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Aquatic Display: Navigating the Roman Imperial World in Acts 27

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This article reads Acts 27–28.10 as an 'aquatic display' that offers Christ-believers a spectacle of navigating the stormy imperial world. It argues that Pliny's *Panegyricus* similarly employs aquatic displays to instruct in negotiating the emperor Trajan's power. It identifies four means in Acts 27 that assert Rome's power – judicial, military, economic, and the sea as a contested site where the sovereignties of God and Rome compete and cooperate – and which Christ-believers must negotiate by various means including submission, awareness of danger, courage, social interaction, agency, contribution to well-being, and discernment of and contestive allegiance to God's greater sovereignty.

Keywords: Acts 27, Paul, shipwreck, Pliny, imperial negotiation, Rome

1. Introduction

Scholarly readers of Paul's storm and shipwreck scene in Acts 27.1–28.10 have wrestled with the contribution of this lengthy sixty-verse narrative.[1] Richard Pervo suggests that the space might have been better used for more important matters.[2] Susan Praeder notes the availability of 'compact' literary travel itineraries that comprise only a sentence or two.[3] What does the scene contribute?

Some argue on the basis of genre that the narrative's historical accuracy in nautical matters and use of participatory 'we' language demonstrate 'the credibility of his work as a piece of Greek history writing'.[4] Ernst Haenchen counters,

1 L. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina 5; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992) 450, 452.
2 R. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 51.
3 S. M. Praeder, 'Acts 27:1–28:16: Sea Voyages in Ancient Literature and the Theology of Luke-Acts', *CBQ* 46 (1984) 683–706, esp. 687.
4 For example, B. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 755–6.

though, that there is no standard account of sea voyages to sustain claims of historical writing.[5] Others see the inclusion of a standard topos of fictional (nautical) adventure contributing to the entertainment value of Acts.[6] Some foreground the hero Paul[7] as saviour ('he, the prisoner, saves them all!'[8]) or as innocent[9] ahead of his appearance before Caesar – attested by his survival of the storm and shipwreck (a well-documented topos[10]). Yet others foreground God's purposes and/or power, controlling history variously to protect Paul,[11] to spread salvation to Gentiles,[12] to move Paul to Rome and the emperor,[13] and thereby to assert God's superiority to Odysseus and Zeus.[14]

This reading's contribution is located in its attention to structures of Roman imperial power in the scene and the challenge of their negotiation, dimensions that have been commonly neglected in previous discussions. Foregrounding four structures of imperial power (judicial, military, maritime, economic) and multiple simultaneous means of negotiating it, I argue that this scene in Acts 27–28.10 comprises an 'aquatic display'[15] that provides for its audience of Christ-believers a 'spectacle' or 'tableau'[16] of Paul negotiating the stormy imperial world. The scene foregrounds the stormy sea as a contested site in which the sovereignties of God and Rome co-operate and collide, depicting the world that Christ-believers must navigate – like Paul – by numerous simultaneous means

5 E. Haenchen, 'Acta 27', *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an R. Bultmann* (ed. E. Dinkler; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1964) 235–54.

6 Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 51.

7 Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 52–3.

8 E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971) 709.

9 G. Miles and G. Trompf, 'Luke and Antiphon: The Theology of Acts 27–28 in the Light of Pagan Beliefs and Divine Retribution, Pollution, and Shipwreck', *HTR* 69 (1976) 259–67; D. Ladouceur, 'Hellenistic Preconceptions of Shipwreck and Pollution as a Context for Acts 27–28', *HTR* 73 (1980) 435–49; Witherington, *Acts*, 769–70.

10 C. Talbert and J. Hayes, 'A Theology of Sea Storms in Luke-Acts', *SBL 1995 Seminar Papers* (ed. D. Lovering; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 321–36, esp. 322–5; Praeder, 'Acts 27:1–28:16'; H. H. Huxley, 'Storm and Shipwreck in Roman Literature', *Greece & Rome* 21.63 (1952) 117–24.

11 Johnson, *Acts*, 458; M. Skinner, *Locating Paul: Places of Custody as Narrative Settings in Acts 21–28* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 156–7.

12 Praeder, 'Acts 27:1–28:16', 684, 695–706; J. Jipp, *Divine Visitations and Hospitality to Strangers in Luke-Acts: An Interpretation of the Malta Episode in Acts 28:1–10* (Leiden: Brill, 2013) 33–7, 254–6.

13 Witherington, *Acts*, 758.

14 D. R. MacDonald, 'The Shipwrecks of Odysseus and Paul', *NTS* 45 (1999) 88–107.

15 The phrase derives from K. M. Coleman, 'Launching into History: Aquatic Displays in the Early Empire', *JRS* 83 (1993) 48–74, who examines the emperor Titus' staging of aquatic displays such as naval battles and re-enacted myths; also A. Feldherr, 'Ships of State: "Aeneid" 5 and Augustan Circus Spectacle', *Classical Antiquity* 14 (1995) 245–65.

16 M. Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 180.

including submission, awareness of danger, courage, social interaction, agency, contribution to well-being, and discernment of and contestive allegiance to God's purposes and greater sovereignty.[17]

The use of an 'aquatic display' to school an audience in imperial negotiation is not unique to Acts. Pliny's *Panegyricus*, roughly contemporary with Acts but not previously engaged in relation to Acts 27–28.10, also employs 'aquatic displays' to instruct its audience in imperial navigation. To sustain this argument, I investigate Pliny's engagement with and strategies for navigating difficult imperial waters and examine the contributions of the *Panegyricus*' five aquatic displays to this navigation/negotiation (sections 1 and 2). In section 3 I take up the Acts 27 'aquatic display' concerning Paul's multivalent negotiation of structures of imperial power. In section 4, I briefly locate this discussion in relation to previous work examining interaction between Acts and the Roman Empire.

I make five assumptions that I identify here but cannot defend because of limits of space.

(1) I affirm that the Acts account is polyvalent. That is, like numerous other 'aquatic displays', it depicts a literal sea storm and shipwreck which also carry symbolic (though not allegorical) significance.[18]
(2) I do not consider either the sources or the genre of the Acts 27 narrative, engaging it in its final form.
(3) My use of Pliny's *Panegyricus* employs a form of intertextuality whereby the interpreter creates meaning by putting texts, or aspects of texts, into dialogue.[19] This approach privileges some textual interactions and silences and relegates others. I thus foreground intertextual interaction between Pliny's

17 This approach has some consonance with those who focus on Paul's exemplary virtues that comprise the 'Christian Art of Living'; so M. Lang, 'The Christian and the Roman Self: The Lukan Paul and a Roman Reading', *Christian Body, Christian Self: Concepts of Early Christian Personhood* (ed. C. Rothschild and T. Thompson; WUNT 284; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 151–72, esp. 169–72, identifying 'talking to God … acting philanthropically … seeing the situation clearly … reacting without panic' (170). J. C. Lentz (*Luke's Portrait of Paul* (SNTS 77; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 94) highlights Paul's virtuous response to adversity, notably bravery, self-control and piety.

18 Also R. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009) 652–3. M. S. Bate ('Tempestuous Poetry: Storms in Ovid's *Metamorphoses, Heroides* and *Tristia*', *Mnemosyne* 57 (2004) 295–310, esp. 297) notes that the (literal) storm scene in *Odyssey* 5 is interpreted both in terms of 'themes of heroism, justice and order' elevated to a cosmic level and as 'a symbolic expression of Odysseus' internal anxieties' and desire for a reunion with his wife. Analogously, R. Carrubba ('The Structure of Horace's Ship of State: *Odes* 1.14', *Latomus* 62 (2003) 606–15, esp. 614–15) notes polyvalent interpretations of the 'ship of state' in Horace's *Odes* 1.14, as a historical reference to the campaign of Philippi, as a 'ship-of-love' and as a 'life- or poetic-journey'.

19 Steve Moyise labels this form of intertextuality 'Postmodernity Intertextuality': S. Moyise, 'Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament', *The Old*

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'aquatic displays' in the *Panegyricus* and the Acts 27.1–28.10 narrative. I do not claim literary dependence. I do recognise a common link of sea imagery, a common concern with imperial power, and that both texts emerge in roughly the same time period and Roman imperial world.

(4) I assume that Acts emerges in the early second century CE.[20]

(5) The notion of aquatic display or spectacle is central for the argument. Displays in Roman arenas such as the Flavian Coliseum dramatised desirable virtues and values.[21] In his *Panegyricus*, Pliny notes that Trajan generously provided public entertainments or a spectacle (*spectaculum*) to uphold the manly nature of the Roman people including courage, self-control and domination over others.[22] Trajan's spectacles, says Pliny, did not 'weaken and destroy the manly spirit (*animos virorum*) of his subjects' but served 'to inspire them to face honourable wounds and look with scorn on death, by exhibiting love of glory and desire for victory even in the persons of criminals and slaves' (*Pan.* 33–4).[23] I argue that Pliny's *Panegyricus* presents aquatic displays as spectacles that exhibit as well as instruct in negotiating imperial power. Acts 27 similarly employs an aquatic display to exhibit faithful strategies for negotiating the structures of imperial power that the scene makes evident.

2. Pliny's *Panegyricus*

Pliny delivered the *Panegyricus* to the emperor Trajan and the Senate as his *gratiarum actio*, his 'vote' or 'speech of thanks' (*Pan.* 1.6; 90.3) for his appointment as consul in 100 CE (*Pan.* 90). Earlier scholars did not warm to its enthusiastic praise for Trajan. One scholar calls it an 'arrant compost of wishful thinking'.[24] Another declares that 'the *Panegyricus* is indispensable but unreadable, and only a historian's sense of duty … can make him keep on until the last, ninety-fifth chapter'.[25]

Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North (ed. S. Moyise; JSNTSup 189; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 14–41, esp. 33–41.

20 The most sustained discussion is R. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2006).

21 Coleman, 'Launching into History: Aquatic Displays'.

22 C. Williams, '*Virtus* and *Imperium*: Masculinity and Dominion', *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010^2) 145–56.

23 I reference *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus*, vol. II (trans. B. Radice; LCL 59; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). For discussion, D. N. Schowalter, *The Emperor and the Gods: Images from the Time of Trajan* (HDR 28; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

24 K. H. Waters, 'Traianus Domitiani continuator', *AJP* 90 (1969) 385–404, esp. 398.

25 B. Radice, 'Pliny and the *Panegyricus*', *Greece & Rome* 15 (1968) 166–72, esp. 169.

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Recent scholarship has been more appreciative.[26] Pliny's post-Domitian work is, in Mark Morford's view, 'a serious attempt to define a working relationship between Senate and princeps'.[27] This working relationship included the Senate's dutiful and respectful attitude (*obsequium*) to 'a ruler who held overwhelming power', along with its exercise of *libertas*[28] comprising mutual responsibility, shared power and free expression (cf. *Pan.* 76.1–2). For the princeps it meant self-control (*moderatio*) in observing senatorial processes, religious duty and the laws (*Pan.* 65.1). Paul Roche sees Pliny offering Trajan 'a sort of manifesto of the Senate's ideal of a constitutional ruler' (*Pan.* 4.1),[29] comprising some fifty-one virtues.[30] Pliny does so creatively and self-protectively by using a genre customarily linked with praise[31] to instruct the all-powerful emperor about good rule that comprised a working relationship with the Senate.

Instructing an emperor to his face while also protecting one's own existence lest instruction be heard as criticism requires some skill. Morford argues that Pliny's moderate and credible style seeks more 'to persuade rather than to flatter'.[32] But others are not as sanguine about Pliny's rhetoric. Shadi Bartsch argues that 'the *Panegyricus* is an obsessive attempt to prove its own sincerity'. Its 'most pervasive organizing device' contrasts the dissimulation of false flattery necessary under Domitian with the new era of 'true praise of the living ruler' Trajan.[33] So Pliny claims that the Trajanic era no longer requires role-playing (*Pan.* 54.1–2) or political double-speak (*Pan.* 3.4). It is not marked by confusion between fear-framed flattery and true praise (*Pan.* 72.5–7), or bans on criticism of rulers (*Pan.* 53.3–6). Yet, Bartsch argues, in the continuing circumstances of power disparities, Pliny must employ for his own self-protection the same dissimulation and dissembling utilised by various senators under Domitian.[34]

Bartsch observes that Pliny provides ample evidence that the actual realities of power are not as he asserts them to be. Pliny's praise incorporates numerous

26 P. Roche, ed., *Pliny's Praise: The Panegyricus in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 'an exceptionally important speech' (4).

27 M. Morford, '*Iubes Esse Liberos:* Pliny's *Panegyricus* and Liberty', *The American Journal of Philology* 113 (1992) 575–93, esp. 585–93.

28 Morford, '*Iubes Esse Liberos*', 584.

29 P. Roche, 'Pliny's Thanksgiving: An Introduction to the *Panegyricus*', Roche, ed., *Pliny's Praise*, 6–7; Radice, 'Pliny and the *Panegyricus*', 168.

30 Roche, 'Pliny's Thanksgiving', 6–10, esp. n. 14, often with negative examples mostly from Domitian (10–14).

31 In Roche, ed., *Pliny's Praise*, see Roche, 'Pliny's Thanksgiving', 1–4; D. C. Innes, 'The *Panegyricus* and Rhetorical Theory', 67–84; G. Manuwald, 'Ciceronian Praise as a Step Towards Pliny's *Panegyricus*', 85–103.

32 Morford, '*Iubes Esse Liberos*', 578–82.

33 S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) 149.

34 Bartsch, *Actors*, 149–61.

instances of 'factual misrepresentation'[35] and convenient omissions. His denigration of Domitian is compromised, for example, in that Pliny experienced Domitian's generous favour much more than his cruel tyranny. Moreover, he positions himself as being disadvantaged through the 90s CE when Domitian withdrew his favour and thereafter as living with 'those who lived with grief and fear' *(inter maestos et paventes, Pan*. 95.3–4). Pliny conveniently ignores, though, his appointments as quaestor, tribune of the plebs and praetor as well as his prestigious appointment in 93 as the triennial prefect of the military treasury. This latter position betokens considerable favour from and complicity with Domitian.

Bartsch argues that given unequal power relations and his own complicity, Pliny cannot escape the long tradition of doublespeak made necessary when 'terms of praise lend themselves to interpretation as blame'.[36] In denying that his praise, unlike previous rhetoric of the Domitianic era, might veil blame or criticism or become slander, Pliny raises the possibility and danger of precisely that outcome (*Pan.* 3.4).[37] Pliny cannot overcome the challenge of timing in that Pliny's words come too early in Trajan's rule to know whether they truly and accurately reflect changed circumstances, or are merely wishful thinking, or are primarily self-promoting and self-defining.[38] Thus, Bartsch argues, Pliny 'privileges simulation over reality', thereby exposing not only the instability of his rhetoric but also the gap between the rhetorical performance and political reality.

In short, Pliny's selective yet pervasive over-emphasis on sincerity and *libertas* by which he negotiates Trajan's power betrays the fact that a new age has not dawned. A situation comprising power concentrated in the hands of one man, a massive differential in power, self-serving manipulation, dissembling speech and corruption is one that cannot be wished or 'talked' away. Pliny's rhetoric betrays the reality that for those subject to such imperial power, life remains vulnerable and at risk, and that the challenge of its negotiation/navigation is constant and considerable.

35 Following Bartsch, *Actors*, 166–9; Roche, 'Pliny's Thanksgiving', 14–18, for further examples.

36 Following Bartsch, *Actors*, 169–87; quotation on p. 169.

37 B. Gibson, 'Contemporary Contexts', in Roche, ed., *Pliny's Praise*, 104–24, also questions Pliny's claim of new speech, noting considerable continuity from Domitian's age and instability in Pliny's claims (116–24).

38 So C. F. Noreña, 'Self-Fashioning in the *Panegyricus*', in Roche, ed., *Pliny's Praise*, 29–44. Noreña notes that Pliny enhances his own authority and status as consul by highlighting Trajan's laudatory behaviour in his third consulship vis-à-vis the Senate (*Pan*. 59–64). His final thanks to the Senate are eclipsed by realigning his own career, distancing himself from Domitian in favour of Trajan, and declaring his good intent for his work as consul (*Pan.* 95).

3. Pliny's Aquatic Displays

These rhetorical and political realities frame our discussion of Pliny's use of aquatic displays to construct and negotiate Trajan's rule.[39] Moving between the literal and the metaphorical, Pliny's maritime material is similarly unstable.

In an opening cluster of three maritime images that appear in sections 4–6 of the *Panegyricus*, Pliny recognises and celebrates Trajan's vast power. First is the commonplace for emperors that acknowledges them as rulers of lands and seas (*cuius ditione nutuque maria, terrae … regerentur, Pan.* 4.4).[40] This descriptor expressed Roman sovereignty over the sea, for example, through military power,[41] control of pirates,[42] taxes on production and fishing activity[43] and extensive trading activity that constituted Rome as the world's 'emporium' (Aristides, *Roman Oration* 7). Sovereignty over the sea signified the vast reach of Trajan's power and the massive power differential between ruler and ruled.

Pliny's second image in this opening cluster moves from literal rule over the sea to a metaphor where the stormy sea denotes the civic unrest under Nerva's rule that led to Nerva adopting Trajan as his successor (*Pan.* 5.8). Pliny images 'rioting and mutiny … in the army' and 'widespread violence and terror' that threatened a new civil war as a 'storm and tempest' and 'season of unrest' (*Pan.* 5.6–8). Trajan, though, brought a welcome 'period of calm in sky and sea' (*maris caelique temperiem*), something that Nerva (and previously Domitian) could not do (*Pan.* 5.8). Using the metaphor of storm and sea to depict unnuanced 'before-and-after' imperial scenarios, Pliny positions himself as the exuberant herald of Trajan's accomplishments.[44]

39 The key work is E. Manolaraki, 'Political and Rhetorical Seascapes in Pliny's *Panegyricus*', *Classical Philology* 103 (2008) 374–94; also Morford, '*Iubes Esse Liberos*', 590–1.

40 For example, Philo, *In Flacc.* 1.104, 'the Augustan house;' *Ad Gaium* 1.309, Augustus; *Ad Gaium* 1.141, Tiberius; *Ad Gaium* 1.44, Gaius Caligula; Josephus, *Ant.* 19.1, 5–6, 81, Gaius Caligula; *J. W.* 3.401–2, Vespasian; Juvenal, *Sat.* 4.37–55, Domitian; Philostratus, *Apoll.* 7.3, Domitian. Josephus presents Vespasian's son, the future emperor Titus, reminding his troops that they are 'masters of well nigh every land and sea …' (*J. W.* 6.43).

41 Josephus (*J. W.* 2.367) has Agrippa declare that Roman control of the sea is maintained by 'forty long ships'.

42 Augustus (*Res Gestae* 25) claims that he 'freed the sea from pirates'; Philo (*Ad Gaium* 1.144–6) describes Augustus as 'he who cleared the sea of pirate ships and filled it with merchant vessels'.

43 K. C. Hanson and D. E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 100–6; an inscription, *I.Eph* 1a.20, in H. Wankel, *Die Inschriften von Ephesos*, vols. Ia–VIII.2 (Bonn: Habelt, 1979–84); W. Carter, 'Master(s) of the Sea? Ephesian Fishermen, John 6.16–21, and John 21', *But These Are Written … Essays on Johannine Literature in Honor of Professor Benny Aker* (ed. C. Keener, J. Crenshaw, J. D. May; Eugene: Pickwick, 2014) 65–79.

44 Compare Philo, who hails Augustus as 'the Caesar who calmed the torrential storms …' (*Ad Gaium* 1.143–6).

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Pliny's third image in this opening cluster continues the emphasis by presenting Trajan as steering the ship of state safely through the storm (*publicae salutis gubernaculis, Pan.*6.2). The storms of Nerva's rule were worth it, Pliny argues, because Trajan emerged as the rudder that steers the ship of state to safety. Here Pliny expresses his unqualified admiration for Trajan by using a topos 'prominent in Plato's and Cicero's political essays' and widely used in other writers to image imperial rule.[45]

After these three initial instances that establish Trajan's extensive power over sea and the ship of state, and express Pliny's open appreciation, Pliny uses 'aquatic displays' four more times. These displays confirm the dynamic Bartsch identifies as discussed above. As much as Pliny enthusiastically praises Trajan and the new era that has supposedly dawned, several factors in these aquatic displays undermine the glorious reality Pliny works so hard to portray, betoken a more stormy political reality, and attest the challenges of navigating it.

The first of the four aquatic displays involves an atypical *propempticon*, a common scene that farewells a friend setting out on a journey (*Pan.* 34.5–35.1).[46] The setting is a public spectacle involving men and animals. Trajan parades before the spectators those who were informers (*delatores*) for Domitian and then exiles them:

> Ships were hastily produced and they were crowded on board and abandoned to the hazard of wind and weather … and if the stormy sea casts anyone alive on the rocks, let him eke out a wretched existence on the bare crags of a hostile shore … The sight was unforgettable: a whole fleet of informers thrown on the mercy of the very wind … driven by the fury of the waves on to the rocks in their course. (*Pan.* 34.5–35.1)

Noticing the context and language of spectacles, Eleni Manolaraki observes that Pliny presents the 'punishment of exile as an entertaining aquatic spectacle'.[47] She argues that in Pliny's account Trajan publicly demonstrates 'strictness and clemency, entertainment and justice', a presentation aided by Pliny's downplaying of the horrendous nature of the informers' imminent deaths. Pliny even attempts to circumscribe the responses of his audience of senators by declaring their 'joy' and 'thanks to our ruler' (*principi gratias*) for Trajan's 'mercy'

45 Manolaraki, 'Seascapes', 375–6 notes that Pliny uses the same image in *Ep.* 10.1 (*ad gubernacula rei publicae*); also Livy 4.3.17; 24.8.13; Horace, *Odes* 1.14; R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes, Book 1* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) 179–82 for literary and possible historical contexts; M. Bonjour, 'Cicero Nauticus', *Présence de Cicéron: Actes du colloque des 25, 26 Septembre 1982. Hommage au R. P. M. Testard* (ed. R. Chevallier; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984) 9–19; N. Thompson, *The Ship of State: Statecraft and Politics from Ancient Greece to Democratic America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 167–9.

46 Manolaraki, 'Seascapes', 377–9 and literature quoted there.

47 Manolaraki, 'Seascapes', 378.

(*clementia*) and for his entrusting of 'vengeance over men on earth to the gods of the sea' (*Pan.* 35.1), an act that puts Trajan on an equal footing with the gods. The exiling of 'informers' rather than senators displays 'how times had changed' (*diversitas temporum, Pan.* 35.2). For this act that outdoes the accomplishments of the divine Titus, Trajan will, the ever-admiring Pliny assures him, be divinised.

Manolaraki observes in the scene Pliny's presentation of Trajan's 'easy political control, his humane temperament' and favourable contrast to Domitian in not staging the informers' deaths cruelly in the arena.[48] But the scene and characterisation are much more ambivalent than Manolaraki recognises. In distinguishing 'informers' from senators and presenting Trajan as acting for and with the appreciative senators, Pliny silently passes over the fact that some informers were senators. And in praising Trajan's mercy, Pliny overlooks the horror of Trajan consigning boatloads of informers to the whims of stormy seas even as he pictures them shipwrecked and dashed against rocks. Moreover, in suggesting that Trajan leaves vengeance to 'the gods of the sea', Pliny disingenuously overlooks Trajan's vengeful agency in parading them in the arena and consigning them to ships. The scene dramatically draws attention to the life-and-death power Trajan as emperor has to remove any threat to his reign. As much as Pliny wants to distinguish Trajan from Domitian, he ends up aligning them in this spectacle of harsh power.

Pliny's second aquatic display draws a further contrast between Trajan and his predecessors in relation to senatorial freedom. He narrates Trajan's initial appearance in the senate-house as emperor to exhort the senators 'to resume our freedom, to take up the responsibilities of the power we might be thought to share, to watch over the interests of the people' (*Pan.* 66.2). Pliny immediately notes that Trajan's predecessors had said the same thing:

> … but none had been believed. In our mind's eye were the shipwrecks of the many who had advanced in a hazardous period of calm only to be sunk by an unforeseen storm; for no sea could be more treacherous than the flattery of those emperors whose instability and guile made it more difficult to be on guard against their favor than their wrath. But in your case we have no fears … (*Pan.* 66.3)

Despite his use of the plural ('those emperors', *principum illorum*), Manolaraki sees Pliny addressing the difficult issue of Pliny and Trajan's careers flourishing under Domitian.[49] More accurately, Pliny focuses on the 'shipwrecked' (*naufragia multorum*), those who did not fare well under Domitian.[50] Pliny continues to image Domitian negatively – a hazardous calm, an unforeseen storm, a

48 Manolaraki, 'Seascapes', 379.

49 Manolaraki, 'Seascapes', 382–3.

50 Manolaraki, 'Seascapes', 383, n. 35 for Cicero's use.

treacherous sea. According to Pliny, Domitian's assuring words were not reliable, his flattering words were treacherous, his favour fickle. But it is not so with the new Trajanic era.

Yet again, Pliny undermines the reality he is trying to sell. He notes that no one trusted the favour of previous emperors but he offers no reason to trust Trajan. He passes over in silence the successful careers that he and Trajan had under Domitian while others were 'shipwrecked'. The silence raises questions about his veracity and doubts about what he is hiding. His declaration that 'we have no fears' in the midst of flattering prose and the shadows of Domitian's power confirms the reality of fear. Declaring 'our trust' in Trajan's 'promises and sworn oath' (*Pan.* 66.5) provides no reason for doing so. These factors shipwreck Pliny's presentation.

Pliny's third aquatic display shifts between the literal and the metaphorical providing a further opportunity to praise Trajan by denigrating Domitian. Evoking Trajan's recreational activities of hunting and sailing (*Pan.* 81–2), Pliny admires his leadership capabilities revealed in sailing. Trajan sits at the helm, matches his comrades, and masters the wind and current – in control, not bettered by other men, and master of the natural world, a true emperor. Pliny then contrasts this manly man Trajan with the squeamish Domitian whose dislike for sailing and 'seasickness become a matter of foreign policy and national disgrace'.[51] The towing of Domitian's boat, which Domitian does not steer, is a 'disgraceful scene' (*foeda facies*) rendering the emperor shamefully a 'prisoner (*capta*) in his own ship' (*Pan.* 82.3). Worse, by reference to the Danube and Rhine rivers and a disgrace witnessed by 'Roman eagles, Roman standards, and the Roman river-bank', (*Pan.* 82.4), Pliny denigrates Domitian's military campaigns in Germany and the Suebic–Sarmatic wars.

Again Pliny's 'before-and-after' scenario is possible only because of selective presentation. 'Pliny scornfully omits Domitian's (military) accomplishments … such as his triumph over the Chattans (83 CE), his precarious peace treaty with the Dacian king Decebalus (89), and his *ovatio* for the Suebic–Sarmatic wars (92–3).'[52] The material that Pliny withholds – known to his audience – betrays and reveals the unreality of what Pliny attempts to construct.

Pliny's final aquatic display comprises another *propempticon* or farewell scene (*Pan.* 86.1–5). Setting it at the harbour of Ostia, Pliny presents Trajan as 'genial well-wisher'.[53] He farewells an unnamed prefect of the praetorian guard who is leaving office and Rome, even though Trajan does not want him to go. Pliny praises Trajan for putting his friend's wishes ahead of his own. On a 'watchtower', Trajan expresses his 'distress' along with his 'repeated prayers and tears', prayers

51 Manolaraki, 'Seascapes', 376.
52 Manolaraki, 'Seascapes', 377.
53 Manolaraki, 'Seascapes', 381–2.

for a 'calm sea' for his friend's journey. Manolaraki observes the importance of the 'watchtower' or 'outlook' (*specula*) in fusing 'the actual landscape with Trajan's demeanor', posing Trajan surveying the sea while he guards their friendship. The anonymity of the departing figure allows the scene to function as a paradigm of Trajan's solidarity with his friends/allies and of his selfless rule.[54]

The scene is a touching one in presenting Trajan's caring interaction with his friend. But Pliny's carefully constructed illusion is undone by the scene's intratextuality with the *propempticon* of the informers. The vengeful spectacle of boatloads of informers consigned by Trajan's cruel command to the sea, storms and shipwreck on rocks overwhelms this scene of Trajan's care for one man and his prayers for a calm sea. The informers' scene diminishes any reassuring value that this scene might have. The intratextuality undermines Pliny's rhetorical efforts to construct a caring and humane Trajan.

This brief discussion has highlighted Pliny's use of aquatic displays in his negotiation of imperial power. Disparities between Pliny's rhetorical constructions and political realities betray his efforts to construct a new age of freedom and co-operation. The aquatic displays construct Trajan as a powerful ruler over land and sea and the imperial world as under his control, yet they also reveal Trajan's vengeful power, selective care and unconvincing verbal assurances. The presentation, intended to reassure, functions to signal imperial dangers. Pliny's construction of himself as a loyal and subservient admirer coheres with his need to engage in the same 'doublespeak' and self-protective flattery that he denounces. He must do so because, as his aquatic displays reveal, the imperial world is unpredictable, subject to sudden and destructive storms, destructive of vulnerable human life and requiring considerable skill and courage for elite navigation/negotiation of its dangerous waters.

4. Paul's Aquatic Display: Acts 27–28.10

I turn now to the aquatic display of Paul's navigation/negotiation of the stormy seas in Acts 27–28.10. Unlike the aquatic displays in Pliny's *Panegyricus*, this spectacle is narrated from below. It concerns a non-elite, not elite, subject, an imperial prisoner, not an emperor. Acts 27 employs, I suggest, more ambiguity towards imperial power than does Pliny's naive facade of open and monolithic admiration that masks yet reveals significant dangers in spite of its own best efforts. The Acts scene openly depicts dangers and benefits of the stormy imperial world, while it constructs Paul negotiating this rule with diverse strategies and initiatives. I make explicit four of the scene's imperial structures and personnel (judicial, military, maritime power, tributary economy), along with Paul's diverse and simultaneous interactions with them throughout the chapter. My

54 Manolaraki, 'Seascapes', 381.

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argument is that the sea is a contested place, with the scene offering an aquatic display for Christ-believers of Paul navigating stormy imperial seas.

The opening eight verses locate Paul in relation to four imperial structures and personnel. The first is Rome's judicial system, with which Paul has ambivalent interaction. He is one of 'the prisoners' (δεσμώτας, 27.1), in detention (23.10; 18 δέσμιος), yet he has asserted his agency and gained benefit by appealing to the emperor for a hearing (25.10). His appeal is referenced immediately before chapter 27 in 26.32.

Interestingly, while this appeal to the emperor and his identity as a prisoner shape the whole scene, Paul's agency is centre stage. His identity as a prisoner recedes through the chapter, not mentioned again until 27.42–3. His agency dominates the presentation, constructing him through most un-prisoner-like actions. Sailor-like, he identifies imminent danger from the sea (27.10). Captain-like, he exhorts the crew to courage in the storm (27.21–6). Preacher-like, he reports his angelic vision, declares God's purpose for him to appear before Caesar, and announces the divine promise of safety to Paul's companions (21.23–4). Pastor-like, he urges the centurion and soldiers not to let the sailors abandon the ship (27.31) and encourages the ship's personnel to self-care with food (27.33–8). His promise that 'none of you will lose a hair from your heads' echoes Jesus' promise for safety in the woes preceding the eschaton (Luke 21.18) and expresses the literal/symbolic dynamic of divinely protected safety that pervades the scene (27.34). Paul experiences that divine protection not only in living through the shipwreck but also when, collecting brushwood on the Maltan beach for the fire, he is bitten by a snake. He survives not only the bite but also the popular verdict that he is a murderer. When he does not die, the revised verdict is that he is a god (28.3b–6). Hospitality from Publius, 'the leading man of the island', provides the opportunity for Paul to heal Publius' father (27.8) and the rest of those on the island 'who had diseases' (27.9).

This dynamic of asserting, then diminishing, Paul's identity as a prisoner and elevating his agency creates an aquatic display relevant to a wide audience of Christ-believers. Paul's various roles and actions (sailor, captain, preacher, exhorter, pastor, healer) display means of negotiating the imperial world. The scene constructs Paul as highlighting the danger of the imperial seas (see below), not diminishing it or feigning that all is well as Pliny does. His exhortations underscore the necessity for courage and commitment in the midst of the storm. He puts the stormy situation in theological perspective, announcing that God's purposes will prevail and all will be safe. He contributes to the well-being of the ship's personnel by distributing food to ensure strength for survival. Not standing apart, he also contributes to the community good in collecting brushwood for the fire. And benevolently, he heals numerous sick people and receives hospitality. His actions demonstrate diverse ways of negotiating Roman power, holding together awareness of its danger, the necessity of courage, commitment to

survival, the conviction of God's supreme purposes, social interaction with imperial agents and elites that benefits Paul as well as furthering the well-being of these imperial figures, and active contributions to the common good.

The second structure of Roman power – the military – is evident with Paul in the custody of a Roman centurion with the very imperial name of Julius (27.1). Julius is identified with three terms: 'centurion' (ἑκατοντάρχης) or commanding officer,[55] the 'Augustan cohort', a military unit that is perhaps part of a legion but whose name evokes the immensely successful military commander and powerful emperor Augustus,[56] and the name 'Julius', evoking the powerful Roman ruler, Julius Caesar.[57] The claim that 'the identification of the cohort [is] of little significance for the meaning of the narrative'[58] misses the contribution of these identifiers. The identifiers not only evoke the Roman military power to which Paul is subject, but they also particularise that power in terms of two of its leading exponents, Julius Caesar and Augustus.

Paul's initial interaction with the centurion Julius is narrated in a matter-of-fact manner. There is no evident hostility (27.1). One of them does his job as guard, the other, a prisoner, has appealed to the emperor's beneficence. Yet we cannot forget the power dynamic of guard over prisoner, an interaction that could be harsh and abusive. Nor can we forget Paul's near-whipping in 22.24–9. Ambivalence is also evident when Julius 'kindly' or benevolently (φιλανθρώπως) ensures that Paul receives care from friends at Sidon (27.3) yet ignores Paul's warning about the 'now dangerous' or 'unsafe' seas (ἐπισφαλοῦς, 27.9) and the potential loss of cargo and life, thereby creating the possibility for both (27.1; cf. Paul's 'I told you so' in 27.21). Subsequently, Julius seems to ignore Paul's warning against letting the *sailors* abandon ship (27.31) – the *soldiers* act to prevent this (27.32) – yet as the shipwreck occurs, the centurion Julius intervenes to benefit Paul when he stops the soldiers killing the prisoners lest they escape (27.42–3). The narrative constructs the centurion's act not as an action concerning all the prisoners but quite personally as a favour directed to Paul: he 'desir[es] to save Paul' (27.43). While the narrative does not

55 B. Dobson, 'The Significance of the Centurion and "Primipilaris" in the Roman Army and Administration', *ANRW* 2.1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974) 392–434; A. Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003) 68–72.

56 Inscriptions attest an 'Augustan cohort' in Syria in the first century: *ILS* 2683 = *CIL* III.6687; *OGIS* 421. Josephus (*Ant.* 19.365–66; *J. W.* 2.52) refers to cohorts associated with the city of Sebaste in Samaria under the command of Agrippa I, but their role in transporting prisoners to Rome is unlikely. For discussion, C. J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989) 132–3; B. Rapske, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Settings*, vol. III: *The Book of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 267–73.

57 Various commentators (e.g. Witherington, *Acts*, 759) propose that Caesar may have granted one of Julius' ancestors freedom and citizenship.

58 Johnson, *Acts*, 445.

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elaborate the centurion's motive, readers of the scene recognise God at work in the centurion's action (27.23–4). Does God co-operate with, control or override the centurion's action?

The third expression of Roman power concerns the sea. Maritime vocabulary dominates verses 3–8 in describing the sea journey to Fair Havens.[59] As the discussion above of Pliny's references to Trajan's actions vis-à-vis the sea indicates, the sea is not a neutral space but one under Roman power. The topos of the emperor as ruler of the sea expresses his extensive power. In this sea-journey, Paul travels in Rome's domain, geographically and personally subject to Rome's sovereignty.

Yet the scene relativises the display of Roman maritime power in three ways. First, with the dangerous sailing season underway, marked by severe storms, diminished visibility and difficult navigation (27.9), the storm exposes limits to the claim of imperial sovereignty over the sea. Roman power does not embrace weather, wind and waves (27.4, 18–20); the Alexandrian grain boat and cargo will succumb (27.41–4).

Second, without any elaboration at this point, the narrative subtly reminds the reader that the sea is a contested space. The reference to 'the Fast' (27.9) indicates that Roman and natural forces are not the only powers involved in the increasingly stormy situation (27.9). While 'the Fast' signifies the day of Atonement,[60] the evoking of Israel's God functions beyond calendrical or seasonal markers to put much larger narratives of this God's activity in play. It evokes, for example, the narrative of Israel's God leading the people from captivity in Egypt through the Red Sea, exercising sovereignty in dividing the waters, drowning the Egyptian military and freeing the people (Exod 14).[61] In this tradition, God ominously overwhelms imperial power and consigns it to the bottom of the sea. Rome is not the only power in the scene.

Third, Paul makes explicit this implied claimant for sovereignty over the sea by referring to the 'God to whom I belong and whom I worship' (27.23).[62] In declaring his angelic vision and God's assurance that Paul will arrive safely in Rome (27.23–4), Paul announces God's sovereignty operative in this thalassic arena claimed by Rome.

59 27.2, embarking (ἐπιβάντες), ship (πλοίῳ), sail (πλεῖν), ports (τόπους), put to sea (ἀνήχθημεν); 27.4, put to sea (ἀναχθέντες), sail under shelter (ὑπεπλεύσαμεν), winds (ἀνέμους); 27.5, open sea (πέλαγος), sail through (διαπλεύσαντες); 27.6, ship (πλοῖον), sail (πλέον), put aboard (ἐνεβίβασεν); 27.7, sail slowly (βραδυπλοοῦντες), wind (ἀνέμου), sail under shelter (ὑπεπλεύσαμεν); 27.8, sail along (παραλεγόμενοι).

60 For example, Johnson, *Acts*, 447; Witherington, *Acts*, 762–3.

61 God's control of the sea is rooted in creation (Gen 1.6–13). See also Josephus, *ConAp* 2.121; *J. W.* 5.218; *Ant* 1.282; and Philo, *In Flacc.* 1.123.

62 Verse 1's passive verb ἐκρίθη ('it was decided') expresses what seems at first glance to be Paul's subjection to Roman power but, in the light of 27.23–4, it also indicates divine direction.

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The relationship, though, between these sovereigns of the sea is variable. This God seems to be, to some degree, in co-operation with the imperial structures and personnel of Rome's judicial, military and naval power in using them to get Paul to Rome. Yet Paul's God is not an unambiguous sponsoring deity of imperial power, for while he guarantees that all on board will be safe, he does not or cannot protect the ship and its cargo from the storm (27.38, 41). The narrative does not clarify whether this is a matter of power (God cannot) or will (God cares only about people including Paul). The tradition Paul evokes probably points to the latter option of God's supreme sovereignty as ruler of the seas rooted in creation and demonstrated in rule over political powers such as parting the sea to free the Israelites and destroy Egyptian military might. But such power is not unambiguously asserted in this scene. Nevertheless, as much as Caesar is 'master of the sea', Paul's report troubles the waters by indicating the presence and purposes of another sovereignty that is both co-operative and contestive in ensuring Paul's arrival in Rome. The chapter offers an aquatic display involving contest and co-operation between Roman power and God's sovereignty.

Fourth, in addition to Roman judicial, military and maritime power, the Acts 27 narrative locates Paul in relation to Rome's economic and taxing prowess. At the grain port of Myra,[63] the centurion relocates his charges to 'an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy' (27.6). Verse 38 subsequently indicates that this ship is one of the many privately contracted boats that carried grain from Egypt to feed Rome.[64] Peter Temin identifies the crucial role that these ships played in transporting production extracted by taxes-in-kind when he comments: 'The Roman market for bulk commodities extended only slightly beyond where ships could go.'[65] Paul is entangled not only in imperial mastery of the sea, but also in Rome's mastery of the grain-producing, imperially taxed land. Pliny identifies Trajan as ruler of land *and* sea (*Pan.* 4.4).[66]

63 Hemer, *Book of Acts*, 134.

64 The discussion of ship transportation of grain is extensive. L. Casson, 'The Role of the State in Rome's Grain Trade', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 36 (1980) 21–33; G. Rickman, *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); G. Aldrete and D. J. Mattingly, 'Feeding the City: The Organization, Operation, and Scale of the Supply System for Rome', *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire* (ed. D. S. Potter and D. J. Mattingly; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) 171–204, esp. 184–8 on 'Merchants and Shippers'; D. Kessler and P. Temin, 'The Organization of the Grain Trade in the Early Roman Empire', *The Economic History Review* 60 (2007) 313–32.

65 P. Temin, 'A Market Economy in the Early Roman Empire', *JRS* 91 (2001) 169–81, esp. 180.

66 Pliny recounts Trajan, after a harvest failure in Egypt, shipping corn back to Egypt. He exalts Trajan's life-giving powers: 'even the heavens can never prove so kind as to enrich and favor every land alike but he can banish everywhere the hardships … of sterility and introduce the benefits of fertility' (*Pan.* 31–2).

Egypt, which Pliny describes with centrist arrogance as this 'vain and presumptuous nation' (*Pan.* 31), was Rome's primary supplier of grain.[67] Grain was largely procured by taxation-in-kind, Rome's means of asserting ownership over the land as well as over the production of the land and the labour of its inhabitants.[68] Erdkamp argues that tax 'consisted of a fixed amount of wheat per unit of land and therefore it did not fluctuate in accordance with the harvest'. He notes that there were different tax rates on private and public land with land belonging to imperial estates taxed at a higher rate. He calculates that Rome removed about 10 per cent of the crop grown on private land and 30–40 per cent of production from public land. The grain boat of 27.6 belongs to and represents Rome's taxing sovereignty over Egypt, its people, land and agricultural production.

The grain boat does not fare well. Its initial progress into the wind is slow (27.7–9). Stronger winds from the north-east drive and toss the ship (27.14–17), and as the storm intensifies, the cargo, then the tackle, are jettisoned (27.18–19). As danger increases, hope of survival dissipates (27.20). When the grain is jettisoned, the reason for the ship's journey disappears, and so eventually does the ship. With the shipwreck (27.40–1), this instrument of Roman economic power and control disintegrates (27.44). The loss of cargo and ship (but not life) happens in accord with the divine (sovereign) purposes revealed through Paul (27.22, 24, 44).

It is perhaps tempting to posit that the shipwreck displays God shipwrecking the Roman tributary economy.[69] But the limited scope of the disaster and the divine purposes concerning Paul's journey to Rome caution against this conclusion. And Paul's continued journey confirms that the tributary economy and its transportation and taxation structures remain not only in place but also useful for accomplishing divine purposes. Provisioned by the hospitable and grateful locals, three months later, the journey to Rome resumes with another Alexandrian grain ship (28.10–11). This ship sails under the sign of the Dioscuri, the twin sons of Zeus, Castor and Pollux, who were variously associated with protection for travellers at sea and good fortune during a storm.[70] Paul again benefits from these imperial structures.

What, then, has Acts' aquatic display displayed? Whereas Pliny depicts the Empire under Domitian and Nerva as chaotic and repressive, but under Trajan as marked by imperial constraint, senatorial co-operation and *libertas* (or so

67 P. Erdkamp, *The Grain Market in the Roman Empire: A Social, Political, and Economic Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) argues against Josephus' claim (*J. W.* 2.383–6) that Africa supplied two thirds of Rome's grain while Egypt supplied one third (226–230, 235), claiming that Josephus significantly underplays Egypt's contribution. Erdkamp appeals in part to Pliny, *Pan.* 31.

68 For what follows, Erdkamp, *The Grain Market*, 235–7.

69 Akin to the judgement of Revelation 18.

70 Horace, *Odes* 3.29.63–4; Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.18.29; Lucian of Samasota, *The Ship* 9.

Pliny wishes), this Acts 27–28.10 aquatic display depicts four structures of imperial power and a spectrum of ways to negotiate them. The Empire's great power extends over sea and land, though it cannot control the storm, and over people's lives by judicial, military and economic (taxation) means. It can exercise this power benignly in benefiting Paul but also destructively in seizing property and endangering human life. God is at work in and through its structures but is not co-opted by the Empire. In both co-operative and contestive interaction over the sea, God works with and outpowers Rome in asserting greater sovereignty in getting Paul to Rome. The scene displays Rome's power to be extensive, both dangerous and benevolent, but not ultimate.

Moreover, this aquatic display shows Paul negotiating imperial power with diverse and ambivalent strategies. Paul's journey, framed by arrest, military power and judicial appeal to imperial benevolence, reveals both the benefits and the dangers of the imperial seas and the need for submission, awareness of danger, courage, commitment and agency to survive. He benefits from and interacts with imperial personnel and structures, and receives hospitality. But Paul also exhibits considerable agency in actively and benevolently contributing to the physical and social well-being of his fellow travellers and exercising self-benefiting co-operation with them. And he does so in the context of discerning God's activity and purposes in the midst. He commits to God's greater sovereignty, faithfully announcing the divine purposes that thereby relativise, even as they imitate, Roman sovereignty.

5. Conclusion

How might the above consideration of Acts 27–28.10 as an aquatic display of Roman power and of multiple strategies for negotiating it contribute to the discussion of Acts' interaction with the Roman Empire? In an important discussion of scholarship on the relationship between Acts and the Roman Empire, Steve Walton identifies five views: (1) Acts offers a political apology for Rome to the church; (2) Acts offers a positive view of the church to Rome; (3) Acts legitimates the beliefs and lifestyle of believers as not incompatible with allegiance to Rome; (4) Acts equips Christians to live under the Empire, especially when they are on trial; and (5) Luke is not interested in the Empire.[71]

The above analysis of Acts 27–28.10 immediately disqualifies positions one, two and five in Walton's schema. Position five (no interest in empire) is shown to be not viable. Position one is monolithic in naming only an apologetic aim for the Empire and does not account for the various dynamics identified above in Acts 27, a scene Hans Conzelmann for example does not consider in proposing

71 S. Walton: 'The State They Were in: Luke's View of the Roman Empire', *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church* (ed. P. Oakes; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) 1–41, esp. 2–12.

his imperial apologetic view.[72] The same failure to recognise diverse strategies marks the second position. While aspects of Paul's behaviour, notably his contributions to the common good, present the Christian movement positively, other more critical and distancing dynamics do not. And Paul Walaskay's claim that imperial structures in the scene coalesce to accomplish divine purposes is sustainable only if the complexities of the scene's imperial structures are overlooked (military power, taxes, a lack of concern for the welfare of the ship's personnel).[73]

Combining aspects of positions three and four, though, offers some possibilities. I have argued that Paul displays various strategies for negotiating the Empire. Included among these is the option (along with others) that Acts legitimates, at least in part, a compatibility between believers and the Empire (position 3 in part).[74] Richard Cassidy rightly argues, though, that compatibility cannot be the whole story since in his view Acts provides believers with instruction on being faithful to Jesus if and when they are put on trial (position 4 in part).[75] Walton's own view highlights a 'critical distance' that seems to embrace positive and persecutory imperial interactions along with the recognition of the supremacy of Jesus over Caesar.[76] This view helpfully identifies a range of interactions even though it undersells the variety of strategies.

Therefore I formulate a further position, one comprising multiple simultaneous strategies such as submission, awareness of danger, courage, social interaction, agency, contribution to societal well-being, and discernment of and contestive commitment to God's presence and sovereign purposes in the midst. I have argued that Acts 27 constructs an aquatic display of these various, simultaneous and at times even contradictory strategies that Christ-believers might employ in negotiating Roman power. Dexterity that embraces a range of strategies is necessary because the various expressions and structures of Roman power that impact their daily lives (judicial, military, maritime and geographical control, and taxation) are shown in the scene to be both benefiting and dangerous, providing and restricting possibilities. Whether this position can adequately embrace all of the narrative of Acts narrative beyond 27–28.10 requires further consideration.

72 H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960) 137–44.

73 P. Walaskay, *'And So We Came to Rome:' The Political Perspective of St. Luke* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 60–2.

74 P. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1987) 201–19, esp. 217–19.

75 R. Cassidy, *Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987) 145–70.

76 Walton, 'The State They Were in', 33–5.