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Authority from the Back of Beyond: Cosmic Travel as a Rhetorical Strategy across the Myth of Er, the Book of the Watchers, and the Dream of Scipio

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Abstract: Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cosmologies shared general assumptions about the interconnectivity of heaven and earth. Plato's Myth of Er, the Book of the Watchers in *1 Enoch*, and Cicero's Dream of Scipio, narrate the travels of Er, Enoch, and Scipio, respectively, into the Beyond, where they each learn astonishing things about the cosmos, and are tasked with imparting a message to humanity. This comparative study argues that cosmic travel is an integral means of constructing a rhetoric of authority designed to recruit its audiences to its socio-political vision. By analysing literary conventions like pseudepigraphy and epiphany in the features that make up cosmic travel, we better understand how each story bridges the gap between the narrated (story) world and the external (real) world. The ability to blend the realities of a story and its audiences stems from the ways in which tropes of legitimacy render spatio-temporal reality malleable, but is also imperative to the very authority these tropes offer. Without arguing for deliberate intertextuality between all these sources, this study compares the use of heavenly voyages as a literary device for legitimising worldview across cultures, times, and places.

Keywords: otherworldly journey; comparative literature; Myth of Er; Plato; Dream of Scipio; Cicero; Book of the Watchers; *1 Enoch*



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1. Introduction

This article is a comparison of cosmic travel in three tales from antiquity: the Myth of Er from Plato's *Republic* (614b–621d), the Book of the Watchers from *1 Enoch* (*1 En* 1–36), and the Dream of Scipio from Cicero's *De re publica* (*Cic. Rep.* 6.9–29). The overarching claim is that cosmic travel is an integral means of constructing a rhetoric of authority designed to recruit its audiences to its socio-political vision.¹ As part of this first claim, I also argue that the stories' respective rhetorics of authority are contingent upon the blending of the same tropes of legitimacy—tropes like pseudepigraphy, epiphany, autopsy, and the social status of the traveller. The cumulative effect of these literary conventions that I call tropes of legitimacy is the establishment of cosmic travel itself as an over-arching, compositive trope of legitimacy. The rhetoric of authority's efficacy results from its ability to bridge the gap between the narrated (story) world and the external (real) world, which stems from the ways in which tropes of legitimacy render spatio-temporal reality malleable.

These stories' socio-political visions are intimately linked to the narrative space and its real-world counterpart(s), for the stories each narrate cosmic travels, with a point of departure in the real world. Cosmic travel is the movement between the mundane and otherworldly realms of narrated space, and within the latter space.² These are not stories set in fantasy or imaginary worlds, for the journeys start in locations that one could locate on a historical or modern map, and ancient geography included the entire cosmos for the authors and audiences of our three stories (*Romm 1992*, pp. 172–73; *Coblentz Baultch 2003*, p. 8).³ The ability to travel to and from the Beyond was more about where and how, than if. They therefore reveal cross-cultural understandings of how the earthly and otherworldly

planes were connected, even as each story engages this concept in culturally unique and narratively programmatic ways.

For this analysis, cosmic travel is the literary framework applied to each story, and its comprising features are the analytic structure through which I will argue in support of my above-stated claims. I will first introduce the three sources, and then analyse each of the five features which make up cosmic travel.⁴ In order of analysis, these features are (1) the traveller, (2) the means of accessing other space and movement therein, (3) points of departure and/or arrival, (4) otherworldly tour guide(s), and (5) cosmic itineraries. For each feature, I explain how it contributes to the rhetoric of authority—specifically the way it destabilises or disrupts spatio-temporal expectations—and then show in each source how this is the case. To conclude, I will consider what the commonalities and differences between the rhetoric of authority in the Myth of Er, the Book of the Watchers, and the Dream of Scipio indicate about the socio-political functions of cosmic travel narratives. With this roadmap in hand, we are ready to set out.

2. Sources

In proposing to compare these three stories of otherworldly travel from the second half of the first millennium BCE,⁵ I unite sources which hail from different contexts, were preserved by different communities, and were/are treated as the object of study by different academic fields.⁶ It is therefore practical to offer a brief presentation of each story. What follows is an overview of each story's contents, its literary context, and what is known about dating and location. As they are brief, these introductions do not highlight any particular similarities or differences between the sources, as these will occupy us during the analysis.

The Myth of Er (μῦθος, 621c) tells of the journey taken by the soul of Er, a soldier from Pamphylia, after his death. Over twelve days, Er travels through an afterlife, learns of the fates awaiting both the just and unjust, sees the dome of heaven and spindle of Necessity, and is charged with conveying all he saw to humanity (614b–621b). Told as the grand conclusion to Plato's *Republic*, this story is considered one of Plato's eschatological myths, as it supports Socrates' claims regarding the soul's immortality and deals with questions of justice, the afterlife, and reincarnation.⁷ Written in Greek in approximately 375 in Athens, the *Republic* is one of Plato's most well-known and studied dialogues in which metaphysical topics contribute to discussions of political systems and governance.

Like the Myth of Er, the Book of the Watchers is only a portion of a larger work.⁸ Comprising the first thirty-six chapters of the longer work called *1 Enoch*, the Book of the Watchers is itself a composite sourced that was redacted in Aramaic or Hebrew during the 3rd century BCE, and then translated into Greek during the 2nd or 1st century BCE. Unlike the *Republic*, neither an author nor a precise date or location of redaction is known for *1 Enoch*. The Book of the Watchers' various elements unite ideas about the origins and nature of evil, cosmology, scientific knowledge, justice, and judgement. The story opens with a first-person statement by Enoch that the entire source is an illustration or analogy (παράβολη) that resulted from a vision he beheld (*1 En* 1:1–3), after which the narration shifts to a prediction of future judgment and reward or punishment at the hands of the divine (1:4–5:9). Here, the narration shifts again, and the story of the Watchers unfolds (6:1–11:2): Cosmic order is upended when otherworldly beings descend to earth and unite with the mortal women. These otherworldly beings, called the Watchers (ἐγγεγόροι), share knowledge and skills with all humanity that they should not have, and God condemns the monstrous results of this heavenly and human mix. Enoch is initially petitioned by the Watchers to plead their case to God, which is soundly rejected (12:1–13:3). After this petition's denial, Enoch ascends to the Otherworld in a dream vision (13:4–14:19). There, Enoch sees many otherworldly beings of numerous ranks and receives instructions from them (14:20–16:4). Enoch is then toured around the entire cosmos, a journey that crosses all temporal and spatial boundaries and during which he sees and learns much (17–36).

The third story is known as the Dream of Scipio. Originally the concluding chapter to Cicero's *De re publica* (6.9–29), this larger work was composed in Latin between 54–51. Unfortunately, most of the *De re publica* was not preserved. The remaining portions, in addition to quotations or references to the work, indicate that it was a Platonic style dialogue on politics, governance, justice, history, the ideal citizen, and morality. The Dream of Scipio survived as an appendix to Macrobius' *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, a highly influential, fourth century Neoplatonic treatise.⁹ In this story, Scipio Aemilianus (henceforth Scipio) tells his interlocutors of a dream he had while in Africa. His adoptive grandfather Scipio Africanus (henceforth Africanus) and his father Paulus appear to Scipio, guiding him through a cosmic journey in which he sees stars and planets, and learns all manner of social and scientific knowledge.

I have presented the sources in their chronological order, as that is the order in which I proceed in the analysis of the uses to which various structural and thematic literary devices are put in these stories. In each section, then, I will first look at the Myth of Er, then the Book of the Watchers, and finally the Dream of Scipio. Analysing the works in this order better highlights the similarities in the Book of the Watchers and the Dream of Scipio, as both works were composed in a world highly influenced by Plato's writing; moreover, placing *1 Enoch* in the middle reminds us that this work participated in broader Mediterranean traditions, thereby preventing us from seeing it as separated from the connected works of Plato and Cicero. For the Book of the Watchers, I analyse the Greek from the Akhmim Manuscript (Codex Panopolitanus), as this is the source most like the now inaccessible Greek version, which would have been circulating in the first centuries BCE.¹⁰

3. Methods

If the goal is to ascertain the persuasive efficacy of cosmic travel as the rhetoric of authority in and between the Myth of Er, the Book of the Watchers, and the Dream of Scipio, what should we compare and how? In order to gain such insights, I draw attention to literary devices I call 'tropes of legitimacy', literary conventions that are able to excite a sense of legitimacy in both the story and real worlds. The tropes of legitimacy contribute to the sources' broader aims and their rhetoric of authority, and this rhetoric contributes, in turn, to each story's ability to bridge the divide between internal and external worlds. It is in bridging this gap that the rhetoric of authority can convince its external audience of its socio-political vision.

Although cosmic travel may appear to a twenty-first century reader to be a trope of legitimacy in and of itself, it incorporates other such tropes. Two key tropes for this study are pseudepigraphy, the attribution of a story to someone else, and epiphany, the manifestation of the divine or otherworldly. Pseudepigraphy and epiphany interact with the features of cosmic travel in various ways, assisting in answering the following questions: Who travels, and with whom? Where and how do they travel? What do they see? The answers to each, I argue, build the stories' respective rhetoric of authority and its ability to cross in and out of the story world.

Pseudepigraphy, the attribution of part or all of a story or text to someone else, was a widespread literary practice in antiquity (Ehrman 2012; Najman and Garrison 2019; Morand et al. 2024). Throughout this article, I use the term to mean an extended story whose provenance is attributed to a culturally significant figure, which thereby enables the authors and narrators to claim "in some way to be chronologically and authorially part of the same tradition" (Najman and Garrison 2019, p. 335)¹¹. Pseudepigraphy's legitimacy results from its ability to connect new or radical ideas to a culturally significant figure of a bygone era. By participating in a "discourse tied to a founder" (Najman 2003, pp. 12–13), pseudepigraphy borrows a founding figure's authority to present contemporary or desired changes as part of how a society functions already.

The second trope of legitimacy is epiphany. A literary epiphany is "a combination of structural elements and imagery (*semeia*) used to describe divine encounter." (Glass 2022, p. 47) The structural elements include (1) preparation for an epiphany, (2) the appearance of

a being or beings from the Beyond, (3) a speech of the otherworldly being(s), (4) a response to the presence of the otherworldly, and (5) externalization or sharing of the experience with others. Though often found in this order, variations can be created through the repetition of one or more elements and playing with the order (Glass 2022, p. 80). Epiphanic imagery commonly includes incredible beauty, stature, or strength; light, brightness, or shining; astral or solar imagery; and extraordinary smells, sounds, or sensations (Petridou 2016, p. 9). Taken together, these structural and descriptive features form the epiphanic motif, although I refer to it as epiphany for simplicity's sake. Though different types of storytelling (e.g., visual, oral, or written) lend themselves more readily to the use of different aspects of epiphany, its structural and symbolic elements appear across ancient Jewish, Greek, and Roman stories about encounters with otherworldly beings (Glass 2022, pp. 43–47, 67).¹²

As a trope of legitimacy, epiphany is similar to pseudepigraphy. In what could be called an epistemic power-move, incorporating structural or symbolic aspects of the otherworldly (or divine) into a story acts as the ultimate means of legitimisation. What is more authoritative than those beings variously called gods, heroes, ancestors, ghosts, spirits, demons, angels, etc.—beings who can access knowledge from another time and space? Epiphany thus serves explanatory and legitimising functions (Petridou 2016, p. 314; Goff 2016, p. 197). Moreover, such encounters were widely believed to happen not only in the story worlds, but also in the real world. It was therefore the “significance and power of epiphanic experiences in ancient communities [that] lent these narratives their importance, not the other way around” (Glass 2022, p. 47). In summary, epiphany legitimises a story and its contents through an association with powerful otherworldly figures.

The legitimacy granted by pseudepigraphy and epiphany is accomplished in overlapping but not entirely identical ways. Pseudepigraphy and epiphany are both literary conventions connected to identity. In pseudepigraphy, the identity is that of a founding figure, typically a human who is claimed as an ancestor or heralded as the founder of some institution or group. In epiphany, the identities in play are both those of the mortal witness to epiphany and the manifesting otherworldly being. There exists a “close link between epiphanies and prestige, validity, legality, and authority”, because “claims to some sort of proximity with the divine (spatial, emotional, or congenital) [...] legitimize the recipient [individual and/or] communities as god-chosen and, hence, highly valued” (Petridou 2016, p. 334). Epiphany is also a useful mechanism for altering space, as the encounter of this-worldly and otherworldly beings in interstitial places momentarily collapses the boundary between this-worldly and otherworldly spaces (Sulzbach 2010, p. 172, n. 24; Petridou 2016, p. 232). In using a founding figure as a mouthpiece, the legitimacy of pseudepigraphy is connected temporally with an imagined ancestor, whereas the otherworldly and superhuman association of epiphany spatially connects the chosen individual with the Beyond. The similarities and distinctions between these two tropes of legitimacy and their spatio-temporal uses in building a rhetoric of authority will become clearer with the specific examples analysed in the next sections.

Defined above as the movement between the mundane and otherworldly realms of narrated space, cosmic travel itself becomes a trope of legitimacy because of the access it grants to this latter space. Conceptually, travel connects spaces, places, and their contents as the traveller moves between them. Spatiality has its own power dynamics, however, and access to any given space depends upon socially constructed ideas of identity (Coblentz Bautch 2016). In cosmic travels, it is the combination of connectivity and access that functions as legitimisation. The legitimising ability of cosmic travel derives from questions of connectivity and accessibility—where and how one can transcend the boundary between this- and otherworldly space, and who does so. This trope is, additionally, a means of uniting the story and real worlds, for the naming or anonymising of a connective locus provides external audience with points of entry into the narrated space. The legitimacy conveyed by cosmic travel is intimately connected to the legitimacy of pseudepigraphy and epiphany in the Myth of Er, the Book of the Watchers, and the Dream of Scipio, because

one's ability to gain entry to certain spaces stems from and reinforces the other tropes of legitimacy.

Pseudepigraphy and epiphany are particularly useful for comparing these sources because they are conventions whose significance the ancients would have recognized. Focusing on these tropes of legitimacy and their roles in the rhetoric of authority contributes to discussions of the ancient literature in several ways. To begin with, I emphasise overlapping and diverging features in all three stories, rather than centring one source and using others as a backdrop for its study. This approach neither presumes direct influences between them all nor rejects this possibility.¹³ Instead, I offer a means of analysing cross-cultural narrative function.¹⁴ Building on previous studies, my comparative analysis assumes that these three stories were produced in societies that had sustained and complex interactions, and that their authors were both aware of and participated in a variety of socio-economic and literary exchanges—specific knowledge or clear quotations of each other are not strictly necessary (Popović 2014; Kosmin 2024).

4. The Features of Cosmic Travel

I turn now to the analysis of tropes of legitimacy in Er, Enoch, and Scipio. In order to best illustrate how these tropes are woven into the fabric of these travel narratives, I attend to five features of cosmic travel. Attending to these features illuminates the creation of a rhetoric of authority through cosmic travel. These features are (1) the traveller, (2) the means of accessing other space and movement therein, (3) the points of departure and/or arrival, (4) otherworldly tour guide(s), and (5) cosmic itineraries.¹⁵ In the following sections, I address features one through three individually; I address features four and five together, as the discussion of both hinges around the use of epiphany in relation to the guides and the locations visited. For each, I outline how the feature can be used to make spatio-temporal reality malleable and how reality's plasticity is essential for convincing the audiences to accept the socio-political vision on display in the story world. I demonstrate the use and effects of each feature in the sources and discuss the convergences and divergences in applications. The details change across the sources, but I argue that the tropes of legitimacy function to establish a rhetoric of authority with a consistency that speaks to their cross-cultural efficacy.

4.1. The Traveller

In each of the three stories, we are regaled with an account of a journey the veracity of which is directly associated with the person who purportedly undertook it. As a trope of legitimacy, travel is simultaneously the product of and reinforces privilege. Not everyone is able to travel, especially not for leisure or education, and thus the traveller may benefit from socio-economic capital before setting out on their trip. Moreover, the one who has travelled possesses privileged knowledge of other places or people, which may increase any capital they already held. The traveller's status as a credible source of information is therefore of primary importance for the rhetoric of authority in the Myth of Er, the Book of the Watchers, and the Dream of Scipio; they must be someone who could be trusted before their travel so that, upon their return, their account can be deemed credible.

To understand the persuasive capacity of Er, Enoch, and Scipio, we must look to two other tropes of legitimacy: pseudepigraphy and autopsy. As previously stated, pseudepigraphy was commonplace in the ancient world, as it gave even the newest of ideas a semblance of age and tradition. Autopsy, or an eye-witness account, was an important element of ancient travel and historical writing in antiquity. Always subject to scrutiny, pseudepigraphy assures the veracity of these visionary autopsies, instances wherein the eye-witness account (autopsy) is of "a visionary experience rather than an earthly reality" (Hartog 2021, p. 206). In the Myth of Er, the Book of the Watchers, and the Dream of Scipio, a story of cosmic travel is attributed to a human man of an earlier period. In addition to being a mortal man, the pseudepigraphic traveller is a figure whose narrative significance stems from and connects back to the authors' respective cultures and (presumed) social

locations. Pseudepigraphy is, furthermore, used to blend temporal realities, as it is here used to position the storyteller between myth and history. This strategy enhances the sources' authority by anchoring its aims in the divine, poetic authority of 'myth' and the mortal, logical authority of 'history'.¹⁶

Plato's philosophical treatises are famously pseudepigraphic. His works repeatedly place Plato's thoughts in the mouth of Socrates, his mentor, making it difficult to discern exactly which ideas belonged to which man (Cf. Trapp 2007). What matters most for our purposes is that Socrates was widely influential, both in his lifetime and as a proverbial 'founder of philosophy' for later traditions. In addition to Plato's corpus, Socrates' influence among his contemporaries is attested to by Xenophon's admiring references to him in the *Memorabilia*, the *Oeconomicus*, the *Symposium*, and the *Apology of Socrates*, as well as Aristophanes' satirical portrait of the philosopher in his comedy *The Clouds*. Returning to Plato's dialogues, Plato uses Socrates' influential voice to amplify the authority of Plato's own words.

Spoken in conclusion to the *Republic*, the Myth of Er is yet another instance of Plato's pseudepigraphic habit of putting words in Socrates' mouth. The dialogue opens with Socrates and Glaucon, son of Ariston, visiting the Athenian port Piraeus, to pray to Athena and watch the founding of a festival (*Resp.* 327a). After the festival, Glaucon and Polemarchus, son of Cephalus, entreat Socrates to attend an all-night banquet in Polemarchus' house (*Resp.* 327b–c). Socrates offers his extended political metaphor on the soul at this banquet, after being prompted to do so by Cephalus' musings on his advanced age and concerns about what awaits his own soul after death (*Resp.* 328d–331b). These socio-historical references locate the telling of the Myth of Er in the world of Athens' social and political elite and may even place this entire scene in 413 BCE—the founding of the Piraeus festival. If this story-world dating is accurate, the *Republic* unfolds in the middle of the Peloponnesian War at the end of the disastrous Sicilian Expedition, two years before a coup briefly topples Athens' democracy, and a short decade before the city's ultimate defeat in 404—all events of which Plato (writing in approximately 375) and his first audience would have known. After much dialoguing with Glaucon and Polemarchus, Socrates concludes his philosophising by telling his interlocutors that their discussion will only be complete with an account of what awaits everyone at the end (*Resp.* 614a). Glaucon readily agrees, and so Socrates introduces his story and its source:

"Mind you, I'm not going to give you an Alcinous' tale [...] but the story of a brave man, Armenius' son Er, by race from Pamphylia. Once upon a time he was killed in battle, and when the bodies of those who had already decayed were collected up ten days later, his was found to be sound, and when he'd been taken home for burial, on the twelfth day, as he lay on the pyre, he came to. Having done so, he described what he had seen on the other side."¹⁷

Two aspects of Socrates' introduction to his story are particularly important for how he positions both his story and its source within mythic and historical traditions in such a way as to lend it credence. Said with a delightful parallel between 'brave' and 'Alcinous', Socrates frames his story of a brave man (ἀλκίμου μὲν ἄνδρός) in opposition to a 'tale of Alcinous' (Ἀλκίνου γε ἀπόλογον). Continuing the recurring criticism of 'myth makers' in the *Republic* (cf. *Resp.* 377b11), Socrates here invokes Homer's Odysseus who recounted his adventures to the Phaeacian king Alcinous (Hom. *Od.* 9–12).¹⁸ Odysseus is the autodiegetic narrator of the most fabulous and incredible adventures of the *Odyssey*, including the account of his round-trip adventure to the underworld to consult the deceased prophet Tiresias (*Od.* 11).¹⁹ Even though Socrates is about to narrate a dead soul's journey to the Beyond and back, he does *not* tell farfetched stories (Halliwell 2009, pp. 26–27). Odysseus tells a tedious fable (ἀπόλογος); Socrates tells a real story (μῦθος). He also assures his audience of such by attributing his knowledge to the Pamphylian soldier Er. The etymology of Er son of Armenius's name is uncertain, and he is an otherwise unknown character (Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, p. 465, n. 42; Halliwell 2007, p. 448, n. 6). Despite this relative obscurity, Er is introduced right after Socrates' implicit objection to Odysseus,

and so this character takes on an epic glimmer—Er, too, is a soldier and one who died “once upon a time in war”, an introduction which calls to mind the battles waged at Troy. However, through the soldier Er, Socrates (Plato) claims a simple bravery, not a cunning one like that of Odysseus. Er represents a better masculinity and a more civically beneficial courage than Odysseus, who is a conniving, self-centred paradigm of endurance (Halliwell 1988, p. 170; Zeitlin 1996, p. 368).²⁰ Er is thus a reliable source for visionary autopsy. Moreover, Er is never afforded direct speech; Socrates recounts Er’s eye-witness account, furthering the narrative’s legitimacy as visionary autopsy. The effect is as dizzying as it is ingenious. Plato legitimises his own work through double-pseudepigraphy: he incorporates tropes from epic and historiography to enhance the authority of the *two* characters to whom he attributes his thoughts. Socrates provides historical validation as an important philosophical figure of verifiable historical character, to whom Plato adds a mythic flair by demonstrating Socrates’ superiority to Odysseus as a reliable source. Socrates was even praying to Athena at the beginning of the dialogue (*Resp.* 327a), connecting him with the deity who so favoured Odysseus. Socrates’ ostensibly authoritative speech also juxtaposes Er with Odysseus, which further legitimises Er’s visionary autopsy by elevating the brave soldier over the suspicious teller of tall tales.

For all that Er’s account of his experience is the source of Socrates’ information about the soul’s travels after death, Er’s authority does not surpass that of Socrates. Plato achieves this effect through his choice of Er’s tribal connection and occasionally eliding this character’s identity in favour of Socrates’ narration. The first strategy, that of collective affiliation, makes of Er an ‘every-man’. Er is of the kinship group (τὸ γένος) of Pamphylia (Παμφύλου). Using names to convey some other message was popular in Greek literature, and so Plato’s choice of Pamphylia could be etymologically interpreted to mean ‘all tribes’ or ‘a mingling of tribes’, from *πάν* (all) and *φυλή* (tribe). Pamphylia was a region in Southern Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), and Stephen Halliwell finds it more likely that the “combination of Pamphylian with the fathers name, Armenios, [is] Plato’s way of giving an exotic but deliberately imprecise aura to the myth” (1988, p. 171).²¹ Either in addition to this ethno-geographic association or in its stead, Plato may be using Er as an ‘every-man’, and as Er’s experience is about the universal one of death, his status as an ‘every-man’ makes his experience and the moral lessons derived therefrom universally applicable.²² The second strategy, ensuring that Socrates remains the more prominent of the two figures, is performed by combining narratological interruptions with the occasional anonymising of Er. At 615a, Socrates tells Glaucon that he is abbreviating Er’s narrative to save time, and then at 618c, he provides a lengthy explanation of the moral implications of Er’s vision. Both caesuras in the narrative flow remind the internal and external audiences that Er may have provided the story’s content, but Socrates is its interpreter and so ultimately controls it.²³ The interpretive interruption at 618c immediately precedes the omission of Er’s name in the next section, where he is mentioned as the “messenger from the other side” (ὁ ἐκεῖθεν ἄγγελος, *Resp.* 619a). The naming of Socrates and his mastery of the narrative’s contents, pacing, and interpretation ensure that he remains the central figure, over and above Er, the occasionally anonymous every-man witness.

Turning to the Book of the Watchers, this source’s contents are legitimised through its pseudepigraphic attribute to the antediluvian hero Enoch and his characterisation through elite social markers. The Book of the Watchers’ compositional layers are all attributed to Enoch, as indicated by the superscript: “The [account] of the blessing (λόγος εὐλογίας) with which Enoch blessed the righteous chosen who will be present on the day of [necessity] (εἰς ἡμέραν ἀνάγκης), to remove all the enemies; and the righteous will be saved”²⁴ (1 *En* 1:1). Enoch is of the seventh generation of men descendant from Adam and the great-great grandfather of Noah (Gen 5:1–24). Genesis laconically records that Enoch walked with God for three hundred years, and when he was 365 years old, he was no more, for God took him (Gen 5:22–4). Events in the Book of the Watchers unfold during “the days of Jared” (Gen 6:5), and are thus set in an unspecified age of historic myth and mythic history, when human and inhuman beings mingled upon the earth, but without any details which may

indicate a more specific date.²⁵ This temporal setting, in which elements that we would consider myth and history commingle, shares more with Er's journey than Socrates' firm anchor in a historical reality.

Yet Enoch's role as a scribe does connect him to a socio-historical reality. Enoch is twice called a scribe in the Book of the Watchers. The Heavenly Watchers (those loyal to God) call him "a scribe of justice" (ὁ γραμματεὺς τῆς δικαιοσύνης (1 En 12:4). This epithet is unique to the Greek tradition (Reeves and Reed 2018, pp. 46–47), and God later calls him "a man of truth, a scribe" (ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀληθείας, ὁ γραμματεὺς, 1 En 15:4). Enoch even demonstrates his scribal skills by writing the petition of the Fallen Watchers in a memorandum (γράφω [...] ὑπομνήματα, 1 En 13:4). Often members of a cultural elite themselves, scribes were educated individuals with access to temples, courts, and the elite members of society in charge of those interconnected spaces (cf. Eshel and Langlois 2022). As Annette Reed writes, this emphasis "on Enoch's role as scribe and on his transmission of writings to his progeny tacitly attests the authenticity of the texts themselves, as true records of the mysteries revealed to the antediluvian patriarch" (Reed 2004, p. 49). The mythic setting of the antediluvian world thus meets an unspecified historical setting wherein scribal status amplifies the pseudepigraphic author's status and that of his composition.

In contrast, the narrative setting and the author's context of Cicero's work are explicitly rooted in history through information given by Scipio, his father Paulus, and his adoptive great-grandfather Africanus.²⁶ Cicero has Scipio begin his dream account by referencing his time as "military tribune in the Fourth Legion in Africa under the consul Manius Manilius" (*M'. Manilio consuli ad quartam legionem tribunus [...] militum* (*Rep.* 6.9)), which specifically dates this story to a period of time just before the beginning of the Third Punic War in 149. Cicero then plays with the spatio-temporal setting through Africanus' opening lines to Scipio:

"Within two years you as consul shall overthrow it, thus winning by your own efforts the surname, which till now you have as an inheritance from me. But after destroying Carthage and celebrating your triumph, you shall hold the censorship; you shall go on missions to Egypt, Syria, Asia and Greece; you shall be chosen consul a second time in your absence; you shall bring a great war to a successful close, and you shall destroy Numantia. But, after driving in state to the Capitol, you shall find the commonwealth disturbed by the designs of my grandson."²⁷ (*Rep.* 6.11)

As Scipio has not yet done these things, Africanus' predictions function as internal prolepsis and as external analepsis for the external audience—a retelling of events completed between the temporal loci of narrative and audience.²⁸ After these predictions, Africanus impresses upon his adopted grandson (Scipio) that the social and public importance of his exemplary, Roman virtues will be of the highest importance in the political unrest to be caused by Africanus' blood-relation and grandson Tiberius Gracchus: "it will be your duty to hold up before the fatherland the light of your character, your ability, and your wisdom" (*Rep.* 6.12).²⁹ Through Africanus, Cicero locates his discourse on morality and politics in the particular historical context of the unravelling Republic and its *concordia* in the events surrounding the Gracchi Brothers.³⁰ In evoking the Gracchi Brothers' reforms, the social turmoil around them, and the period traditionally considered the Roman Republic's decline, Cicero creates a space in which he can criticize the players in his contemporary political landscape; players like Julius Caesar, whom Cicero considered a *populares* and whose extra-legal actions echoed those of Tiberius Gracchus (Dillon and Garland 2021, p. 371).³¹ Moreover, in having Scipio dialogue with Africanus, both military heroes who bested Rome's great enemy and figures associated with the legal, social, and economic symbolism of the Republic, Cicero gives his own perspectives the authority of civic myth and historical validity.

We have now met our intrepid travellers. In each story, the choice of pseudepigraphic traveller does two things: it enables the external audience to imagine a kind of kinship with the pseudepigraphic traveller and blends the sense of time. In the case of Socrates

and Scipio, founding fathers of institutions, kinship is of a cultural or intellectual nature; for Enoch, this kinship is intergenerational and/or intellectual—he is an ancestor, but as a pre-covenantal ancestor who speaks to the ‘just’ of a future age, the progeny is not limited to biological affiliation. The relationship between time and each pseudepigraphic traveller serves a similar function in each story, but this is achieved differently. Socrates places Er’s story simultaneously inside and outside of time. His opening words are timeliness, “once upon a time” (ὅς ποτε; *Resp.* 614a), but he provides specific numbers of days or years that the souls travel (e.g., *Resp.* 614b, 616b). The audiences’ understanding of a day’s duration facilitates their understanding of Er’s temporal experience of journeying through the Beyond, whilst the atemporal opening framework means the story could happen any time. In Enoch’s story, temporality features in the opening verses, where the pseudepigraphic speaker tells the external audience for whom his words are intended. The narrated sections that follow are experienced as a performance, the consequences of which will not truly be felt in the narrated world, but later, either in or after the time of the external audience. Scipio’s story is the most temporally rooted. While Africanus’ proleptic speech narrates events perceived as historical to the audience, the thinly veiled criticisms of economic and political subjects make his words immediately significant to the external audience contemporary to Cicero’s writing, while the discussion of celestial eschatology implies the timeless and absolute value of his teachings. In all three, then, the specific character connects the temporally situated external audience through imagined kinship with the story world’s temporality, which is then manipulated to ensure an enduring rhetorical significance.

Finally, it is worth explicitly stating that these pseudepigraphic travellers’ authority is also contingent upon a highly gendered and classicist discourse. In different ways, these stories connect their hero with a political elite, and draw on male-coded imagery—such as war and conquest, emissaries and scribal practices—to characterise the men or contextualise their travels. Space prevents any further analysis of these masculinities, but it nonetheless important to remember that the seemingly ‘unmarked’ category is marked and not to be tacitly assumed or accepted (cf. [Crenshaw 1989](#), p. 151).

4.2. The Means of Accessing Other Space and Movement Therein

Having established who travels, let us now consider how they do so. Robert Fowler observes that “a fantasy of what it would be like to visit the Beyond has to be focalized through somebody’s gaze—a *somebody* whose gaze must move in one direction or another” (2017, p. 243. Emphasis Fowler’s). In the three stories discussed here, the *somebodies* are Er, Enoch, and Scipio—free men with historic and/or mythic clout. Each character has a body, but (to play with Fowler’s language) the cosmic travels of these *somebodies* are explicitly *body*-less. The disembodied nature of Er, Enoch, and Scipio’s travels are, I argue, crucial to the stories’ abilities to manipulate spatio-temporal reality and to bring the external audience along on the trip, as it permits the focalising character (and so the audience) to travel as otherworldly beings do. This otherworldly travel further disrupts normal spatio-temporal experience in enabling travel that is both similar and different, and so simultaneously comprehensible and extraordinary ([Fowler 2017](#), pp. 243–44).

Access to the Beyond in these stories is physically limited: the body may not enter. In Er’s case, it is his soul that travels (τὴν ψυχὴν πορεύεσθαι, *Resp.* 614b), while his body remains in mundane space for twelve days, where it is transported and prepared for cremation (*Resp.* 614b). Both Enoch and Scipio sleep, travelling in dreams (1 *En* 13:7–8; *Cic. Rep.* 6.10). These transcendent travels disrupt mortal experiences of time and space, but only for a disembodied part of each person: the protagonists’ bodies are still subject to earthly constraints, even as they travel impossible distances in the Beyond. Moreover, in the cases of our dreaming travellers, who could attempt to return to these otherworldly spaces upon waking, the stories explicitly state that corporeal access to these places is not permitted. Even though the Watchers are able to corporeally descend and ascend between realms, Enoch relays that “no flesh could behold” the supreme otherworldly being (καὶ οὐκ

ἐδύνάτο πᾶσα σὰρξ ἰδεῖν αὐτοῦ 1 En 14:21) and that he travelled “where no flesh walks” (καὶ ἀπῆλθον ὅπου πᾶσα σὰρξ οὐ περιπατεῖ. 1 En 17:6).³² Of his travels, Scipio is told that “unless that *deus* [. . .] has freed you from the prison of the body (*istis te corporis custodiis liberaverit*), you cannot gain entrance there (*huc tibi aditus patere non potest*. Cic. *Rep.* 6.15). The travellers may access these spaces, providing a point of focalisation, yet this is not unfettered access.

This limited access is here important for understanding how the legitimising trope of cosmic travel is able to bridge the gap between the external audience and the story world. Travel is difficult, and even in the mundane world is contingent upon numerous socio-economic privileges. To be able to travel cosmically raises those privileging stakes—could we, the external audience, ever dare hope that we, too, could visit these places? After all, we also sleep and perchance dream, and will someday die. The stories quietly encourage that hope: now we cannot, embodied creatures that we are, but once “this too too solid flesh” has melted away? (Hamlet, Act 1, Sc. 2) Perhaps.

Once the physical body is shed, the traveller is able to move into the Beyond. Only in the case of Enoch is the journey from the worldly to the otherworldly travel described:

“Behold, clouds (νεφέλαι) in the vision were summoning me (ἐκάλουν), and mists were crying out to me (ὁμίχλαι με ἐφώνουν); and shooting stars were hastening me (διαδρομαὶ τῶν ἀστέρων) and lightning flashes were speeding me along (διαστραπαὶ με κατεσπούδαζον); and winds in my vision (ἄνεμοι) made me fly up and lifted me upward (ἐξεπέτασάν καὶ ἐν τῇ ὁράσει μου με καὶ ἐπῆράν με ἄνω) and brought me to heaven (καὶ εἰσήνεγκάν με εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν).” (1 En 14:8–9)

Enoch’s ascension conveys a phrenetic sense of pace and disoriented space. The loud sounds coming from meteorological sources, the literally lightning speed, and the wind-buffed, implicitly weightless movement qualifies this experience as entirely unlike typical human travel.³³

The sources are silent on the mechanics of movement once the disembodied traveller arrives in the Beyond: they go, are lead, travel, or simply are in new locations. (e.g., Pl. *Resp.* 614c, 616b; 1 En 17:1; Cic. *Rep.* 6.10). The narratives’ silence regarding the actual means of displacements disrupts human temporality, and makes it easier for a reader/audience to transpose the story to their own time. In the Myth of Er, Socrates provides a human timeframe for Er’s travels: his body is collected after ten days, and two days later he put on the pyre where he reawakens (*Resp.* 614b). Within this twelve-day period, Socrates tells his audiences that Er spends seven days in a meadow, travels on the eighth for a period of four days to see the rainbow column, and then another day to reach Ananke and her spindle (*Resp.* 616b). In what direction the souls travel, we do not know. Between 616b and 621b, events are narrated in detail: the souls choose their next life, journey to and drink from the river Lethe, and then are sent to rebirth like shooting stars (ῥττοντας ὥσπερ ἀστέρας); however, the only temporal marker is that their rebirth happens at midnight (μέσας νύκτας γενέσθαι) (*Resp.* 621b). The story’s pacing makes time seem irrelevant, even as we are told how many days the souls travel.

The Book of the Watchers and the Dream of Scipio take a different approach to time and travel, sometimes changing locations without warning. Of Enoch’s journey, Kelley Coblenz Bautch observes, “The landscape or celestial surroundings change abruptly and appear to do so in a random manner. In this way, the narration of Enoch’s journey obfuscates the spatial relationship between locales.” (2003, p. 4). Much the same observation could be made of Scipio’s abrupt arrival at a starry vantage point (Cic. *Rep.* 6.10). While this narration technique blurs any connection to mundane maps, this obfuscation is a useful tool for disrupting time and space in a way that unsettles the audience while remaining comprehensible.

4.3. Points of Departure

In these stories of cosmic travel, points of departure and arrival are also places where earthly and otherworldly spaces come into contact. Whether a story vaguely hints at these sites or provides more explicit details influences how the reader/audience imagines the narrated events but also how the reader/audience situates themselves in their real world and is connected to the story world itself.

Of the three stories, the Myth of Er is the most ambiguous about where this world meets the Beyond. Socrates introduces Er, of the race of Pamphylia, and then launches into a fairytale-like account that begins with a Greek equivalent of “once upon a time” (ὅς ποτε; *Resp.* 614b). While Socrates and his audience are in Athens, we know neither the location of the battle in which Er died (ἐν πολέμῳ τελευτήσας), nor the home to which he was taken for burial (οἴκαδε μέλλων θάπτεσθαι, *Resp.* 614b). As discussed above, the banquet at which Socrates speaks takes place during the Peloponnesian War and Er is something of an ‘every-man’ character (or ‘every-soul’). One could reasonably posit that this story’s spatial ambiguity is meant to imply the universal application of the story’s contents and messages. Were the journey after death through punishment or reward and subsequent rebirth limited to one location, the story’s overall meaning would have a lesser impact. The audience/listener need not be in Athens for Plato’s story to be rhetorically effective.

In contrast, the Book of the Watchers provides specific geographic locations for key events (Nickelsburg 2001, p. 239). An important point of contact between this world and the Beyond in this story is Mount Hermon and its environs. Acting as a point of entry and egress, earthly and otherworldly beings descend and ascend via this mountain. Initially, the Watchers first alight upon Hermon when they abandon the Beyond for earth (1 *En* 6:5). Later, once Enoch has been chosen as mediator, his ascent starts from “the waters of Dan in the land of Dan, which is south of Hermon, to the west” (τῶν ὑδάτων Δάν ἐν γῇ Δάν, ἥτις ἐστὶν ἐκ δεξιῶν Ἐρμωνειῖμι δύσεως, 1 *En* 13:7); later, Enoch visits “a mountain whose summit reached to heaven” (καὶ εἰς ὄρος οὗ ἡ κεφαλὴ ἀφικνεῖτο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, 1 *En* 17:2), which Kelley Coblentz Bautch argues is to be understood to be Mount Hermon (2003, p. 68). Though accurate to state that the wilderness generally, and more specifically mountains, rivers, and their immediate environs are “the kind of geography universally associated with epiphanies and worship of the gods” (Nickelsburg 2001, p. 240),³⁴ offering such clear geographic references is also a mutually reinforcing strategy of legitimisation.³⁵ The Genesis account of the watchers is entirely aspatial (Gen 6:1–4), but symbolically significant. The region around Hermon was associated with cultic practices, but specific stories about this place were not preserved from earlier periods. In the Book of the Watchers, the symbolic meanings of the aspatial Genesis story is merged with all the significances of the named locations, which then mutually reinforce each other. In other words, because Hermon and its environs were important to the Book of the Watchers’ author(s) (Coblentz Bautch 2003, p. 64), the story is set there; but the inverse is also true, that because the story was set there, Hermon and its environs are important. Like epiphany’s ability to indicate god-chosen status, the spatial claim that an *axis mundi* is to be found at/around Hermon in the Book of the Watchers connects this exact earthly space, and by extension the people who live there, with the powers and authority of the Beyond. Enoch, as the man who ascends and descends, obtains special status within that group, but just as his transmission of knowledge provides everyone else access to the divine, so does this space.³⁶ This bridge extends out of the story world, too. The territory, its waters, and the mountain are places that the intended audience would have known—either through their own travels or because it was nearby.

References to real-world places also connect the narrated space of the Dream of Scipio with the historical Roman Empire in which Cicero wrote. Scipio is in northern Africa when he dreams of cosmic travel. Though Roman northern African is roughly comparable to the borders of modern Tunisia, the story is not more forthcoming with geographic specifics. One might presume a location near Carthage, for Africanus tells Scipio that he will soon retake this city, but the narrative does not confirm this possibility. Scipio’s placement in

northern Africa is explicitly framed by Rome's military presence, and Africanus expands Roman imperial control to Egypt, Syria, Asia, Greece, and Numantia in his proleptic words to his grandson (*Resp.* 6.11). Kai Brodersen observes that the study of geography encourages reflections on the size and content of the *oikumene*, whereas lists of locations enable a physical and mental conquest of space (Brodersen 2010, p. 835). Scipio's explicitly Roman epiphanic travels begin outside of Rome, in an important region for Rome's imperial mythology, before spreading yet further around the globe. In doing so, Cicero uses the coexistence of past, present, and future in the Beyond to assert a fully formed, Roman, mythic political reality (Fowler 2017, p. 244; McConnell 2017, p. 54).

Whence in the earthly realm each protagonist departs speaks to each story's divine spatiality and the expansiveness or exclusivity of accessing it. The Myth of Er and the Dream of Scipio make far-reaching claims, albeit for different reasons, and have their travellers embark on their journeys far from home. For Socrates and his interlocutors, and possibly the presumed audience, this home is Athens, but Er dies in an unknown location. For Scipio, a father of the Republic, home is Rome, but he dreams of imperial conquest in Roman-dominated North Africa. Both stories thus make boundary-crossing spatial claims. Only Enoch's departure is from home. As we shall see in the next section, however, just because one starts out from home, does not mean that the claim to authority will be circumscribed.

4.4. Otherworldly Tour Guides and Cosmic Itineraries

We come now to the final features of cosmic travel. Unlike the other three, I address the guide and itinerary together, because understanding how each story utilises various tropes of legitimacy in support of its rhetorical authority is deepened by interrogating the interactions between the guide, the traveller, and the sites they visit together. We cannot understand one without the others. My argument in this section is that the guided tours through the cosmos—during which the traveller is escorted to areas of eschatological, political, and scientific importance—naturalises whatever socio-political vision the author is promoting by demonstrating that their vision is already part of the cosmic order. Along the way, the dynamics between guide and traveller, and their experiences of locations illuminate each story's assumptions about the natures of society's visible and invisible members, and the structures governing them.³⁷ To understand how the traveller, otherworldly tour guides, and cosmic site-seeing collectively contribute to a socio-political vision, I draw attention to how each story incorporates (at least one) epiphany into the cosmic itinerary. Epiphany is particularly effective in naturalising the stories' visions due to its ability to blend spaces and legitimise all manner of things. This literary motif also designates something or someone as so magically powerful that they can cause epiphany, and therefore epiphany also focalises our attention, indicating what is more or most important. To this spatial effect, the stories add a temporal distortion as they blend various elements of the epiphanic structure. The order of narration disrupts or dislocates parts of the chronological sequence of events in such a way as to create narrative circularities or to project events into a different temporal locus than that which one would expect. To illustrate all of this, I organise the structural elements of epiphany into three groups and address them in this order (on these elements see above, Section 3 Methods). The groups are, first, (1) preparation and (5) externalisation; second, (2) appearance and (4) response; and third, (3) speech. These groupings and order facilitate a clearer understanding of how each story uses these tropes and their disparate elements to reach across time and space in an attempt to legitimise their socio-political vision for the external audience.

A divine encounter begins with (1) preparation for epiphany on the part of the character who will be its witness and concludes with that same character's (5) externalisation of the experience. In other words, the epiphanic witness does something that increases the likelihood of a divine encounter (1) and then, when it is over, informs other people about their experience (5). In literary accounts of epiphany, the preparatory actions are often undertaken unwittingly, and the soon-to-be-witness of epiphany is not anticipating

the impending encounter. In such instances, epiphany's spontaneity appears to be a means of further illustrating the witness' worthiness of the god-chosen status (Glass 2022, p. 156, 2025). Chronologically, these elements must occur in this order—one cannot rely upon the authority of lived experience if narrating events one has yet to experience. Er, Enoch, and Scipio's stories, however, flip the presentation of this order so that the *syuzhet* does not align with the *fabula*'s chronological sequence. For each, this is accomplished through the work's larger framework and introduction to the cosmic travel story, which fulfils the obligation to speak of the epiphany to others.

In the *Republic*, Socrates' use of Er's story as concluding evidence in support of his earlier arguments conveys the Pamphylian traveller's successful externalization. The Myth of Er is intended as a cautionary tale of the soul's punishment and rewards designed to encourage philosophical education and just action (e.g., Pl. *Resp.* 330d-e, 613e-14a; Halliwell 1988, p. 18). Socrates' ability to tell the story at all informs the audience that Er's obligation was fulfilled before they even hear any of it.

The autodiegetic nature of Enoch and Scipio's travel accounts results in different frameworks for marking (5) the externalization prior to (1) the preparation. The entire corpus of sources collected under the title *1 Enoch* are introduced as Enoch's word of blessing (λόγος εὐλογίας; *1 En* 1:1) and analogy (παράβολή; *1 En* 1:2), which Enoch immediately says were the results of visions and are intended for future use (*1 En* 1:2–3). Following the Platonic philosophical dialogue, Cicero has Scipio tell his own story, and the external audience thus experiences the externalization in real time with the internal audience. In both cases, even the original external audiences lived after Enoch's and Scipio's lifetimes, which turns the very existence of their visions conceptually in story and materially in writing into an indication of the men's successful externalizations of their epiphanic experiences. Moreover, the external audience is invited to consider itself to be the appropriate recipient of this message, as either Enoch's future generation or as being like Scipio's internal audience.

One of the most salient functions of (1) preparation is to separate the character who will witness epiphany from their typical surrounding and move them into a liminal space. This occurs even when epiphany is inadvertent, as it is in these three stories, and epiphany's socially or spatially distant location mirrors the witness' isolation and solitude. It also ensures that no one can contradict what the witness to epiphany recounts (Petridou 2016, p. 157). These three stories mix physical (body-focused), social, and geographic markers to create complex liminalities in preparation for their protagonists' divine encounters.

Er's liminality consists of social, geographical, and corporeal markers indicating his distance from his presumed kinship group and the internal audience's location in Athens. Plato seems to stage his eschatological myth far from Athens, the city in which the other characters are discussing. Because it is possible to transport Er's body from the battlefield back to his home and prepare it for cremation in only two days (*Resp.* 614b), the distance between the battlefield and home cannot be too great. The battle cannot, however, be presumed to have happened in Anatolia, simply because of Er's status as a member of the Pamphylian race. Plato's geographic ambiguity about some details and precision about others suggests that the story which begins 'once upon a time' is also set 'far, far away'. To the story's temporal and spatial ambiguity, we can add the liminality of the unburied dead and the inherent liminality of the battlefield. Many 'normal' social behaviours are replaced with violent and often unconscionable acts on the battlefield, and divine *mania* and epiphany are commonly associated with war (Ustinova 2017, p. 217). Er re-enters his body as his pyre is about to be lit, meaning that his soul's travels all occurred in between the death of his body and the completion of the funerary rituals that would conclusively mark his passing.³⁸ The myth's general vagueness about its spatio-temporal locus, yet specificity of battlefield, and Er's status betwixt and between life and death establish an excellent liminality in which to encounter the divine.

Like Er's preparation, Enoch's includes geographic and social isolation but also informs the audiences of Enoch's activities in the moments leading up to divine encounter.

Two passages indicate Enoch's solitude and actions. Right before the heavenly angels first tell Enoch to speak to the Fallen Watchers, the protagonist is "standing, blessing the Lord of majesty, the King of the ages." (1 En 12:3). In this first instance, Enoch is in an undisclosed location, presumably alone, but the narrative correlation between his action (blessing) and his commission from "the watchers of the Great Holy One" (οἱ ἐγγήγοροι τοῦ ἁγίου τοῦ μεγάλου; 1 En 12:3) implies Enoch's worthiness of encountering otherworldly beings (Glass 2025). In advance of Enoch's ascension to the Beyond, he is seated "by the waters of Dan in the land of Dan, which is south of [Mount] Hermon, to the west" where he "[recited] the memorandum of their petition until [he] fell asleep" (1 En 13:7).³⁹ Again, Enoch can only be presumed to be alone, but he is explicitly in a natural or wild setting, removed from urbanity, and performing his duties as messenger between two groups of otherworldly beings. Throughout antiquity, the solitude of mountains and wilderness make them ideal epiphanic landscapes (Nickelsburg 2001, p. 240; Petridou 2016, pp. 197–98), but Enoch is also in a place specifically associated with visionary experiences in Hellenistic Jewish traditions (Nickelsburg 2001, pp. 186–88, 247). Alone in this Jewish epiphanic landscape, Enoch falls asleep, another piece of his preparatory liminality, as sleeping is a state between life and death in which even one surrounded by others can find isolation (Petridou 2016, p. 227). Finally, in this second instance, Enoch is again portrayed as fulfilling a duty, here conveying a message, which creates a social liminality as he acts as a go-between. Enoch's (1) preparation for the divine encounter is thus the mixed product of geographic, somatic, and social in-betweenness, as he is outside of lived environments, between the categories of wakefulness and death, and two groups of otherworldly beings.

Scipio's (1) preparation is equally mixed in its use of geography and body. Geographically, Scipio is away from Rome in an unspecified region of Africa (*Rep.* 6.9). This locus is far removed from the internal audience, who are at Scipio's estate (*Rep.* 1.14). The geographic distancing of Scipio from Rome also implies the complex, intersectional liminality of being a foreigner and traveller. On the one hand, Scipio is in a new place, dependent upon others' hospitality, and at risk; on the other hand, he travels as an elite Roman man and military tribune of the Fourth Legion with all the power and security of the Roman army (*Rep.* 6.9). Scipio's divine encounter comes after a discussion of politics with King Masinissa, which continues "late into the night" (*in multan noctem; Rep.* 6.11). Though the modern external audience may think this nocturnal moment *de rigueur*, this temporality was not a given for divine encounter in antiquity, which more frequently occurred at midday (Petridou 2016, pp. 210–14, 236–37).⁴⁰ "Late into the night" does suggest the same silence as midday, however, in addition to the requisite solitude of (1) preparation. Alone in his room, Scipio falls "into a deeper sleep than usual", a quintessentially liminal experience (*artior quam solebat somnus complexus est; Rep.* 6.11). The comment that Scipio's sleep is deeper than usual also indicates that it is also out of the ordinary, providing an opportunity for an otherworldly encounter. For Scipio, then, (1) preparation includes geographic remoteness from 'home'—be that Rome or his own country estate—which includes the status as a foreigner with military power, and the somatic interstitiality of sleep.

Taken together, we see parallels in geographic and somatic liminality emerge, even as each story's particularities hint at culturally specific points of reference. All three stories place their soon-to-be witness to epiphany in a geographically remote location that is away from the urbanity, living spaces, or everyday life of either the story world or the internal audience. This spatial remoteness also comes with a mixture of regional precision and local ambiguity: Er is from Pamphylia, Enoch is by the waters of Dan, and Scipio is in Africa, but we cannot pinpoint their exact locations. All three stories also use somatic markers, the bodies of the unburied dead or the sleeping, to convey isolation and solitude. Finally, there are also hints of social interstitiality, as Er's battlefield location places him in the socially liminal category of warrior, Enoch moves between groups of otherworldly beings, and Scipio is both empowered by his military status and a guest dependent upon his host.

With regards to each story's differences, I argued in the earlier Section 4.3 that the points of departure in each story contribute to each story's construction of audience and

socio-political rhetoric. Er's possible universalism, Enoch's particularism, and Scipio's universalism are connected to the location from whence they depart. The mixture of precision and ambiguity in use of spatiality to create liminality contributes to both the rhetorics of authority and each story's creation of narrative solitude.

So far, we have seen that, structurally, each story begins with (5) externalization before proceeding to (1) preparation. Starting the cosmic travel stories with (5) externalization creates legitimacy for the subsequent events because the very existence of the stories themselves and our access to these stories indicate the validity that was first achieved through their transmission from the witness to epiphany to others. The various processes of preparation, though differing in details, all use geographic and somatic markers to indicate the isolation and liminality of the character who is about to experience the otherworldly. They, and we, are now able to move to the next stages of epiphany to analyse (2) the appearance of the otherworldly being and (4) the witness' response.

Whether or not they are aware of the (1) preparation for the divine encounter, the otherworldly is about to appear to the chosen character, who will respond to this apparition. Their (2) appearance is typically marked with epiphanic *semeia*, the imagery that denoted otherworldliness in ancient cultures. The epiphanic witness responds because they recognise the *semeia*'s meaning. The (4) response typically includes awe, wonder, and/or marvel, in addition to either positive or negative psycho-somatic reactions (e.g., fear and trembling, tears of joy or sadness, prostration before the otherworldly being, etc. (Turkeltaub 2003, p. 66; Savran 2005, pp. 55, 65; Petridou 2016, pp. 9, 20, 23–24)).

In each story, the traveller is guided around the Beyond by otherworldly beings who act as guides and interpreters. Boldly going where no man has gone before, such assistance is necessary: no mortal *itinerarium* would exist for cosmic journeys, and mundane lists are of little use.⁴¹ These beings are necessary to the cosmic travel and sightseeing, as they lead the witness through the Beyond, explaining what they see. These figures act as guides and guardians, for they certainly facilitate movement and knowledge acquisition, but they also challenge, limit, and deny access to space and information as necessary. The cosmic traveller, Er, Enoch, or Scipio, is a first focalisation; it is through this character that the “fantasy of what it would be like to visit the Beyond” is focalized. Theirs is the gaze through which the reader/audience sees this other place (Fowler 2017, p. 243). Their respective tour guides, however, further nuance this focalisation by taking the traveller to particular locations and pointing out overlooked or misunderstood sights. The guide's otherworldliness ensures that we understand the cosmic itinerary to be part of a larger programme—it is not random (Coblentz Bautch 2003, p. 239).

Numerous other otherworldly beings appear to the chosen witness, in addition to these guides, but not all solicit a response. I argue that the distinctions between appearances and responses in the Myth of Er, Book of the Watchers, and Dream of Scipio are important means of focusing the audience's attention upon certain figures, locations, attitudes, or ideas, in addition to indicating how each story conceives of the social dynamics between the visible and invisible members of society. As is readily apparent, the sources of epiphany in each story are one of the greatest distinctions between them, but I show that these distinctions in cosmic travel are particularly important for understanding each story's rhetoric of authority.

The Myth of Er could almost be said to be characterised by the absence of an epiphanic response. Er's journey certainly includes many structural and aesthetic components of epiphany. The traveling soul sees “a straight shaft of light stretched out from above through the whole of the sky and the earth like a pillar, closely resembling the rainbow, but brighter and purer” (Pl. *Resp.* 616b),⁴² and meets judges (*Resp.* 614c), Ananke (Necessity) enthroned with her spindle, the Fates (Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos) and sirens, and a being referred to as *προφήτης/prophētēs* (*Resp.* 616c–619b). However, Er is never said to feel or do anything in response to what he sees or hears over the course of his journey.

The absence of emotion in Plato's philosophical myth of cosmic travel and divine encounter is perhaps explicable in the context of his greater polemic against poetry and its

deleterious effects upon young men. The pathetic hero, one associated with tragic heroism, espouses “a false theology about the justice of the gods” and models womanish weakness and indulgence (Zeitlin 1996, p. 370). The Myth of Er is the allegorical capstone to the *Republic*’s promotion of a traditional masculinity that is much improved by philosophical training. The brave Er (ἀλκίμου μὲν ἄνδρός, *Resp.* 614b) can be understood as a model of this “new, revised version [of *andreia*] in which courage, vigilance, self-sufficiency, and strength may be better directed toward the improvement of self and society” (Zeitlin 1996, p. 368). In spite of the eschatological visions’ drama, Er remains calm, as the myth’s audiences are implicitly meant to do. Through its exemplary hero, the Myth of Er becomes itself a model of—according to Plato—what such stories *should* be (cf. *Resp.* 387).

In the Book of the Watchers, the epiphanic response contributes to the depiction of an ideal social hierarchy in which only the authority of the supreme otherworldly being is to be recognised. The audience’s first hint of this is in the Fallen Watchers’ response to the message Enoch delivers. Though the appearance (2) was of the Heavenly Watchers to Enoch, it is the Fallen Watchers who respond (4) with fear and trembling (1 *En* 13:3). A mere message, delivered on behalf of this otherworldly being, can elicit an epiphanic response. Once the sleeping Enoch has been swept up into the Beyond, he responds (4) to his experiences of the dwelling of the supreme being (1 *En* 14:14), and then to the appearance (2) of this being on its throne (1 *En* 14, pp. 19–21, 24). Later, while touring the cosmos, Enoch sees extraordinary things. These travels serve to bring the entire cosmos under the dominion of the deity who sent Enoch on this trip (Kosmin 2024), and Enoch’s reactions emphasize the power of the supreme otherworldly being over all time and space. In a climactic scene, Enoch sees “the centre of the earth”, “a holy mountain”, and another mountain and valleys (1 *En* 26, pp. 1–5). Enoch “marvels exceedingly” at the mountain and valley *before* knowing what they are. The otherworldly tour guide, the angel Uriel, explains what this site is, and upon learning that this place, which scholars identify as Jerusalem, is where the blessed and the curse will live for all time (1 *En* 26:6), Enoch “blessed the Lord of glory, and his glory I made known and praised (him) magnificently” (1 *En* 27:5). Many have argued that cosmology, geography, and eschatology are intimately linked throughout 1 *Enoch* (for a summary, cf. Coblentz Bautch 2003, p. 4). God’s his authority over beings through all time is reflected in his control of cosmic and geographic spaces, and by the earlier creation of physical spaces for future judgment. Geography holds locations of eschatological consequences in 1 *Enoch* (Coblentz Bautch 2003, p. 247).⁴³ Enoch’s seemingly instinctive response (4) to a location that is directly connected to God’s ability to punish or reward reinforces the deity’s authority and naturalises this socio-political structure by geographically situating God’s judgments in the “centre of the earth”.

Enoch’s appropriate responses are further emphasised by narrated instances in which no response is described, despite what the audience might anticipate. There are many such moments when Enoch could exhibit a response and does not. The Heavenly Watchers appear (2) to Enoch to instruct him to speak to the Fallen Watchers in 1 *En* 12: pp. 3–4, but Enoch simply follows their instructions without responding. Moreover, Enoch spends a significant amount of time with otherworldly beings, like Uriel (e.g., 1 *En* 19:1; 21:5; 33:3), as he travels around the cosmos; however, Enoch does not react to the otherworldly guide(s). When juxtaposed with Enoch’s (2) responses to the supreme otherworldly being and the manifestations of his power, these absences of response to the appearances of subordinate otherworldly beings indicates their place in the social hierarchy that encompasses the entire cosmos.

In the Dream of Scipio, (2) appearance and (4) responses are integral to how Cicero fosters a “cosmic political vision” that is “firmly [rooted] within a traditional Roman framework” (McConnell 2017, p. 48). Other than its dream contextualisation, Africanus’ appearance (2) does not rely on *semeia*. However, Scipio is said to shudder upon recognizing Africanus (*equidem cohorrui*; *Rep.* 6.10). When his father Paulus later appears (2), equally unceremoniously, Scipio cries (*equidem vim lacrimarum profudi*, *Rep.* 6.14). Though typical, these fears and tears indicate the otherworldly status of Africanus and Paulus. Scipio does

not only exhibit responses to these anthropomorphic apparitions. As Enoch marvelled at sites along his tour, Scipio reacts to what he sees. He is stupefied by the stars and planets (*stupens*, *Rep.* 6.18), and calls the harmonies *admirans* (*Rep.* 6.20). Scipio's (5) response to his ancestors and the astral bodies is explained by Africanus' explanation of cosmic order: "For man was given life that he might inhabit that sphere called Earth, which you see in the centre of this temple; and he has been given a soul out of those eternal fires which you call stars and planets, which, being round and globular bodies animated by divine intelligences, circle about in their fixed orbits with marvellous speed" (*Rep.* 6.15). The human soul is not a reflection of the divine, but part of it. Scipio's marvelling is also encouraged. Africanus says that it is appropriate to marvel at astral features because, "One of them [the nine spheres], the outermost, is that of heaven; it contains all the rest, and is itself the supreme god, holding and embracing within itself all the other spheres" (*Rep.* 6.17).⁴⁴ The Dream of Scipio thus exhibits a very different understanding of humanity's place in the cosmic order of things. Because the human soul is of the same substance as the astral bodies, which are part of the spheres of heaven, to stand in awe of the heavens is to be implicitly in awe of humanity. In addition, just as the *deus arcens* created this cosmic structure and its order, and this divine intelligence animates all things, the Roman politician is able to structure, order, and animate all that surrounds him. Through Scipio's visions of the cosmos, Cicero imagines Rome's socio-political institutions as timeless, universal, and aligned with the cosmos themselves (McConnell 2017, p. 53).

As is now evident, analysing how the protagonists' epiphanic responses or the absences thereof to their tour guides and all that they see in the Beyond indicates differing human ontologies. However, it also unveiled some conceptual similarities between *1 Enoch* and Cicero's *De re publica*. The Book of the Watchers and the Dream of Scipio share the idea that otherworldly beings are made of fire (*1 En* 17:1, *Rep.* 6.15).⁴⁵ In each story, however, the protagonist's reactions to otherworldly beings indicates divergent ideas regarding the meaning or implication of this ontological fact. Concerns for improper mixing between worldly and otherworldly pervades the Book of the Watchers. Enoch's lack of reaction to the angels with whom he travels is appropriate within the cosmic hierarchy, emphasising the unique power of the top-being, while the angels' fiery nature distinguishes them from Enoch's fleshy existence. In the Book of the Watchers, this fire divides humanity from otherworldly, and only the supreme otherworldly being has the right to rule. In contrast, in the Dream of Scipio, the fiery essence of the astral bodies connects mortal bodies to eternity. Cicero draws a direct parallel between God's command of the cosmos and a human's command of the body.⁴⁶ "Indeed, by the end of the Dream it is clear that a vast, cosmic, contemplative view of things eternal and divine characterizes the ideal statesman and defines his attitudes to politics and earthly life". Additionally, the ideal statesman does not fixate on the earthly to the detriment of the cosmic (McConnell 2017, pp. 50–51).

The only remaining element of the epiphanic motif to consider is (3) the speech of the otherworldly being. It is in this moment that the epiphanic witness receives information and a commission. In other words, they attain new information and learn what they are to do with it. As external audience, we know that these characters will succeed in fulfilling their respective commissions—the story's framework has already conveyed this to us (see above). This neat circular presentation not only reinforces the traveller's status, which was already established by the story's pseudepigraphic attribution, but also connects the external audience to the narrated events. We implicitly know that the hero will succeed in his given quest, because if he had failed, we would not be hearing the first-hand account of his travels. However, there is yet more conveyed by the (3) speech in each story. In analysing them, we further understand the socio-political vision of the storytellers and how this narrative element contributes to the story's rhetoric of authority.

All three men are explicitly commanded to act as intermediaries between the Beyond and this world. To do so, they must watch and listen. The judges say that Er must "listen to and observe everything in that place" (*Pl. Resp.* 614d); God says, "hear my voice" to Enoch (καὶ τῇς φωνῇς μου ἄκουσον; *1 En* 15: 2); and Africanus tells Scipio to "imprint

[Africanus'] words upon [Scipio's] memory" (*quae dicam, trade memoriae*; Cic. *Rep.* 6.10). Cultural expectations of how one gathers information in the Beyond is thus shared across the times and places of the storytellers.⁴⁷ Er, Enoch, and Scipio gather knowledge as any other traveller would—by seeing and hearing.

The (3) speeches also contain hints about morality and the audience's ability to emulate the protagonists. Er is seemingly chosen at random. Socrates has presented him as a brave man (*Resp.* 614a), but the selection criteria used by the otherworldly beings who chose Er are never mentioned. The two judges who determine the souls' punishments and rewards simply say that Er must "listen to and observe everything in that place" in order to be "a messenger to mankind" (*Resp.* 614d). The absence of any qualifications that might be particular to Er once again suggests a certain universality. Anyone could be Er.

Of Enoch and Scipio, however, this is not the case. Not just anyone could fulfil their commissions, and the individual's morals feature prominently in how the otherworldly beings speak to them. Enoch is hailed as "scribe of justice" (ὁ γραμματεὺς τῆς δικαιοσύνης; 1 *En* 12:3–4) and "truthful man and scribe of truth" (ἄνθρωπος ἀληθινὸς καὶ γραμματεὺς τῆς ἀληθείας; 1 *En* 15:1)⁴⁸ Scipio is told by Africanus that it will be his adoptive grandson's "duty to hold up before the fatherland the light of [his] character, [his] ability, and [his] wisdom." (*animi, ingenii consilii tui*; Cic. *Rep.* 6.12). For these two protagonists, their status as divinely appointed messengers become a self-fulfilling prophecy: it is because they were good role models that they were chosen to be role models and messengers. All subsequent travel to and in the Beyond is predicated on the hero's preexisting moral fibre.

In this section, I have used the five elements of literary epiphany to analyse the interactions between the traveller, their tour guides, and their itineraries in the Myth of Er, the Book of the Watchers, and the Dream of Scipio. Of the tropes of legitimisation studied here, epiphany is particularly effective for disrupting spatiality, as the moment of encounter between worldly and otherworldly beings temporarily blurs the boundaries between the spaces in which the beings are typically found. In many stories, epiphany results in an incursion of otherworldly space into worldly space.⁴⁹ Because an epiphany can happen anywhere, having the witness to epiphany travel to the place in which they will experience divine encounter contributes to the legitimising function of cosmic travel. Moreover, witnessing epiphany in the Beyond, the 'natural habitat' of the beings capable of causing epiphanic response, is part of a literary strategy to naturalise the eschatological functions of cosmic geography, for both these and the divine beings who govern them are part and parcel of the otherworldly terrain.

5. Conclusions: The Trope of Cosmic Travel

We have now journeyed through the five features of cosmic travel—the traveller (Section 4.1), the means of accessing other space and movement therein (Section 4.2), points of departure (Section 4.3), and the otherworldly tour guide and cosmic itineraries (Section 4.4). This organisational schema's features elucidated the feedback loop of various literary conventions and socio-economic norms. Pseudepigraphy, epiphany, and autopsy (literary conventions) in conjunction with assumptions about gender, political status, and technical expertise like military training or scribal proficiency (socio-economic norms), operate as internal legitimising technics for characters and information in ways that mirror the historical realities of the authors and earliest audiences. As pre-established literary conventions and socio-economic norms, this mirroring simultaneously draws on and reinforces the audience's expectations (Fowler 2017, p. 243). Herein lies the rhetoric of authority of these three stories, which emerges from the totality of the combined tropes of legitimacy. These stories claim a four-fold authority through the legitimacies of pseudepigraphy, travel, autopsy, and epiphany. In other words, the pseudepigraphic figure legitimises the travel, both of which legitimise their autopsy, and all three are legitimised by epiphany. The total effect of cosmic travel is greater than the sum of its tropes.

However, what use is there in identifying the layers of social and literary conventions, rhetorical strategies, and legitimising claims comprising cosmic travel comparatively in

the Myth of Er, the Book of the Watchers, and the Dream of Scipio? In comparing the *how* of these narratives, rather than the *what*, the overwhelming impression is one of similarity. Each of these stories, in its own way, uses the trope of cosmic travel to invite the reader/audience to reflect upon the eschatological consequences of present, earthly actions. In the words of Harry Maier, these stories offer “a paraenetic means of projecting oneself beyond the end to reveal what one ought to be in the present” (Maier 1997, p. 133). In vicariously travelling through the gaze of the cosmic traveller, the reader/audience sees the same geographic sights as the traveller. Additionally, because geography holds locations of eschatological consequences in these stories, the reader/audience learns, reflects, and is tested along with the protagonists (Coblentz Bautch 2003, p. 247; McConnell 2017, p. 56). With Er, we hear of the tribulations or rewards of the departed souls (*Resp.* 614e–615b), and in learning how the souls’ decision-making influences their reincarnation (*Resp.* 618b–621d), the reader/audience thinks about what they might choose and why. When Enoch writes that his words are for a future, elect generation (*1 En* 1:1–3), when the reader/audience questions the otherworldly guides and learns of what wonders or terrors await (e.g., *1 En* 19:1), they can only hope to be among the god-chosen few and know that, like Enoch, they must be righteous and act appropriately within the cosmic hierarchy. Scipio’s father and grandfather test him in order to determine his greatness of soul (*magnitudo animi*), for only the greatest of souls “have the capacity to behold and to aspire to great things that transcend the local and indeed encompass the whole cosmos” (McConnell 2017, p. 55). This test extends out of the dream, as Scipio tests his internal audience, and even jumps off the page, as Scipio’s examination of his audience models Cicero’s testing of his own reader/audience (McConnell 2017, p. 55). Having read these stories in their entirety, the readers/audiences should “be digesting its central lessons and reflecting on the nature of our own attitudes and attributes” (McConnell 2017, p. 56). There remain important differences between these works; however, all three stories cross boundaries of time and space to reveal the “grand rational cosmic order of things” (McConnell 2017, p. 53; Goff 2016) and the consequences of human actions within this cosmic order.

Several further avenues of reflection also emerge from this comparison. First, further study of the Book of the Watchers in its Hellenistic and Roman contexts seems promising. In its Greek version, *1 Enoch* is said to be an illustration or analogy (*παράβολή*). Anyone educated enough to translate the Aramaic or Hebrew sources into Greek would have known the philosophical implications of this word, and therefore analysing this story in dialogue with Hellenistic philosophy would contribute to knowledge of contemporary Jewish thought.⁵⁰

In a similar vein, further comparison of the Book of the Watchers and the Dream of Scipio as rhetorics of empire would provide a productive complication of how narrative and politics interacted in the last centuries BCE. The mythic sites to which cosmic travel grants access provides a means of challenging hegemonic and colonial claims to contested spaces (Coblentz Bautch 2016, pp. 283–84). Both these stories exhibit convictions that the organisational structure running through this- and otherworldly spaces is controlled by a supreme God. The socio-political organisation of the two spaces is not different, it is not a mirror; they are one and the same.⁵¹ The authority to draw the boundaries of space and time are the products of power. To reject such spatio-temporal assertions is simultaneously to resist the powers seeking to impose their will but also to recognise that such an imposition is, in fact, happening. The ‘resistance’ thus simultaneously rejects and reifies that which it seeks to undermine.⁵² In light of the political realities these storytellers faced, one then wonders, is this literature one of resistance or escapism?

Finally, this study of cosmic travel raises questions of genre, its definition, and analytical application in the study of the ancient literature. Throughout this analysis, I have deliberately avoided genre-specific terminology. Genre remains, however, an important hermeneutical framework and socially significant reading practice. Because the Myth of Er and the Dream of Scipio use revelation to explain the acquisition of knowledge and are concerned with the fates of the dead and those who die unjustly or for a particular cause, must

we label these Greek and Latin works apocalypses? (Coblentz Baultch identifies these traits as central to apocalyptic literature; [Coblentz Baultch 2016](#), p. 288) Because the Greek *1 Enoch* is called a *παράβολή*, should we consider it to be philosophical illustration and number is among the works of Jewish Hellenistic philosophy alongside Philo of Alexandria?

Fascinating though they are, these questions will have to wait for another journey into the sources.

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Notes

- ¹ ‘Audience’ refers to any or all beings (human or otherwise) to whom a story is told in any medium. I distinguish throughout this article between an internal audience (story-world characters) and external audiences (historically situated readers or hearers).
- ² In order to draw out the similarities between the sources, I use deliberately ambiguous language. Locations outside the earthly realm are referred to as the ‘otherworld’ or ‘Beyond’, including space qua astronomical area; and non-human characters are ‘otherworldly’, ‘divine’, or other such non-confessionally loaded qualifiers. The manifestation of any otherworldly being is called and ‘epiphany’, regardless of what the epiphanic subject is called in any ancient language (e.g., *theos*, *el/eloim*, *angelos*, *m’lah*, *deus*, *daimon*, *fantasma*, hero, ancestor, etc.). To maintain this emphasis on similarities, I occasionally render terms in the primary source quotations with italics and a note, rather than translating them (e.g., *προφήτης* / *prophētēs*). Where I amend the translations to fit my lexical choices, I note my changes between square brackets (e.g., translating *δίκη* / *dike* and *justitia* and related words as ‘justice’ across the sources, rather than ‘righteous’ (cf. Nickelsburg’s translation of *1 Enoch*, e.g., *1 En* 12:4).
- ³ This connection with the known world distinguishes these stories from, for example, *Verae Historiae* by Lucian of Samosata. In Lucian’s story, he sails past the Pillars of Hercules, a geographic *topos* signifying his departure beyond the known and credible. ([Romm 1992](#), pp. 189, 194, 213; [Price 2017](#)).
- ⁴ These five features are of my own creation and serve as an organisational strategy more than anything.
- ⁵ All dates are BCE, unless stated otherwise.
- ⁶ ‘Otherworldly journeys’ are this study’s overarching categorization and selection criteria for sources, but there are others of equal merit, a comparison with which would engender other valuable conclusions. These three sources have much in common with paradoxography and near-death experiences, for example. The broad literary motif of wisdom attained through travel is, moreover, undoubtedly broader than the acquisition of knowledge through revelation studied here. Scholarship reflects these interconnected categories and themes. Cf., e.g., [Platthy \(1992\)](#); [Bremmer \(2002\)](#); [van der Sluijs \(2009\)](#); [Rocchetta \(2013\)](#); [Pörtulas \(2019\)](#); [Uusimäki \(2020\)](#).
- ⁷ On these subjects, see, for example, Anagnostopoulos’ and Lorenz’ chapters in *The Blackwell Guide to Plato’s Republic* ([Santas 2006](#)); and Castagnoli’s and Lorenz’ chapters in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato* ([Fine 2019](#)).
- ⁸ For a more complete introductions to *1 Enoch*, see the commentaries by Nickelsburg and VanderKam ([Nickelsburg 2001](#); [Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2016](#)).
- ⁹ On the perceptions and uses of Cicero in Late Antiquity, see ([Bishop 2015](#); [Ramelli 2015](#)).
- ¹⁰ Quotations from Plato’s *Republic* and Cicero’s *On the Republic* are from the Loeb Classical Library ([Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013](#); [Keyes 1928](#), respectively); I have adapted quotations of the Book of the Watchers from Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1* (2001) to reflect the Greek text of Black, *Apocalypsis Henochi Graece* ([Denis and Black 1970](#)).
- ¹¹ Najman and Garrison focus on texts and canons, and I have adapted their definition to suit my approach.
- ¹² Literary epiphanies are one type of narrated epiphany. Epiphanies in written and oral stories differ from those in visual modes, although both incorporate epiphanic *semeia*. On this, see [Petridou \(2016\)](#).
- ¹³ Scholars have speculated on the eastern provenance of or inspirations for the Myth of Er, pointing to Er’s origins in Pamphylia (contemporary Antalya province, Turkey) and the Pythagorean influences on the development of Plato’s thought as evidence

of eastern myth and culture on the Greek philosopher (Halliwell 2007; Gregory 2018); one scholar even argued that a common paradigm explains similarities between epiphanies of in the Myth of Er and the Book of Ezekiel (Bergren 2017). Cicero's intertextual relationship with Plato is clear and well studied (Schofield 2021). The Book of the Watcher's direct connection with any other sources is difficult to determine, as this composite source is in dialogue with many traditions, while quoting none (Nickelsburg 2001, p. 57; Zahn 2020, p. 192). In analysing *1 Enoch's* connections to other literature, scholars have argued for the influences of Mesopotamian, Babylonian, or Greek myths, literature and/or social customs on the Jewish story (Grelot 1958; Glasson 1961; Coblenz Bautch 2003; Bremmer 2014; Kosmin 2024). Tempting as it is to assert a direct influence, such arguments need to demonstrate not only plausible contact between cultures but also where and how direct access to a written source could have occurred. When attempted, such arguments are difficult to make convincingly (for discussion and good examples, see Popović 2014; Stevens 2019).

14 For studies on these sources' scientific contents or the question of sharing literary and technical knowledge, see (West 1997, 2007; Popović 2014; Stevens 2019).

15 I use these features for the organisation of this argument and am not arguing for their literary significance as narrative units in antiquity.

16 Ancient peoples were aware that those subjects now known as 'history' and 'myth' were different, as is demonstrated by various written and material sources. See, for example, the various discussions in Christopoulos et al. (2022).

17 Ἄλλ' οὐ μέντοι σοι, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, Ἀλκίμου γε ἀπόλογον ἔρω, ἀλλ' ἀλκίμου μὲν ἀνδρός, Ἡρὸς τοῦ Ἀρμενίου, τὸ γένος Παμφύλου· ὃς ποτε ἐν πολέμῳ τελευτήσας, ἀναιρεθέντων δεκαταίων τῶν νεκρῶν ἤδη διεφθαρμένων, ὑγιῆς μὲν ἀνῆρέθῃ, κομισθεὶς δ' οἴκαδε μέλλων θάπτεσθαι δωδεκαταῖος ἐπὶ τῇ πυρρᾷ κείμενος ἀνεβίω, ἀναβιὸς δ' ἔλεγεν ἃ ἐκεῖ ἴδοι.

18 Plato is critical of those lesser men who tell or listen to myths for pleasure, rather than educational purposes (Zeitlin 1996, p. 369). There is thus no inherent problem with philosophical myths for didactic use. Plato's criticisms and uses of myth are subjects of long-standing interest. See the collected volume, *Plato and Myth*, for an overview and case studies (Collobert et al. 2012).

19 On narrators in the *Odyssey*, see (Silk 2004). On Odysseus in the Greek imagination, see (Montiglio 2011). As a traveller on his own cosmic journey, see (Marinatos 2001). On the struggle for authority between the Greek genres of philosophy and poetry, see, e.g., (Gould 2014).

20 Classical representations of Odysseus are far from kind. In the Athenian tragedies, he is "most often portrayed as a man of evil counsel or an archdeceiver" (Zeitlin 1996, p. 360, n. 38). Socrates' (Plato's) objection to Odysseus protects philosophy from an association with Odysseus' reputation for being conniving. Thank you to Lilach Stone for pointing this out.

21 Plato's philosophical myth draws on several traditions, but it is difficult to say for certain whether he was influenced by sources from other cultures. Beginning with the historian Megasthenes (c. 300 BCE), there has been speculation about Plato's connection to Indian and Zoroastrian religion and myth (cf. Halliwell 1988, pp. 169–71).

22 Halliwell refers to the Pamphylian connection as a "hint of universalism" (Halliwell 2007, p. 448, n. 6).

23 Socrates shares his ability to interpret what Er sees with an otherworldly being whom Er meets in the Beyond. The Greek term for this being is *prophētēs* (προφήτην, (617d, 619d)), meaning a divinely chosen spokesperson. In their translation, Emlyn-Jones and Preddy refer to this being as "a sort of interpreter", presumably because he explains what is happening to the souls in the afterlife (617d, 619d), and to avoid the denotation and connotation issues of the English word 'prophet'.

24 Λόγος εὐλογίας Ἐνώχ, καθὼς εὐλόγησεν ἐκλεκτοὺς δικαίους οἵτινες ἔσονται εἰς ἡμέραν ἀνάγκης ἐξῆραι πάντας τοὺς ἐχθρούς, καὶ σωθήσονται δίκαιοι.

25 On the motif of knowledge transmission in *1 Enoch*, see (Reed 2004, 2005, 2014a, 2014b).

26 Scipio lived from 185 to 129.

27 *cum autem Karthaginem deleveris, triumphum egeris censorque fueris et obieris legatus Aegyptum, Syriam, Asiam, Graeciam, deligere iterum consul absens bellumque maximum conficies, Numantiam excindes. sed cum eris curru in Capitolium invectus, offendes rem publicam consiliis perturbatam nepotis mei* (6.11).

28 Prolepsis (flash-forward) and analepsis (flash-back) are literary devices that can operate within the narrative's temporal location (internal) or between the temporal locations of the narrative and the audience/reader (external) (Genette 1986; Currie 2006).

29 *Hic tu, Africane, ostendas oportebit patriae lumen animi, ingenii consiliiue tui. sed eius temporis ancipitem video quasi fatorum viam.* (6.12)

30 Acting as tribune of the plebs in 133, Tiberius created land reforms, but operated outside the Republic legal norms to do so; his actions garnered him much popular support, but the enmity of most of the senatorial class. Tiberius was assassinated in 132. Scipio was a major opponent of Tiberius' political works, and there was speculation about the cause of Scipio's own death in 129, which followed Tiberius' so swiftly (Dillon and Garland 2021, p. 381).

31 Africanus' socio-political commentary stems from Cicero's opinions of Roman political factions more broadly. Divided into two, there were the *optimates*, a group whose "policies won the approval of all the best citizens", and the *populares*, made up of individuals "who wanted everything they did and said to be agreeable to the masses" (Sest. 96). Cicero favoured the *optimates* (Dillon and Garland 2021, pp. 397–98). For an overview of the political history, see chapters 10 and 14 in Dillon and Garland (2021), and Fisher (2021).

The Greek versification is different. This pericope is 17:7 in Nickelsburg.

For a reading focused on Enoch's travels, see Sulzbach's article, "When Going on a Heavenly Journey" (Sulzbach 2010).

For an overview of Dan's significance as a sacred location, see "Excursus: Sacred Geography in 1 Enoch 6–16" in (Nickelsburg 2001, pp. 238–47; Coblentz Bautch 2003, pp. 60–66, 77–78).

The association of travel, cultic aetiology, and epiphany is not unique to these three stories. Other examples are Jacob building an altar where he encounters El during his travels and which he names Beth-El (house of El, Gen 35:7), or Queen Metaneira hosting the mourning Demeter in Eleusis, and the goddess' establishment of the cult (Homeric Hymn to Demeter vv. 90–304 in West 2003).

This association has further significance once we consider that the journey itself, across this- and the otherworldly dimension, and through time means that everything is build up and out from this place. The centre is not, e.g., Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Babylonia, or Rome, but Hermon in Dan.

Sarah Iles Johnston refers to the gods and heroes of Greek myth as the 'Invisible Other' (Johnston 2018, p. 28). This term facilitates her analysis of how otherworldly beings were thought to participate in society. Johnston discusses the tensions between wanting a deity who is simultaneously more 'human', thus in whom it is easier to believe, who is 'theologically correct', or through whom the universe is explicable. See chapters 3 and 4 for her discussion.

The concepts and personifications of death (Thanatos) and sleep (Hypnos) were closely linked in Hellenic myth and imagery (cf. Hesiod, *Theogony*, vv. 758–61, 762–6). On the liminality of death and sleep in Greek literature, see Jan Bremmer's chapter in *Ultimate Ambiguities* (Bremmer 2015). For ancient Israelite relations with the dead, see (Schmidt 1994, 2020).

καὶ πορευθεὶς ἐκάθισα ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων Δὲν ἐν γῇ Δάν, ἥτις ἐστὶν ἐκ δεξιῶν Ἐρμῶν εἰς δὲ δόσεως· ἀνεγίνωσκον τὸ ὑπόμνημα αὐτῶν δεικνύων αὐτῶν (1 En 13:7).

Georgia Petridou's work on epiphanies has demonstrated that epiphanies differ in their spatial and temporal loci, depending upon their narrative function. The most common time for epiphanies was midday, for this moment "is an interstitial period of time", which "mediates between the rising of the sun and its setting" (2016, p. 236). This is particularly true in stories where the preparatory activity is one that is both interstitial and depends upon light, like the work of shepherds, goatherds, hunters, and travellers (2016, p. 210). A nocturnal divine encounter tends to be associated with erotic epiphanies.

Itineraria (*itinerarium* in the singular) were lists of stations along roads. See (Brodersen 2010, p. 828).

καὶ ἀφικνεῖσθαι τετραταίους ὅθεν καθορᾶν ἄνωθεν διὰ παντός τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς τεταμένον φῶς εὐθύ, οἷον κίονα, μάλιστα τῇ ἱριδι προσφερέες, λαμπρότερον δὲ καὶ καθαρότερον.

As Coblentz Bautch points out, this is equally true in the Myth of Er.

quorum unus est caelestis, extumus, qui reliquos omnes complectitur, summus ipse deus arcens et continens ceteros.

"And they took me (and) led (me) away to a certain place in which those who were there were like a flaming fire; and whenever they wished, they appeared as men." (Καὶ παραλαβόντες με εἰς τινα τόπον ἀπῆγαγον, ἐν ᾧ οἱ ὄντες ἐκεῖ γίνονται ὡς πῦρ φλέγον καὶ, ὅταν θέλωσιν, φαίνονται ὡσεὶ ἄνθρωποι. 1 En 17:1); "For man was given life that he might inhabit that sphere called Earth, which you see in the centre of this temple; and he has been given a soul out of those eternal fires which you call stars and planets, which, being round and globular bodies animated by divine intelligences, circle about in their fixed orbits with marvellous speed" (*homines enim sunt hac lege generati, qui tuerentur illum globum, quem in hoc templo medium vides, quae terra dicitur, hisque animus datus est ex illis sempiternis ignibus, quae sidera et stellas vocatis, quae globosae et rotundae, divinis animatae mentibus, circulos suos orbesque conficiunt celeritate mirabili. Rep. 6.15*).

"just as the eternal God moves the universe, which is partly mortal, so an immortal spirit moves the frail body." (*et ut mundum ex quadam parte mortalem ipse deus aeternus, sic fragile corpus animus sempiternus movet; Cic. Rep. 6.26*).

Enoch and Scipio's encounters with beings from the Beyond also include the common reassurance by the manifesting being: "Fear not, Enoch, righteous man and scribe of truth. Come here, and hear my voice (μὴ φοβηθῆς, Ἐνώχ, ἄνθρωπος ἀληθινὸς καὶ γραμματεὺς τῆς ἀληθείας· πρόσσελθε ὧδε, καὶ τῆς φωνῆς μου ἄκουσον). Go and say to the watchers of heaven. . ." (1 En 15:1–2). "Courage, Scipio, have no fear, but imprint my words upon your memory" (*Ades, inquit, animo et omittite timorem, Scipio, et, quae dicam, trade memoriae; Cic. Rep. 6.10*). Encounters with the otherworldly were inherently dangerous, and such statements are common in literary epiphanies—in either a positive ('take courage', e.g., *Aseneth* 14:11) or negative formulation ('fear not', e.g., Gen 21:17; Dan 10:12; Luke 1:13, 29). Aphrodite's words to Anchises are an example of a formulation that is both positive and negative: "Anchises, most glorious of mortal men, be of good courage, and let your heart not be too afraid. You need have no fear of suffering any harm from me or the other blessed ones, for you are dear to the gods indeed." (Ἀγχίση, κύδιστε καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων, θάρσει, μηδέ τι σῆσι μετὰ φρεσὶ δεῖδιθι λίην· οὐ γάρ τοί τι δέος παθέειν κακὸν ἐξ ἐμέθεν γε οὐδ' ἄλλων μακάρων, ἐπεὶ ἡ φίλος ἐσοὶ θεοῖσιν. H.H. to Aphrodite 192–195).

These are the author's translations.

Examples: In the Homeric Hymns to Demeter, Aphrodite, Apollo, and Dionysus, the respective gods appear in earthly spaces. Messengers from God visit humans in earthly space throughout the early Jewish and Second Temple Jewish literature (see note 47 for sample references).

- 50 There exists a significant academic corpus on Greek-language education in antiquity (Cf., e.g., Morgan 1998; Cribiore 2005; Bloomer 2015; Zurawski and Boccaccini 2017).
- 51 It is more apt here to say that mirroring is happening between the narrated world and the audiences' world; the 'real' world and the 'Beyond'—in both the narrated and audiences' worlds—are connected extensions of each other.
- 52 As an example, Bowditch does an excellent job of explaining this tension in Latin elegiac poetry, which is both the product of, incorporates, and rejects Roman imperial discourses (Bowditch 2023).

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