible context for the text, but the text does not constitute one single visual image. She shows that the goal of the image of this wall is to initiate viewers into a new exegetical reality through seeing the mystery of Christ (once – now; to reveal: ἀποκαλύπτω; enlighten, to illumine/make clear: φωτίζω), which the text relates to the enthroned Christ.

In her chapter titled *Citadel of the God(s) or Satan's Throne: The Image of the Divine at the Great Altar of Pergamon between Ruler Religion and Apocalyptic Counter-Vision* Brigitte Kahl works with the Gigantomachy Frieze of the Great Altar of Pergamon and Hesiod's *Theogony* to offer an inventory of the visual vocabulary of Western God-imaging and its ideological implications with regard to divinzation of power, dehumanization of expendable Others, and earth-subjugation. Her inventory uses the tools of semiotics to lay bare a set of binary oppositions that encode the political ideology of the monument. The Pergamene version of the primeval battle of the Gods against the Giants and arch-mother Gaia depicts the anti-divine forces in a spatial and aesthetic arrangement that reflects a hierarchical order of binaries. The Giants are below not above, out not in, unrestrained and menacing versus composed and salvific, ugly/beastlike instead of beautiful, defeated rather than triumphant. Conceptually, these visual dichotomies express the political and social antagonisms of law versus lawlessness, order versus chaos, good versus evil, civilization versus barbarian terror, power versus powerlessness, heaven versus earth. Within this paradigm, the divine is visually and ideologically always attached to the superior position of a Self claiming dominance over an Other. The only deviation is the earth goddess Gaia who is singled out as part of the anti-divine coalition of the earthborn 'below' and thus subject to the death and punishment, suppression and exploitation imposed on them: a visual anticipation of earth neglect, nature abuse and ecocide in Western culture. In the Book of Revelation this visual semiotics of the divine is exposed to a relentlessly iconoclastic deconstruction. Pillorying the Great Altar as Satan's throne, John the Seer dismantles the normative images of divine power and their mirroring representations of human rulers as gods. The Roman emperor and his divine effigy is visualized as a monstrous serpentine idol with

the features of a man-eating red dragon. In a bold act of messianic re-imagination John vandalizes the established iconography of the divine and replaces it with the image of a tortured and crucified God at the bottom of the power pyramid: a slaughtered lamb.

The final chapter of this section and the volume, *Kinetic Divine Concepts, the Baptist, and the Enfleshed Logos in the Prologue and Precreation Storyline of the Fourth Gospel*, Vernon K. Robbins, guided by a merger of cognitive scientific perspectives on abstract concepts and the sensory dimension called *kinesthesia*, presents an experimental translation of the prologue to John (1:1–18).

This approach highlights the movement of the abstract concepts of logos, life, light, grace, truth, and glory from the precreation realm of 'being' into the realm of 'becoming' where things can be seen by humans. From the perspective of cognitive science, this is a process of bringing 'imageless' concepts to human scale, whereby writers can develop them rhetorically through composition, completion, and elaboration. He goes on to consider the prologue's elaboration in John 1:1–42, which transforms the story of John the Baptist from its prophetic-apocalyptic conceptuality in the storyline of the synoptic Gospels into precreation formulation where he 'witnesses' to the coming of the Logos as eternal life-light into the sphere of creation. A special goal of the paper is to argue that the elaborated prologue introduces precreation conceptuality that functions as a cognitive frame for the entire narrative of the Gospel of John.

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