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Kings, Symbols, and Cities

By

Mario Baghos

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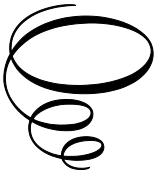

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Cover photo: Byzantine mosaic entitled 'Deposition of the Relics'
from a lunette on the façade of St Mark's Basilica, Venice (13th century). St Mark's was modelled on Constantinople's mausoleum church of the Holy Apostles, which is no longer extant.

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PREFACE

In a broad sense, this book constitutes a history of civilisations. In a narrower sense, it addresses specific ancient cities from the dawn of the civic enterprise to the rise of Byzantine Christendom in order to delineate that religiosity was inherent to city building from the outset. This book also demonstrates that what transpired in the evolution from the first cities in Mesopotamia to Byzantine Christendom—or, as I prefer to describe it, Christian Byzantium—is the gradual replacement of the pagan ruler cult, with the ruler becoming subordinate to Jesus Christ as manifested in representations of Christ as 'Master of All' (Pantokrator), that is, the entire cosmos and everything it contains. This book identifies the main religious trends that conditioned ancient cities in certain cultures: Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Israelite, and two major cities within the Byzantine empire, Rome and Constantinople. These trends included the symbolic perception, reflected in art, architecture, and the relevant primary texts, that cities constituted the intersection of heaven, earth, and the underworld; thereby ensconcing their inhabitants in visions of the cosmos through which the sacred was revealed. Cities were therefore *imagines mundi* (images of the world) and *axes mundi* (centres of the world) that were constituted as such by their rulers, usually kings, who, because of their perceived relationship with the sacred, were considered gods or representatives of the gods; world-shapers (or ecosystemic agents) who undertook this activity from their respective capitals.

The present work also grapples with the following paradox: that while ancient pagan religious perceptions of the city space were indeed holistic, they nevertheless lapsed into an idolatry of the ruler or king that, this book argues, was only displaced with the advent of Christianity. Indeed, Christianity's emphasis—not on any worldly ruler—but on "the ruler of the kings of the earth" (Revelation 1.5), Jesus Christ, as anterior to the cosmos as its creator and the source of sacredness, divested rulers from, at the very least, the abiding perception that they were gods on earth. Moreover, the Orthodox Church's insistence on the heavenly Jerusalem, or God's kingdom, as the ultimate destination for the inhabitants of worldly cities, countered the ancient world's idealisation of their terrestrial abodes while at the same time employing symbolism that demonstrated that the Church—both in a mystical sense and in terms of its art and architecture within

Byzantium—is where the sacred could be immediately participated in. This was considered the case on account of the belief that Jesus Christ is the true and only *axis mundi* and ecosystemic agent.

This book incorporates research from multiple sources, which have been thoroughly updated and revised, as well as unique material published here for the first time. The principal material for chapters one through six is from my doctoral thesis entitled *Eternal Cities: Rome, Constantinople, and their Antecedents as Symbolic Images and Centres of the World*, that was successfully completed at the department of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney in 2015. Chapter seven includes material from the thesis but also incorporates elements from my article 'Christ the "Sun" and "Hearth" of our Salvation,' in the *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 9.3 (2018): 75–92, as well as my chapter 'Theotokoupoleis: The Mother of God as Protectress of the Two Romes,' published in Kevin Wagner, M. Isabell Naumann, Peter John McGregor, and Paul Morrissey's *Mariology at the Beginning of the Third Millennium*, 51–77 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017). And finally, chapter eight includes material from 'Religious Symbolism and Well-being in Christian Constantinople and the Crisis of the Modern City' in Doru Costache, Darren Cronshaw, and James R. Harrison (eds), *Well-being, Personal Wholeness and the Social Fabric*, 324–54 (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017). I am grateful to my supervisors, Professor Carole Cusack and Very Revd Dr Doru Costache, as well as to the editors of these aforementioned volumes and journal for their permission to republish this material, which in any case has been significantly reworked and synthesised with new, previously unpublished research, into the present volume.

This book is in fact the outcome of ten years of research that began before I became a doctoral candidate. Throughout this period, I have encountered many scholars and friends who have offered pertinent suggestions and encouraged me in my work. I duly acknowledge them, with deep gratitude, here: Dr Vassilis Adrahtas, Professor Pauline Allen, Very Revd Professor John Behr, Professor Paul Blowers, Very Revd Fr Anastasios Bozikis, Professor David Bradshaw, Professor James L. Cox, Revd Professor Angelo Di Berardino, Dr Bernard Doherty, Dr Guy Freeland, Mr Konstantinos Kalymnios, Associate Professor Philip Kariatlis, Professor Gerard Moore, Professor Bronwen Neil, Mrs Denise O'Hagan, Professor Claudia Rapp, Dr Anna Silvas, Professor Garry W. Trompf, and Professor Jonathan Wooding.

I am also grateful to the late Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, Stylianos of blessed memory, for his support as I undertook my doctoral studies; and to his successor His Eminence

Archbishop Makarios, for his paternal care in granting me a full-time position as lecturer in Theology (Patristics) and Church History at St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College. My thanks also to my parish priest, the Very Revd Fr Athanasios Giatsios, and his family, for their friendship and encouragement. My love to my wife Victoria—who is my anchor in life, my best friend, and my inspiration—and to our daughter, Ludmila, who is my very heart. My love also to my father Alexander, my mother Vasiliki, and my brother Chris; whose unwavering support I can never repay.

Mario Baghos
Feast day of Saints Athanasius and Cyril
18th of January, 2021

INTRODUCTION

In the worldview of ancient and medieval societies, proximity to the cosmos or nature was essential to the civic enterprise, to building cities.[1] This was because of the sacredness that was manifested through the cosmos and nature (here the two are considered interchangeable). According to Mircea Eliade, ancient and medieval persons desired to be ontologically conditioned by sacredness, the opposite of which would be existentially destructive.[2] Moreover, he highlighted that ancient persons needed to cosmicise the space that they occupied in such a way as to facilitate participation in the sacred, avoiding thereby the psychic trauma of yielding to profane, amorphous space.[3] Nowhere can this better be seen than in the religious art and architecture of ancient and medieval cities, especially those that were Christianised, like Rome and Constantinople.

This book addresses the extent to which religion functioned in ancient cities and how select cities—from the ancient Near East to Christian Constantinople (modern day Istanbul in Turkey)—were *axes mundi*, 'centres of the world,' and *imagines mundi*, 'images of the world,' or *imagines et axes mundi* (images and centres of the world). While incorporating evidence from a range of sources including epic poetry, literature, scriptures, imperial panegyrics and ancient and medieval city 'guidebooks,' the book focuses especially on ancient historiographical material. The cities it addresses are from the Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Israel; it culminates in an assessment of pagan Rome and the role of early Christianity that continued and reinterpreted the trends regarding the *imagines et axes mundi* symbolism within Rome and later Constantinople. Indeed, Rome and Constantinople are organically connected insofar as the former was called 'New Rome' at its founding,[4] and was initially patterned on the former. The centre of the

[1] Here nature and the cosmos are considered interchangeable.
[2] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1987), 12–13.
[3] Ibid., 23–24.
[4] Constantinople was called New Rome, since it was intended by its founder to replace the old Rome, upon which it was partly modelled. Lucy Grig and Gavin

(Eastern) Roman or Byzantine empire that was established in AD 330 by St Constantine the Great (r. 306–337)—after whom Constantinople was named—the Byzantine empire would last for over a thousand years and constituted the framework within which Orthodox Christianity flourished before being imparted to many other nations and cultures.

By culminating in chapters seven and eight in Christian Rome and Constantinople, this book will focus on Christian art, images and symbols in these cities (and which can also be found throughout the world), affirming that these images were meant to have a positive existential impact on their inhabitants. This is in contrast to modern cities, which are not conditioned by religious structures, temples or churches that recapitulate the cosmos within which the sacred is revealed (as is the case with ancient cities or Christian cities). To put it another way, while these structures are indeed included in modern cities, instead these are, for the most part, shaped by economic and materialistic forces as reflected in their Central Business Districts: by glass and metal skyscrapers belonging, for the most part, to corporations that advertise their products in various ways through electronic billboards and signs. This has perhaps made us oblivious to the religious import of ancient cities, which is what this book attempts to bring to the forefront in its assessment of them.

We often hear the expression 'religion is in decline' reiterated constantly by the mainstream media and scholarship in Western countries, citing statistics from the evaporating numbers in the Church of England—both in the United Kingdom and abroad[5]—to the rise of people identifying as nonreligious as a confirmation of the triumph of secularism.[6] The same is not true, however, for non-Western countries: in Eastern Europe, Asia, South America and Africa,[7] religion is definitely very much part of everyday life, as it is for migrant and minority religious communities in the West. This book presupposes that this is the case because of the inherent religiosity of human beings; that human consciousness was marked by religious modes

Kelly, eds, *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

[5] Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000*, Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

[6] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap University Press, 2007).

[7] Rumy Hasan, *Religion and the Development of the Global South* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

of perception and behaviour from its outset,[8] and that this can be discerned in the earliest cities in human history. This is in stark contrast to most modern cities, which, as mentioned above, while not bereft of religious structures and significance, are for the most part utilitarian or functional in structure and outlook.

As mentioned above, the main goal of this work is to analyse the ancient city, which tried to recapitulate nature or the cosmos—through which the sacred was revealed—within the temples that conditioned city-centres. It does this by demonstrating the cross-cultural and diachronic parallels in the way that six important civilisations, that are addressed in eight consecutive chapters—Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Christianity as a religious phenomenon, pagan and later Christian Rome, and finally Constantinople—viewed their cities as centres and images of the world understood in a religious sense; that is, as manifesting the sacred. By selecting these cultures, I am neither denigrating other cultures—whether Far Eastern or Northern European—that might have been relevant to the present study, nor am I dismissive of the fact that other cultures have had similar approaches towards their cities and towns. Instead, the aforementioned civilisations have been chosen because of their geographical proximity to the Near East—which is where the earliest cities emerged—to one another, and to the rise of Christianity,[9] which I argue differs (along with Judaism) from ancient civilisations in its curtailing of certain religious trends that, while more holistic and nature-embracing than contemporary utilitarian approaches to cities, are nevertheless problematic in their outcomes: in their worship of personifications of nature, human behavior, and the ruler as a god.

In any case, the religious trends that this book addresses are rather strictly defined. It will not be looking in great detail at modes of worship, ritual, or sacrifice, but rather at the way that ancient and medieval persons viewed cities as images and centres of the world through assessments of the

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[8] Dorin David, '*Homo Religiosus* in the Scientific Work and Fantastic Prose of Mircea Eliade,' *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov*, Series IV: *Philology and Cultural Studies* vol. 6, 55.1 (2013): 22.

[9] In light of this, I have ordered these civilisations more or less chronologically herein. Although I do not necessarily subscribe to the so-called Pan-Babylonian school, Mesopotamian civilisation does seem to be paradigmatic for the development of cities in the Near East. I am aware of criticisms of the Pan-Babylonian method, such as those by Frank J. Korom in his 'Of Navels and Mountains: A Further Inquiry into the History of an Idea,' *Asian Folklore Studies* 51 (1992): 103–25. However, as can be discerned in this study, while I do not embrace the method wholeheartedly, I do acknowledge that it does have some merit.

relevant primary and secondary sources and material culture, for which it applies the heuristic concepts *imago mundi* and *axis mundi* to the cities under investigation.

The aforementioned civilisations under analysis, it must be stated, are addressed according to their own merits, the degree to which they informed one another, and, finally, in relation to the 'two Romes'—i.e. Rome and Constantinople—which built their respective syntheses both in parallel and upon some aspects of these ancient cultures, but which were ultimately conditioned by Christianity. In addressing mostly literary sources, this book is essentially macrohistorical, because it seeks to encapsulate the salient themes under investigation—namely, the common approaches towards cities as *imagines et axes mundi* by these respective cultures—through a diachronic analysis. For this reason, the work has as a guiding principle the *longue durée*, a conceptual apparatus put forward by the history of mentalities which viewed historical periods or epochs as motivated by the enduring worldviews that conditioned people in the unfolding of events.[10]

This book articulates a methodology in the next section ('Definitions') that defines religious symbolism and its relationship to ancient cities within a narrative discourse that argues that in these cities the symbol, or symbolism, is understood as facilitating a participation in the reality to which it points, in this case, the sacred or God. The terms that appear in the 'Definitions' section are essential for understanding the interdisciplinary nature of this work, which, as already seen, adopts concepts from the history of religions like *axis mundi* and *imago mundi*, but also insights from the history of mentalities (*longue durée*). The way this book defines symbolism—based on the work of Paul Ricoer, Mircea Eliade and Karen Armstrong—as well as eschatology, the Christian discourse on the 'last things'—necessary for understanding chapters six through eight—will also be addressed under 'Definitions.'

Next, the symbolic culture of ancient cities, which are an outcome of humanity's propensity to cosmicising the space that it occupies, is demonstrated in relation to the ancient civilisations mentioned above. The specific religious motifs that are addressed in these cities concern, first, their cosmic significance, since they were considered recapitulations of the three

[10] The *longue durée* was first used by the founders of the history of mentalities, Marc Bloch and Fernand Braudel of the Annales school. See Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. S. Rendall and E. Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), xxi–xxii.

main tiers of the cosmos, "heaven, earth, and hell,"[11] which can alternately be described as the celestial, terrestrial, and subterranean or infernal levels of reality. It is precisely to these recapitulations, which involve the manifestation of the sacred (hierophany) that could be discerned in natural and human made objects in these cities, that I apply the terms *axis mundi* and *imago mundi*. These cities are therefore addressed as constituting existentially meaningful intersections and encompassments of the cosmos for their inhabitants. This vision continues in the Christian cities that follow, with the major qualification that these motifs are emptied of their polytheistic significance and applied to Christian conceptions of the universe with Jesus Christ at their centre. (In this way, Christ can be described as the *axis mundi par excellence*).

My logic for choosing these civilisations, as opposed to some others (Etruscan, for example),[12] is based on the striking parallels in the way that their inhabitants represented them as images and centres of the world. This is especially important in relation to Mesopotamia—the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian civilisations, respectively[13]—which, as far as we know, is where the very first cities emerged in history, not to mention Egypt, Israel, and Greece, from which the city of Rome and even Constantinople borrowed symbolic motifs before they were thoroughly Christianised. In relation to the Christian approaches towards cities—necessary for our understanding of ancient and medieval Rome and Constantinople—these are analysed at the end of the book as they represent, for this author, the zenith and most existentially significant examples of religious symbolism in the city space; especially since the remnants of Christendom are still with us in most Western European countries.

We have seen that, for ancient persons, the cosmos was usually perceived as comprised of three tiers of reality and experience—heaven, earth, and the underworld—and while attempts to recapitulate them within cities led to more holistic visions of reality or the cosmos, nevertheless these visions were often regulated by rulers or kings, who, as world-shapers—

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[11] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 12.

[12] The significant impact of Etruscan culture upon Roman government and architecture has been aptly delineated by John F. Hall in 'From Tarquin to Caesars: Etruscan Governance at Rome,' in *Etruscan Italy: Etruscan Influences on the Civilizations of Italy from Antiquity to the Modern Era*, ed. Hall (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1996), 150–51.

[13] The neighbouring Hittite, Assyrian, and Ugarit empires, which are not without their significance for the development of ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures, have been passed over in this book for the sake of convenience.

what I have called in this book 'ecosystemic agents'—were considered either representatives of the creator-god, the demiurge, or inherently divine in symbolically shaping and building cities as reflections of the various pagan conceptions of the cosmos. I have described these rulers as ecosystemic agents insofar as they were either considered, or considered themselves, as systematically ordering (from the Greek σύστημα which means 'composite' or 'ordered whole')[14] their cities or homes (οἶκος meaning 'house' or 'dwelling place') to reflect the cosmos and the sacred manifested within it. Exceptions to this exaltation of the ruler—that we shall see lasted until the official establishment of Christianity in Byzantium[15]—existed in ancient Greece and in Israel. But whereas the former eventually adopted this cult under Alexander the Great, the latter—despite the hubris of some of its kings—nevertheless maintained fidelity to the God of Israel—Yahweh Elohim—as the ecosystemic agent *par excellence*. The 'beginning of the end' of the ruler cult can therefore be seen in ancient Israel's kingship, which was often compromised by ineffective or unfaithful rulers but generally maintained its fidelity to God throughout its long history.

In my attempt to demonstrate that Christianity's use of cosmic imagery transcends that of ancient cultures, I use the terms ecosystemic agent and *axis mundi* in relation to Christ, but in doing so I am in no way implying that he is a world-shaper or centre of the world in the same way that ancient rulers or cities were. Orthodox Christianity has a rich heritage of appropriating terms from cultures extraneous to it—principally but not limited to the philosophical schools of late antiquity—and endowing these terms with unique Christian content in order to communicate its beliefs. The term Logos (Λόγος), for example, which goes back to the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, denoted an all-embracing organisational principle that gave order and meaning to the universe and all it contained. The author of the Gospel according to St John applied this concept to Jesus Christ in pre-existence (i.e. before his birth in history), namely, when he wrote: "In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (Jn 1.1–3). In appropriating and reinterpreting this term, the author of the Gospel was expressing his belief that Christ pre-existed his earthly birth before becoming flesh and living among us (Jn 1.14), what we call in Christian

[14] For 'οἶκος,' see Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1204. For 'σύστημα,' see ibid., 1735.

[15] The fact that the ruler cult has cropped up again in history is really a pseudo-morphosis; in Christian Byzantium—where Christ is worshipped as God—an emperor or empress could only go so far.

theology the incarnation.[16] Moreover, this was done in a way that would be intelligible to his Hellenistic audience that would have been familiar with the term 'Logos.' This way of referring to Christ in fact became a staple of the Christian tradition, especially in early times, insofar as it was consistent with the incipient Church's experience of Christ as the one who created and ordered the cosmos together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.[17]

Taking inspiration from this approach, I have attempted to employ terms—namely, ecosystemic agency and *axis mundi*—from a discipline extraneous to Christianity, from the history of religions. I have applied these terms to Jesus Christ in a manner consistent with the Christian Church's approach towards him as God and man. This much is evident from the manner in which Christ is represented in the scriptures and patristic texts, for while he is considered the only true ecosystemic agent (together with his Father and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity), he does not, like the pagan ecosystemic agents (whether they are gods or human rulers), shape pre-existing matter, but creates the world *ex nihilo*—out of nothing—together with the Father and the Spirit.[18] This belief is important, because it affirms that Christ is not posterior and thus limited by the created order, but anterior to it as its creator, which further implies his eternity and divinity. This is existentially relevant for Christians because, to quote St Athanasius the Great's criticism of Arianism—which the Church contended with in its earliest centuries—and which posited the 'createdness' of Christ: if "the Son were a creature, man would have remained mortal as before, not being joined to God."[19]

For Christians, only the eternal and divine Son of God—who is God himself—can save humanity from the antithesis of eternity, that is, mortality—death—which the Son accomplishes by assuming human nature as Christ Jesus and rising from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion.[20] This is significant because, unlike pagan rulers who were identified with demiurges or divine organisational principles, the Son of God, as Logos, does not embody different humans at different times. Instead, he permanently assumes human nature as Christ while remaining

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[16] Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Ian and Ihita Kesarcodi-Watson (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 90.
[17] Ibid., 36.
[18] St Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation* 33, trans. John Behr (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 55.
[19] *Oratio II contra Arianos* 69.1, in *Athanasius: Werke, Band I*: Die dogmatischen Schriften, Erster Teil, 3, ed. Karin Metzler and Kyriakos Savvidis (Berlin and New York: Lieferung and De Gruyter, 2000); retrieved via TLG.
[20] St Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation* 8 (Behr, 66–67).

fully God, a tenet unique to Christianity and expressed in its experience of Christ as disclosing the truth concerning God's identity and relationship to the world.[21] This is important to mention at the outset, as it will assist us in understanding the nature of the change that takes place when kings, in building cities and endowing them with religious symbolism, stop identifying themselves with pagan gods that are posterior to the creation—and thus on the same level as they are—and instead construe themselves as mortal representatives of Christ as creator God. The new Christian belief system influenced the nature of the symbolism that was henceforth displayed, with Christ as 'Master of All' exalted above rulers who, in spite of their continued pretense to universal authority, could only articulate this in terms of regency on behalf—and never as an embodiment—of the creator God.

As we have already stated, ancient cities, from the earliest ones that emerged in Mesopotamia to late antique marvels such as Constantinople, were by-and-large religious centers: they were full of symbols that reflected the religious conception of the world of the inhabitants.[22] A major characteristic of the religious conception of ancient cities, explored in this book, concerns their dedication to one or more of the gods worshipped by the inhabitants. In the Graeco-Roman context, this can be discerned in Athens, which was named after the goddess of wisdom, Athena, and even in the case where cities were not named after gods or goddesses, they could receive the name of one of their attributes. This was the case with Delphi (addressed in chapter four) on account of its association with the god Apollo, who, according to Homer, rode there on a dolphin before the construction of his temple named after the Greek word for dolphin, which is δελφίς (*delphis*).[23] It would be illogical to think that a habit that was essential to human beings since the dawn of civilisation—that is, the infusion of cities with religious symbolism and their ascription to divine protectors—would dissipate when people (for the most part) stopped believing in the old gods. The early Church as it influenced the Roman empire, first in Rome and later in Constantinople, used various methods in

[21] Nicholas Arseniev, *Revelation of Life Eternal: An Introduction to the Christian Message* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), 83–88.

[22] Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 15–16. Indeed, scholars such as Jan Assmann have argued that the earliest cities, in Egypt for example, contained no characteristic structures apart from temples. Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, trans. D. Lorton (London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1.

[23] *The Homeric Hymns III–To Pythian Apollo*, in *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (London: William Heinemann, 1914), 358–59.

order to shift the emphasis away from protector gods and goddesses to saints, who were not meant to be seen as gods or worshipped; but since they were (and are) considered immediate participants in the grace of the one and only Trinitarian God revealed through the Son of God, Jesus Christ, are venerated because they entreat him on behalf of humanity.[24]

Thus, cities throughout Christendom were ascribed saintly protectors who would shield them from various disasters, both natural and human-made, and who were chiefly entreated to pray to God on behalf of the inhabitants (if not for the whole civilised world) for their salvation. In chapters seven and eight of this book, we shall see that it was in this capacity that the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, was considered the chief intercessor of Constantinople and Rome (as she was of Paris, Aachen, and many other cities). But, although there is no room to treat them in this volume, other saints were evoked too: St Demetrios protected Thessaloniki and St Andrew protected Patras (both in Greece), and St George protected London. In some places, cities and towns were even named after patron saints, such as Sfântu Gheorghe in the Romanian county of Covasna, and Giurgu in a county named after St George, again in Romania. A brief example, from the Graeco-Roman context, of how this shift of emphasis took place can be discerned in relation to Athens, where the Parthenon was, at least by the sixth century AD, converted into a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Parthenos Maria or the Theotokos Atheniotissa—the God-bearer of Athens—its main title after the twelfth century.[25]

The last chapters of this book, as already mentioned, are principally concerned with the representation of Christ as an ecosystemic agent, meaning that it is to Rome and later Constantinople, the New Rome, that we will turn; since it is especially in the latter where Syriac, Graeco-Roman, and Egyptian art converged to produce the representation of Christ that would become a standard image of him in Byzantium: that of the Pantokrator, which we have seen means 'Master of All,' and which can be taken to mean the cosmos and all it contains. The Pantokrator image will be our special focus in those chapters, and one of the earliest examples of it as

[24] For the veneration of the saints in the doctrinal definition of the seventh ecumenical council, see *Second Council of Nicaea—787*, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1989), 135–36. For the intercession of the saints, see the dismissal prayer of any Orthodox Christian service, e.g. the liturgy, in *The Divine Liturgy of our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom* (Sydney: St Andrew's Orthodox Press, 2005), 111.

[25] It was also known as "the Great Church of Athens." Anthony Kaldellis, *The Christian Parthenon: Classicism and Pilgrimage in Byzantine Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 77–78.

a portable icon comes from St Catherine's monastery in Mount Sinai. What can be discerned in this specific version is its theological significance: the distinction between Christ's two natures—divine and human—in the unity of his person as the one and only Son of God in a way that is immediately dependent upon the doctrinal formulations of the ecumenical councils held within Byzantium, such as the fourth council in Chalcedon in 451, which put forward the Christological definition of faith that: "the one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten [is] acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation."[26] To reiterate: it is for this reason that this book will conclude with an assessment of images of Christ and of the saints in Byzantium, specifically but not limited to its capital, Constantinople. It does this in order to demonstrate just how the image of the Pantokrator in particular—and of the saints positioned in relation to this image—would proliferate and condition the city space in a way that would become influential not just in Byzantium, but in predominantly Orthodox Christian cities throughout the world.

In any case, the importance of the image of the Pantokrator—just like all iconographical depictions of Christ and his saints—lies in its association with Byzantium, and specifically with Orthodox Christianity. For Byzantine or Orthodox Christians, the icons depicting Christ and the saints participate, through the grace of God, in their archetypes, so that veneration given to these images was transferred to the persons the images depict.[27] This is why in Constantinople the images that one would typically find inside of churches were also reproduced in the public space as well, so that by the eighth century the Christianisation of this space was given a formal mandate in the seventh ecumenical council in 787, which stated:

> …the reverend and holy images, whether painted or made of mosaic or of other suitable material, are to be exposed in the holy churches of God, on sacred instruments and vestments, on walls and panels, in houses and public ways; these are the images of our Lord, God and saviour, Jesus Christ, and of our Lady without blemish, the holy God-bearer, and of the revered angels and any of the saintly holy men.[28]

In fact, the doctrinal definitions of ecumenical councils one through six, held throughout various cities in Byzantium—and three times in Constantinople—all concerned Jesus Christ, and asserted, in consecutive order, his divinity

[26] *Council of Chalcedon–451*, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 86.
[27] St John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* 1.21, trans. Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 34–35.
[28] *Second Council of Nicaea—787*, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 135–36.

or shared essence with the Father (councils one and two), the oneness of his person (council three), the reality of his divine and human natures (council four), his oneness once again (council five), and the full integrity of his human nature by affirming that he had a human will which was subject to his divine one.[29] Addressed in such a manner, the ecumenical councils seem to reflect a progression into the mystery of the eternal Son of God's divine economy, of his incarnation: begotten of the Father before all ages, he deigned to become a human being while remaining fully God. The final two chapters of this book demonstrate that the incarnation is perhaps best attested to in the iconographic tradition in Byzantium: for the icons, made of material pigments, wood and other elements were theologically and doctrinally described as a logical outcome of the Son of God's incarnation as Christ, since this involved his sanctification of all cosmic matter. In other words, since the Son of God, in assuming human nature which is a microcosm, sanctified all matter—*cosmically*—through his incarnation, then believers could utilise matter in order to depict him, so that the veneration given to these depictions is transferred to God or the saints by the former's grace.[30]

The icons, whether portable, or in fresco or mosaic form, represented the aspiration of the inhabitants of Christian cities to inherit eternal life. The Pantokrator, the standard image of Christ as master of the universe who is transcendent insofar as he is often depicted in this manner above us all in the domes of churches, and yet immanent since he is the Son of God who assumed humanity, was always shown with his right hand delivering the blessing of peace. As we shall see in this book, the emergence of the image of the Pantokrator is bound up with the history of ancient cities and their patron gods, especially the sun god, with whom ancient rulers—so-called ecosystemic agents—identified themselves in founding their capitals as *imagines et axes mundi*. The replacement of the sun god in the city space with the image of Christ the Pantokrator by the Church is also bound up with the paradigm shift from ancient pagan cities to Christendom, and with the changing aspirations of inhabitants to participate precisely in that everlasting peace that only the Pantokrator was believed to bestow. This book will address the evolution of the religious aspirations of the inhabitants of ancient and medieval cities in a way that will help the reader not only to account for the transition from pagan to Christian symbolism in the city space, but also for changes in relation to the way that rulers or kings were

[29] *Third Council of Constantinople—680–681*, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 128.
[30] St John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* 1.21 (Louth, 34–35); see also 2.13–14, pp. 70–71.

perceived vis-à-vis the pagan gods and Christ. But before embarking on this journey, we must further define the terms used in this study, namely symbols and symbolism, *imago mundi* and *axis mundi*, ecosystemic agency, and eschatology.

DEFINITIONS

> In all things, but especially in architecture, there are two inherent categories: the signified and the signifier (*quod significatur et quod significant*).
>
> Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture* [1]

This book demonstrates that the human impetus for cosmicisation in material culture can be discerned with the emergence of the first cities in ancient civilisations, from the ancient Near East to Christian Byzantium. But this cosmicisation process is disclosed in the way that human beings perceived non-material culture also. Hence, the ancient civilisations addressed in this book are analysed in relation to imperial monuments, temples, palaces,[2] and churches, along with natural phenomena such as mountains, trees,[3] and vines,[4] to name a few. These objects, both human-made and natural, are construed as 'symbolic' throughout, in a manner consistent with the above definition by Vitruvius, that in architecture there are "two inherent categories: the signified and the signifier."[5] This distinction has been, albeit indirectly, elaborated upon by eminent modern

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[1] Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture* 1.1, trans. Ingrid D. Rowland, ed. Rowland and Thomas Noble Howe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22.

[2] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. W. R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 12. Here, Eliade referred to temples, palaces and cities, but I also demonstrate the *imago et axis mundi* symbolism of imperial monuments and churches below.

[3] For more on trees as *axes mundi*, see Carole M. Cusack's *The Sacred Tree: Ancient and Medieval Manifestations* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

[4] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. W. R. Trask (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 36.

[5] Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture* 1.1 (Rowland and Howe, 22). Vitruvius went on to describe his use of the words *significatur* and *significant*—both deriving from *signum*, the Latin word for 'sign'—in relation to the proposed object of discussion (the signified) and the language or terms that one needs to conduct that discussion (the signifier). Rowland and Howe, 'Commentary: Book 1,' in *Ten Books on Architecture*, 135.

thinkers such as Paul Ricoer and Mircea Eliade. The former defined a symbol as "any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first."[6] In this volume, the objects under analysis, namely cities, the buildings and monuments that they contain, and the relevant natural phenomena, constitute the "structure[s] of signification" pointing towards secondary, figurative, and predominantly cosmic and/or sacred meanings which are existentially relevant, as indicated by Eliade when he stated that symbols "respond to a need and fulfil a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being."[7]

In the case of the ancient symbolic objects in the two Romes or the other civilisations addressed in this book, these modalities can also be quite plain insofar as symbols point to various aspects of a certain representation of reality—an image of the world—that can be discerned in the other cultural artifacts, literary for instance, produced by them. It is important therefore to highlight, as Eliade did, that insofar as they relate to human needs, functions, and modes of being, symbols have an experiential significance. Additionally, the following nuance concerning the etymology of the Greek word for symbol, σύμβολον, coming from the verb βάλλω and the prefix σύν, which mean 'throw' and 'together' respectively,[8] is relevant for the cities under analysis insofar as they were perceived, along with many of the material and non-material objects that they contained, as putting together—and thereby facilitating an immediate or direct participation in—the realities they signified.[9] Thus, it becomes clear from the outset that while

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[6] Paul Ricoer, 'Existence and Hermeneutics,' trans. Kathleen McLaughlin in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 12–13.

[7] Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 12.

[8] The primary definition of the first person verb 'βάλλω' is 'I throw.' Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 304. In composite verbs, 'σύν' means "with, along with, together, at the same time." Ibid., 1690. Hence, σύμβολον means 'throw together,' as indicated above.

[9] The initial meaning of 'σύμβολον' concerned "each of two halves or corresponding pieces" of an 'astragalos' (a knucklebone from an animal) or another object whereby two parties, in entering on a contract or agreement, kept a piece of the object as proof of their contract. From this initial definition it evolved to mean "complimentary factors," until finally it became associated with the 'signifier' and the 'signified.' In each of these definitions, the two factors are mutually inclusive, thereby confirming my assertion that the signifier initiates a participation in that which is signified, and vice-versa. Ibid., 1676.

this book at times consults archaeological evidence, it is not primarily concerned with the discipline of archaeology per se. Nor is it concerned with the archaeological reconstruction of monuments or buildings that are no longer extant. Instead, it focuses on the way that these cities, their respective monuments and buildings, and the related natural phenomena, were symbolically perceived and represented by the writers of the sources under examination, and will have recourse to archaeological material mostly when it is necessary to use it in order to confirm such symbolic perceptions and representations.

Above we defined the term symbol, but it is perhaps relevant to mention here—by way of reiteration—the definition given by Karen Armstrong also, that "*symballein* means 'to throw together': two hitherto disparate objects become inseparable."[10] In other words, the symbol not only points towards but also participates in the reality it signifies.[11] That this object usually relates to the gods or God was also made clear by Armstrong when, after giving the above definition of the word 'symbol,' she affirmed that when Paleolithic and ancient persons in general "contemplated any earthly object, [they] were therefore in the presence of its heavenly counterpart."[12] According to Eliade, these symbols could be reflected in the geometric shapes—the circle[13] and the square[14]—incorporated into temples and other city-structures, as well as the art they contained. To these shapes, which appear in the architectural designs of many symbolic structures in both pagan and Christian cities, must be added the triangular or pyramidal shape, symbolising fire or heavenly ascent,[15] as well as the cross, which is emphatically Christian. Below we shall see that the erection of monumental crosses by St Constantine the Great in Constantinople was endowed with symbolic significance insofar as it was through the cross that Christ saved

[10] Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (Melbourne, VIC: The Text Publishing Co., 2005), 15–16.

[11] This is implied in Paul Ricoer's definition of the symbol above. For Eliade, it was these "figurative" meanings that reflected the "deepest aspects" of "humanity," and thus, while secondary in terms of the process of signification, take on a primary or fundamental importance. Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 12.

[12] Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, 16.

[13] Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 52.

[14] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 45, 47.

[15] The etymology of the word pyramid (from the ancient Greek πύραμις) includes, as the first part of its compound, the word 'fire' (πύρ). Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1555. The triangle, in its pyramidal form, can also symbolise heavenly ascent. Robert J. Wenke, *The Ancient Egyptian State: The Origins of Egyptian Culture (c. 8000–2000BC)* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 298.

the world;[16] a world which, in some early Christian sources, such as St Paul's letter to the Philippians, is considered comprised of the celestial, terrestrial, and infernal realms.[17]

St Paul's writings, as well as the general testimony of the Christian Church concerning the cross of Christ, would constitute the basis for later reflections by patristic authors such as the fourth century St Gregory of Nyssa, who described the cross as symbolically intersecting the cardinal points of the cosmos (like the circle and the square) from a central axis through its arms,[18] in other words, as an *imago mundi* and an *axis mundi*. In any case, insofar as all these symbols-within-cities facilitated an existential participation in the realities they pointed to—in this case, usually sacred ones—these cities, to follow Eliade and Armstrong's reasoning, acted as springboards for participation in the sacred.

So far, we have said that for ancient persons the natural world revealed the sacred, and so the dissociation between human beings and nature inspired a desire to retrieve the natural order and the sacred revealed through it. This retrieval, executed by human beings who were inherently religious, involved the use of geometric and other symbols within the city space. We have an example of how this retrieval took place from the Mesopotamian city of Eridu, one of the oldest urban settlements in the world. Eridu was considered a locus and recapitulation of a cosmogony that revealed the sacred through its ziggurat which, it was believed, represented a cosmic mountain,[19] and will be addressed in chapter one of this book. Indeed, in ensuing chapters we shall see that similar perceptions could be found not only in other ancient Mesopotamian cities, but also in Egypt (where cities contained no characteristic structures apart from temples),[20]

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[16] Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* 23 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 84–85.

[17] In Philippians 2.10, Paul states that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."

[18] *The Great Catechism* 32 [i.e. the Catechetical Oration], in *Gregory of Nyssa: Selected Works and Letters*, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, NPNF (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 500.

[19] Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievements in the Third Millennium B.C.* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1961), 62–63.

[20] Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, trans. D. Lorton (London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1.

Greece,[21] Rome,[22] and Israel (especially Jerusalem).[23] This process continued with Christian cities—in the Christianisation of Rome and in Constantinople—but instead of temples at their centres, there were now churches whose symbolic architecture indicated the worship of the Trinitarian God revealed through one of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, and also his saints. Thus, for Christians, the life of Christ and his saints were the main source of sacredness in the world; a sacredness that they desired to participate in and that could be manifested in cities. Later in this book, before addressing Christian Rome and Constantinople, I will give a preliminary assessment of the Christian approach to cities which shifted the *imagines et axis mundi* symbolism to Christ as the *axis mundi* and ecosystemic agent *par excellence*. It will be demonstrated that, paradoxically, Christians also represented Christ and his saints in images (and with symbols) that were meant to transport believers beyond these images to the heavenly kingdom governed by Christ, the 'Master of All' or Pantokrator.

We have seen that Eliade's position was that ancient and medieval cultures put forward holistic visions of reality that included three main cosmic tiers—"heaven, earth, and hell."[24] These can of course alternately be described as the celestial, terrestrial, and subterranean or infernal levels of reality. According to Eliade, both the natural and human-made objects mentioned above symbolically recapitulated these three cosmic tiers, and in this way functioned as images and centres of the world. If we were to presuppose Eliade's belief in the multivalent nature of symbols, upon which "any exclusive reduction is an aberration,"[25] then each and every one of these objects—from cities to mountains—can recapitulate or intersect the cosmos both concurrently and independently from one another. Moreover, since these objects manifest the different levels of the cosmos, they also manifest the sacred, which properly belongs to the heavenly realm (and

[21] Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study of the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome*, trans. Willard Small (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006), 138.
[22] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 47.
[23] Ibid., 42.
[24] Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 12.
[25] Since symbols have their origin in images in the mind which use them to express ultimate, albeit often contradictory, realities, Eliade subsequently related them to images, before affirming concerning the latter a fact that can be taken to refer to the former, namely: "it is therefore the image as such, as a whole bundle of meanings, that is *true*, and not any *one* of its meanings, nor one alone of its many frames of reference. To translate an image into a concrete terminology by restricting it to any one of its frames of reference is to do worse than mutilate it—it is to annihilate, to annul it as an instrument of cognition." Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 13.

sometimes the subterranean). In other words, each of these objects, both natural and human-made, were perceived by Eliade as the locus of a hierophany, which he defined as:

> …the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world.[26]

Thus, for Eliade, ancient and medieval persons experienced the sacred as both inhering within, and yet ontologically distinct from, the world around them. However, it must be affirmed from the outset that it would be incorrect to assume that each and every inhabitant of the civilisations under analysis viewed the cosmos as either sacred or constituted by the three layers of reality mentioned above. The cosmological systems of some ancient Greek philosophers, such as the naturalists, are an example of a reluctance towards sacredness. In relation to the latter, that is, the three cosmic regions, many early Christian theologians maintained—in an apophatic sense—the spiritual topography of heaven and hell as real places, just not literally above or below us. Nevertheless, Christians consistently referred to heaven and hell as existentially charged terms for the following: a positive experience of God (the celestial or heavenly),[27] the passions (earthly),[28] or a negative experience of God (the subterranean or infernal).[29]

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[26] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 11.

[27] Christ often refers to the kingdom of heaven or God as having come near in his person (Matthew 4.17), and Ra'anan S. Boustan and Anette Yoshiko Reed have explicated that, in late antique mentalities, the experience of heaven "remains shrouded in mystery, but more and more this mystery is cited for the sake of its revelation to those deemed chosen, pure, initiated, or wise." 'Introduction: "In Heaven as it is on Earth,"' in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2–3.

[28] For instance, Panayiotis Nellas assesses the disposition of some of these theologians, such as St Maximus the Confessor, who affirmed that the soul "puts on the earthly form" when it moves towards matter "by means of the flesh." Nellas quotes the *Patrologia Graeca* (PG) version of Maximus' *Ambigua*, PG 91, 1092C, in *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*, trans. Norman Russell (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 56.

[29] To give just one example: St Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Catechetical Oration*, affirmed that those who undertake the ascetical endeavour within the ecclesial context in this life will, in both this life and especially the next, experience God in a positive way. Those who do not will, in the next life, be purged by fire. Since, according to the same author, this fire has already purged evil *in toto* from human nature in the incarnate Christ, the implication is that those who do not participate in God in the here and now will need to experience this purgation in the next life for

Also, when speaking either of God or the pagan gods in relation to the cosmos—particularly its celestial or spiritual dimension—an important distinction should be made. That is, that although in certain pagan trends various dimensions of the cosmos were considered inherently divine, nevertheless for Judaism and especially for Christianity, God—as paradoxically both transcendent and imminent—is not to be confused with the created order. In other words, while for Judaism and Christianity there exist spiritual worlds/beings created by God, nevertheless he is totally other and outside the world (*ad extra*) while paradoxically engaging with the world *ad intra*.[30] Moreover, while most ancient and medieval religious persons shared a conviction that the sacred—the hierophany—constituted a truly palpable experience understood in a myriad of conflicting ways and often conflated with nature, what is distinct for Christianity is that the sacred is revealed by Jesus Christ, who discloses the truth concerning the one God as three persons. For this reason, in relation to Christian cities, the term 'theophany' is perhaps a more appropriate term than 'hierophany' to describe the revelation of the Trinitarian God within them; for it is not sacredness in a general sense that is being described, but sacredness as extending from the Trinity.

It must also be stressed that while one would be hard pressed to find the exact phrases *imago mundi* and *axis mundi* in the primary sources, I nevertheless demonstrate throughout that the evidence under evaluation yields itself neatly to these heuristic concepts as I account for the ancient disposition towards cities, as well as other natural and human-made phenomena, as images and centres of the world. Furthermore, given that the

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God to be "all in all" (1 Cor 15.28). Mario Baghos, 'Reconsidering *Apokatastasis* in St Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Soul and Resurrection* and the *Catechetical Oration*,' in *Cappadocian Legacy: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. Doru Costache and Philip Kariatlis (Sydney, NSW: St Andrew's Orthodox Press, 2013), 432–33. That this fire is associated with Hades—often viewed as topographically subterranean—is made clear by St Gregory on his *On the Soul and Resurrection*, where he claims that Hades is a powerful symbol for an existential state. Ibid., 415.

[30] Janet M. Soskice gives plenty of ancient sources, from the Rabbi Gamaliel to Philo of Alexandria, to show that for Judaism God is entirely transcendent while also immanent in the world he created from nothing. Soskice, 'Creatio ex nihilo: its Jewish and Christian Foundations,' in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, ed. David B. Burrell et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 33–34. Elizabeth Theokritoff affirms that, for the early Christian tradition, this transcendence and immanence is articulated along the lines of 'creation' and 'salvation' in her 'Creator and Creation,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Theokritoff (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 63–64. I thank Chris Baghos for the latter reference.