

# The God Came to Me in a Dream: Epiphanies in Voluntary Associations as a Context for Paul's Vision of Christ\*

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## ■ Abstract

Much of the written evidence for Greco-Roman associations provides information about meeting frequency, group activities, venues for gathering, and membership requirements. At the same time, many inscriptions and papyri also contain short narratives that directly contribute to the common identity of the association. These narrative elements often take the form of a vision, a dream, or an oracle that a patron receives that encourages him or her to found the association or direct its practices in some way. I suggest in this article that many of Paul's audiences would have received his story about encountering the risen Christ as rather commonplace given the frequency of these similar claims among voluntary associations. In other words, the article explores how Paul's (mainly non-Judean) audiences would have slotted his claims into their cultural repertoire of ideas, especially if they considered his Christ group to be just like the many other associations with which they were already familiar. Association inscriptions offer an important collection of examples that can be analyzed alongside Paul's claim to have seen the risen Christ.

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## ■ Introduction

While much of the written evidence for Greco-Roman associations provides information about meeting frequency, group activities, venues for gathering, and membership requirements, many inscriptions and papyri also contain narrative elements that directly contribute to the common identity of the association. These narrative elements often take the form of a vision, a dream, or an oracle (sometimes involving a direct encounter with a deity) that a patron receives that encourages him or her to found the association or direct its practices in some way. Because of this, in all likelihood, association members expected to encounter such myths of origin as part of their affiliation with a group. These narrative elements thus provided a number of “benefits” to an association: prestige and authority (primarily for the patron or founder, but secondarily for the other members); a common feature for their shared identity; and temporal connections beyond the present. Identity is a notoriously tricky concept in the social sciences, for it is often deployed rather imprecisely.<sup>1</sup> I here use “identity” mainly to indicate the sense of belonging, connection, and shared history and experience that people feel as part of a group (whether such connections and experiences can be empirically demonstrated or not). My goal is to explore how group members managed their shared cultural resources (in this case, stories about Christ) and which interpretative frameworks make them meaningful.

Recent research convincingly shows that many aspects of Pauline groups can be elucidated by comparison with voluntary associations.<sup>2</sup> By comparing Paul’s groups with these associations, it is possible to generate new insights about the likely

<sup>1</sup> As discussed aptly in Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) 1–63. Brubaker (with Frederick Cooper) elsewhere laments identity thus: “The term is richly—indeed for an analytical concept, hopelessly—ambiguous” (“Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 [2000] 1–47, at 6).

<sup>2</sup> James Luther Adams, *Voluntary Associations: Socio-Cultural Analysis and Theological Interpretations* (Chicago: Exploration, 1986); Richard S. Ascough, “Greco-Roman Philosophic, Religious, and Voluntary Associations” in *Community Formation in the Early Church and the Church Today* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002) 3–19; idem, “Voluntary Associations and the Formation of Pauline Churches: Addressing the Objections” in *Vereine, Synagogen und Gemeinden im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien* (ed. Andreas Gutsfeld and Dietrich-Alex Koch; STAC 25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 149–83; John S. Kloppenborg, “Edwin Hatch, Churches and Collegia” in *Origins and Method: Towards a New Understanding of Judaism and Christianity. Essays in Honour of John C. Hurd* (ed. Bradley H. McLean; JSNTSup 86; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 212–38; idem, “Collegia and Thiasoi: Issues in Function, Taxonomy and Membership” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson; London: Routledge, 1996) 16–30; Richard Last, “Communities That Write: Christ-Groups, Associations, and Gospel Communities,” *NTS* 58 (2012) 173–98.

size and frequency of meetings,<sup>3</sup> venues for socializing,<sup>4</sup> financial dealings within the groups,<sup>5</sup> internal activities and organizational structures,<sup>6</sup> and relationships to other groups.<sup>7</sup> This is not to suppose that Paul's groups were simply voluntary associations, but rather to suggest that given the commonality of such associations, the mechanics of his groups may have functioned similarly to them and that many members may have anticipated similar benefits from joining a Christ group as they did for associations. Whereas most of these comparative studies illuminate the socio-historical context of Paul's groups, I will argue that associations can help us better understand the ideological content of his letters as well.

Toward that end, I suggest in this article that many of Paul's audiences would have received his story about encountering the risen Christ as rather commonplace given the frequency of other similar claims among voluntary associations. Paul's claim to have encountered a deity in a vision, which in turn provided the impetus and the justification for him to "found" Christ groups throughout the eastern empire, is an entirely ordinary way to narrate the origins of an ancient association and was likely regarded as such, and not necessarily as a self-evidently exceptional or unique encounter with Christ. To be clear, this discussion is not about what actually happened to Paul to initiate his "conversion," nor is it about how resurrection was understood in the ancient context. Rather, my interest is in how Paul's (mainly non-Judean) audiences would have categorized his claims within their cultural

<sup>3</sup> Luther H. Martin, "When Size Matters: Social Formations in the Early Roman Empire" in *The One Who Sows Bountifully*: Essays in Honor of Stanley K. Stowers (ed. Caroline Johnson Hodge et al.; Brown Judaic Studies 356; Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2013) 229–41; Richard S. Ascough, "Reimagining the Size of Pauline Christ Groups in Light of Association Meeting Places" in *Scribal Practices and Social Structures Among Jesus Adherents: Essays in Honour of John S. Kloppenborg* (ed. William E. Arnal et al.; BETL 285; Leuven: Peeters, 2016) 547–65.

<sup>4</sup> Inge Nielsen, *Housing the Chosen: The Architectural Context of Mystery Groups and Religious Associations in the Ancient World* (Contextualizing the Sacred; Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Last and Sarah Rollens, "Accounting Practices in P.Tebt. III/2 894 and Pauline Groups," *Early Christianity* 5 (2014) 441–74; see, for instance, an earlier examination of the financial aspects of Jews and Christians in John M. G. Barclay, "Money and Meetings: Group Formation among Diaspora Jews and Early Christians" in *Vereine, Synagogen und Gemeinden im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien* (ed. Andreas Gutsfeld and Dietrich-Alex Koch; STAC 25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 113–28.

<sup>6</sup> Markus Öhler, "Cultic Meals in Associations and the Early Christian Eucharist," *Early Christianity* 5 (2014) 475–502; Richard S. Ascough, "The Thessalonian Christian Community as a Professional Voluntary Association," *JBL* 119 (2000) 311–28; Richard Last, *The Pauline Church and the Corinthian Ekklesia: Greco-Roman Associations in Comparative Context* (SNTS Monograph Series 164; Cambridge University Press, 2015); Timothy A. Brookins, "The Supposed Election of Officers in 1 Cor 11.19: A Response to Richard Last [2013]," *NTS* 60.3 (2014) 423–32; Philip A. Harland, "Familial Dimensions of Group Identity: 'Brothers' (ἀδελφοί) in Associations of the Greek East," *JBL* 124 (2005) 491–513; idem, "Familial Dimensions of Group Identity (II): 'Mothers' and 'Fathers' in Associations and Synagogues of the Greek World," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 38 (2007) 57–79; John S. Kloppenborg, "Greco-Roman *Thiasoi*, the *Ekklesia* at Corinth, and Conflict Management" in *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians* (ed. Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller; ECL 5; Atlanta: Scholars, 2011) 186–218.

<sup>7</sup> Richard S. Ascough, "Translocal Relationships Among Voluntary Associations and Early Christianity," *JCEC* 5 (1997) 223–41.

repertoire of ideas, especially if they considered his Christ group to be quite like the many other associations with which they were already familiar.<sup>8</sup>

### ■ The Nature of the Evidence and the Context of Interpretation

We know a great deal about ancient associations based on the written records that they left. These records exist in documentary papyri, inscriptions, ostraca, and other forms, and they recount such mundane affairs of associations as meeting frequency, membership lists, initiation requirements, fees and fines associated with the group, and regulations for meetings, inter alia. Scholars of Christian origins have made increasingly strong cases that these social forms can help us understand the dynamics of urban Christ groups.<sup>9</sup> Without rehashing the entire debate, which has been made more convincingly by others, I will simply state that the comparison is an analogical one: by studying associations for their social dynamics, we can gain better insight into and generate new questions about Paul's groups. Whether or not Paul intended to found an association that was akin to the hundreds of others for which we have literary evidence, his audiences were no doubt familiar with those social forms, which in turn likely influenced their expectations about what they would experience during their affiliation with the Christ groups.

It is also necessary to comment on the ubiquity of visions, dreams, and other epiphanies and their roles in divine communication, since these phenomena will

<sup>8</sup> For Jewish audiences, there are countless examples from Judean scriptures to provide more context for epiphanies and heavenly journeys (see "*I Lifted My Eyes and Saw*": *Reading Dream and Vision Reports in the Hebrew Bible* [ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer and Elizabeth R. Hayes, LHBOTS 584; London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014]). Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones ("The Ascent into Paradise [2 Cor 12:1–12]: Paul's Merkava Vision and Apostolic Call," in *Second Corinthians in the Perspective of Late Second Temple Judaism* [ed. Reimund Bieringer, Emmanuel Nathan, and Didier Pollefeyt; *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* 14; Leiden: Brill, 2014] 245–85) has recently analyzed Paul's claims in light of Second Temple Jewish mystical experiences. See also Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, "The Heavenly Journey in Paul: Tradition of a Jewish Apocalyptic Literary Genre or Cultural Practice in A Hellenistic-Roman Context?" in *Paul's Jewish Matrix* (ed. Thomas G. Casey and Justin Taylor; Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press; Stimulus Books, 2011) 167–200; Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians* (The New Testament Library; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003) 279; James Buchanan Wallace, *Snatched into Paradise* (2 Cor. 12:1–10): *Paul's Heavenly Journey in the Context of Early Christian Experience* (New York: De Gruyter, 2011). All of these studies of Paul's visions draw their comparanda from ancient literature, whereas this analysis brings epigraphic evidence into the discussion.

<sup>9</sup> See *Greco-Roman Associations, Texts, Translations, and Commentary, Volume 1: Attica, Central Greece, Macedonia, Thrace* (ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Richard S. Ascough; BZNW 181; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011) 1–13; Ascough, "The Thessalonian Christian Community," *ibid.*, 311–28; Richard S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians* (WUNT II 161; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); *idem*, "Voluntary Associations and the Formation of Pauline Christian Communities"; Last, *The Pauline Church and the Corinthian Ekklesia*; Last and Rollens, "Accounting Practices in P.Tebt. III/2 894 and Pauline Groups"; Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003); Rachael McRae, "Eating with Honor: The Corinthian Lord's Supper in Light of Voluntary Association Meal Practices," *JBL* 130 (2011) 165–81.

be the primary point of comparison between associations and Paul's groups in this analysis. As one scholar has noted, "[e]pigraphs record quite frequently that the faithful made their consecration by divine order (*ex iussu, ex epitagès* in Greek), after a vision (*ex uisu*) considered as being premonitory (*ex monitu*), [or] after a dream (*kat' onar*)."<sup>10</sup> Another scholar emphasizes the frequencies even more bluntly: "virtually all deities ultimately appeared in dreams."<sup>11</sup> Such visions were so common that there is a well-documented literary form that the reports of dreams and visions tended to take.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, there is an entire genre of "message"<sup>13</sup> dreams and visions, wherein a (usually divine) visitor speaks to the seer and the latter is spurred to some action. Visions and dreams, moreover, were not necessarily even treated as distinct phenomena by ancient Romans.<sup>14</sup> Yet, in modern theologically-motivated analyses, Paul's vision of Jesus is regarded as singular, remarkable, and life-changing. The post-resurrection visions of the disciples are treated similarly. Not only are such encounters not unique in the ancient world, they are not even unique cross-culturally. Contemporary research on polyphasic societies documents the routine nature of experiencing visions of deceased people and the blurring of dream states with ordinary time.<sup>15</sup> This means that in encountering a deceased

<sup>10</sup> Nicole Belayche, "Religious Actors in Daily Life: Practices and Beliefs," in *A Companion to Roman Religion* (ed. Jörg Rüpke; Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) 275–91, at 285. See also Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Greco-Roman Religions* (trans. Brian McNeil; Studies of the New Testament and Its World; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000) 204–209.

<sup>11</sup> J. S. Hanson, "Dreams and Visions in the Greco-Roman World and Early Christianity," in *ANRW* 23 (1980) 1395–1427, at 1397. Moreover, the majority of ancient authors who left extensive writings (from Cicero to Homer, Aristotle to Josephus, Plato to Herodotus, inter alia) comment on dreams, visions, and their meaning, though they are sometimes skeptical of what people claim to have experienced. Even the *Epic of Gilgamesh* presumes the importance of dreams for communicating divine messages, though it does not include any reflection upon them in the abstract sense.

<sup>12</sup> Hanson, "Dreams and Visions," 1405–407.

<sup>13</sup> A. Leo Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 46.3; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956) 179–373; see also, Juliette Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire: Cultural Memory and Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) 88–97.

<sup>14</sup> After observing the wide range of terminology that ancient authors used to describe such phenomena, Hanson remarks that these observations imply that there is "difficulty, if not impossibility, of distinguishing between a dream and a vision. For regardless of the term used, the formal structure and the literary function of these accounts remains the same" ("Dreams and Visions," 1408). There also appears to be "a lack of consistent discrimination between waking and sleeping in connection with any particular term" (1408). And further, "the rather rigid distinction between the terms dream (a sleeping phenomenon) and vision (a waking phenomenon) is not paralleled in antiquity" (1409). He opts for the phrase "dream-vision" (1408) to overcome these difficulties. Harrison illuminates part of the supposed confusion by noting that the ancient understanding of dreams is often treated in the context of discussions of vision and sight (*Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire*, 29).

<sup>15</sup> Pieter Craffert, *The Life of a Galilean Shaman: Jesus of Nazareth in Anthropological-Historical Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2008); idem, "Altered States of Consciousness: Visions, Spirit Possession, Sky Journeys" in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament* (ed. Richard DeMaris and Dietmar Neufeld; Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009) 126–46. Harrison

person in a vision, then, Paul was simply doing what many others did in his socio-cultural context.<sup>16</sup>

That these experiences would be used for social currency and embedded in inscriptions and other written sources important to a group is to be expected. The appeal to visions or dreams as forms of legitimation is a particularly common strategy to cultivate authority. Gregor Weber has explored the sociology of dreaming and seeing visions in antiquity and how they translated into social capital for the seer.<sup>17</sup> His interest is not in the occurrence of dreams and visions per se, but rather the act of articulating them and the strategies for turning them into cultural resources. A dream or vision told to others, he argues, requires selection and shaping in its articulation, and thus only exists as a kind of discursive product.<sup>18</sup> The literary reports of dreams and visions should be treated as “deliberate acts of narration”<sup>19</sup> that take their form in relation to social conventions and cultural expectations.

In a similar vein, the next part of this article will examine the “narrative” elements within association evidence,<sup>20</sup> especially references to visions, dreams, and other origins stories that connect to the identity of the groups. We will be especially concerned with the production of social status and group identifications that such elements make possible. This discussion will set the stage to suggest that, if Paul’s audiences were familiar with these sorts of ideas in associations, they would expect them to play a similar role within Paul’s groups, which will lead us to explore in a new way how Paul’s story of seeing the risen Christ would have been received and interpreted by his groups.

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observes, however, that ancient authors could make a distinction between visions seen while awake and while sleeping if it were deemed necessary (*Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire*, 35).

<sup>16</sup> As Heidi Wendt observes, Paul was “hardly unique among first-century Judeans in adducing literary mysteries, prophecies, and eschatological narratives from Judean writings, nor, for that matter, in receiving messages from God through revelations, dreams, or other methods of divination” (*At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016] 154).

<sup>17</sup> Gregor Weber, *Kaiser, Träume und Visionen in Prizipat und Spätantike* (Historia Einzelschriften 143; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Harrison also notes that we only have access to dreams as discursive reports: Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire*, 9, 49, and elsewhere. Hanson, “Dreams and Visions in the Greco-Roman World and Early Christianity,” 1400–1401.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire*, 50.

<sup>20</sup> In the accompanying chart at the end of this article, I have included a number of examples as reference points to illustrate my argument. They are certainly not exhaustive, as there are still unpublished materials from ancient associations. There are enough examples included, nevertheless, to illustrate common conventions in connecting encounters with deities through dreams, visions, oracles, and the like to the founding and current practices of different associations. I have also included on the chart the evidence from Paul’s letters, which I will treat analogously to the associations data in the final portion of this article.

## ■ Narratives at Work in Voluntary Associations

The claim to have a vision or dream involving a deity automatically bestowed prestige and authority on the person who professed it. Such authority was especially useful for bolstering political power. Warren Carter explains how Roman emperors often understood their right to rule to stem from divine encounters: “Individual emperors needed to demonstrate that they were recipients of divine favor. Various accounts narrate amazing signs, dreams, and experiences that were understood to show the gods’ election of particular emperors.”<sup>21</sup> To offer one concrete example, consider Suetonius’s account of Vespasian’s prescient dream:

He dreamed in Greece that the beginning of good fortune for himself and his family would come as soon as Nero had a tooth extracted; and on the next day it came to pass that a physician walked into the hall and showed him a tooth which he had just then taken out. . . . Omens were also reported from Rome: Nero in his latter days was admonished in a dream to take the sacred chariot of Jupiter Optimus Maximus from its shrine to the house of Vespasian and from there to the Circus.<sup>22</sup>

These dreams, although not explicitly narrating an encounter with a deity, nevertheless create the appearance of bestowing divine sanction on the soon-to-be emperor and his actions. Other famous (though highly Christianized) examples from a slightly later period are Constantine’s visions first of the cross in the sky and then of “the Christ of God,”<sup>23</sup> which subsequently became the mythic founding story of the Christian Roman Empire. As Juliette Harrison observes in her cataloguing of dream reports in Roman literature, “The directness and the clarity of the message was important [for rulers]; it was necessary that there be no room for interpretation or questioning, as this would defeat the purpose of the dream, which was to remove any doubt as to the rightfulness of the dreamer’s actions.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, it is a virtual truism that ancient rulers relied on visions, dreams, and other similar divine oracles for divine sanction of their reigns.

But these sorts of claims were meaningful to “ordinary” (non-elite, non-governing) people as well and could be used by them to justify rather commonplace

<sup>21</sup> Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007) 7.

<sup>22</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars* [Vespasian], Volume II (trans. J. C. Rolfe; LCL 38; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914) 5.5–7.

<sup>23</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series, Vol. 1. (trans. Ernest Cushing Richardson; ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890) 1.28–29.

<sup>24</sup> Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire*, 89. Vespasian’s dream falls into Harrison’s broader category of “message dreams,” which act to justify action for the recipient. In ancient “imaginative” literature (Harrison’s classification over against ancient “historical” literature), divine message dreams occur frequently, but in the first and second centuries CE, tend to give way to more generally symbolic dreams. Regardless, the literary trope of a divine messenger in a dream or vision would have been commonplace.

actions, such as founding an association or setting up a dedicatory statue.<sup>25</sup> Several examples from the inscriptional evidence for associations tap into the authority that stems from divine communication.<sup>26</sup> Consider *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 985:

- 1 ἀγαθῆι τ[ύχηι].  
 ἀνεγράφησαν ἐφ' ὑγείαι κα[ὶ κοινῆι σωτηρίαι]  
 καὶ δόξῃ τῇ ἀρίστῃ τὰ δοθέ[ντα παραγγέλμα-]  
 τα Διονυσίω καθ' ὕπνον π[ρόσοδον διδόν-]  
 5 τ' εἰς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ οἶκον ἀνδρά[σι καὶ γυναῖξιν]  
 ἐλευθέρους καὶ οἰκέταις. Διὸς [γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ]  
 τοῦ Εὐμενοῦς καὶ Ἑστίας τ[ῆς παρέδρου αὐ-]  
 τοῦ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων θεῶν Σωτ[ήρων καὶ Εὐδαι-]  
 μονίας καὶ Πλούτου καὶ Ἀρετῆς [καὶ Ὑγείας]  
 10 καὶ Τύχης Ἀγαθῆς καὶ Ἀγαθοῦ [Δαίμονος καὶ Μνή-]  
 μης καὶ Χαρίτων καὶ Νίκης εἰσὶν ἰδ[ρυμένοι βωμοί].  
 τούτ[ῳ] δέδωκεν ὁ Ζεὺς παραγγέλ[ματα τοὺς τε ἀ-]  
 γνισμοὺς καὶ τοὺς καθαρμοὺς κ[αὶ τὰ μυστήρια ἐπι]  
 τελεῖν κατὰ τε τὰ πάτρια καὶ ὡς νῦν [γέγραπται: . . .

To good fortune! For health, . . . common salvation (?), and the best reputation, . . . the instructions (?) . . . which were given to Dionysios in his sleep were written down, . . . giving access (?) . . . into his house (oikos) to men . . . and women (?), free people and household slaves. . . . For in this house altars (?) . . . have been set up for Zeus Eumenes and Hestia . . . his consort (?), for the other Saviour gods, and for Eudaimonia (“Prosperity”), Ploutos (“Wealth”), Arete (“Virtue”), . . . Hygeia (“Health”) (?), Agathe Tyche (“Good Fortune”), Agathos . . . Daimon (“Good Spirit”) (?), Mneme (“Memory”), the Charitai (“the Graces”), and Nike (“Victory”). Zeus has given instructions to this man for the performance of the purifications, the cleansings, . . . and the mysteries (?) . . . in accordance with ancestral custom and in accordance with what has now . . . been written here (?): . . .<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Jean Bottéro (*Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* [trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992] 113) explains that exceptional divinatory dreams were often claimed by elite figures, but even common people were also accustomed to examining their dreams for symbolic meaning and prognostications. See also Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire*, 211. On dreams and the founding of cultic associations, see Cyril J. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948) 24; Gil Renberg, “‘Commanded by the Gods’: An Epigraphical Study of Dreams and Visions in Greek and Roman Religious Life” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2003). And note Plato, *Epinomis* 985c.

<sup>26</sup> Discerning the desires of the gods was critical when founding a city (Diliana N. Angelova, *Sacred Founders: Women, Men, and the Gods in the Discourse of Imperial Founding, Rome through Early Byzantium* [Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015] 26–43), and since associations often mimic civic structure, it is reasonable to assume that some sort of divine auspices would be important for the founding of a voluntary association.

<sup>27</sup> The remainder of the inscription outlines the group’s regulations. Greek text and translation taken from Philip Harland, “[121] Divine Instructions for the Household Association of Dionysios (late II-early I BCE),” *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: An Expanding Collection of Inscriptions, Papyri, and Other Sources in Translation*, 10 November 2011, <http://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/divine-instructions-for-the-household-association-of-dionysios/>.

In this inscription, a householder known as Dionysios is singled out to receive instructions from a deity in a dream. Within the context of his household, his authority, which probably already existed due to his status as head of the household, is heightened by his encounter with this deity, and it sanctions him to pronounce the regulations of the association. Similarly, in *IG X/2.1 255*, we find the following:

...  
 κομίζεσθαι ἐν οἶκον ἔδοξε καθ' ὑπ<v>ον ἐπιστάντα  
 [ν παρ' αὐ]τὸν Σάραπιν ἐπιτάξει ὅπως παραγενόμενος ἐν Ὀποῦντα  
 5 ν ἀνανγείλῃ Εὐρυνόμῳ τῷ Τειμασιθέου ὑποδέξασθαι αὐτόν τε καὶ  
 ν τὰν ἀδελφὰν αὐτοῦ Εἷσιν, τὰν τε ἐπιστολὰν τὰν οὔσαν ὑπὸ τῷ ποτι-  
 κεφαλαίῳ ἀναδοῦ αὐτῷ. τὸν δὲ ἐγερθέντα θαυμάζει τε τὸν  
 [ν ὄ]γειρον καὶ διαπορεῖν τί ποητέον ἐστὶν διὰ τὸ ὑπάρχεν αὐτῷ  
 ἀντιπο-  
 λειτεῖαν ποτὶ Εὐρύνομον. καθυπνώσας δὲ πάλιν καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ἰδὼν  
 10 ν καὶ ἐπεργεθεὶς τὰν τε ἐπιστολὰν εὔρε ὑπὸ τῷ ποτικεφαλαίῳ  
 ν καθὼς αὐτῷ ἔτεκμάρθη. ἐπανελθὼν δὲ ἀνέδοκε τὰν ἐπιστολὰν  
 Εὐρυνόμῳ καὶ ἀνήγγειλε τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιταχθέντα. Εὐρύνομος δὲ  
 τὰν ἐπιστολὰν λαβὼν καὶ ἀκούσας τὰ ὑπὸ Ξεναινέτου λεγόμενα  
 ν παρ' αὐτὸν μὲν τὸν καιρὸν ἀπόρως εἶχε διὰ τὸ καθὼς ἐπάνω  
 15 [διασ]φεῖται εἶμεν αὐτοῖς ἀντιπολιτεῖαν ποτ' ἀσφατοῦς. ἀναγνοὺς δὲ  
 [ν τὰν ἐπιστ]ολὰν καὶ ἰδὼν τὰ γεγραμμένα σύμφωνα τοῖς  
 [ν ὑπὸ Ξεναινέτ]ου εἰρημένοις ὑπεδέξατο τὸν Σάραπιν καὶ τὰν Εἷσιν  
 ...

to enter into the *oikos*, it seemed in his sleep that Sarapis stood beside him and told him that after having arrived in Opus, he should carry a message to Eurynomos, son of Timasitheos, to receive him (Sarapis) and his sister Isis, and that he should deliver to him (Eurynomos) the letter under the pillow. And waking up, he (Xenainetos) marveled at the dream and yet he was at a loss about what he should do because he was a political rival to Eurynomos. But, falling asleep again and seeing the same things, when he awoke he found the letter under the pillow, just as it had been indicated to him. When he had returned (to Opus) he gave the letter to Eurynomos and reported the things that were decreed by the god. When Eurynomos received the letter and heard the things that Xenainetos said, he was at a loss because they were political rivals towards one other, as was made clear above. After having read the letter and having seen (that) the things that were written were in agreement with the things first having been said by him (Xenainetos) he (Eurynomos) received Sarapis and Isis.<sup>28</sup>

Here one Xenainetos gains extensive authority from being visited by Sarapis in a dream, to the extent that when he relays the account to his political rival Eurynomos,

<sup>28</sup> Greek text taken from the Packard Humanities Institute (PHI) database of inscriptions (Packard Humanities Institute, "PHI Greek Inscriptions," 1 September 2015, <http://inscriptions.packhum.org/>); translation from Richard Ascough, Philip Harland, and John S. Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012) 48–49.

the latter becomes convinced of its merit and “received Sarapis and Isis.” In *SEG* 15, 637, another householder Poseidonios receives an oracle from Apollo who decrees that he and his family should honor Zeus Patroos, Apollo, and the Mother of the Gods (i.e., found a household cult honoring them):

- 1 ἀπο[στ]ειλαντος Πο[σ]ειδ[ωνίου και χρ]ησά[σθα]ι  
 τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι, τί ἂν αὐτῷ τε και τοῖς ἐξ αὐτοῦ  
 γινομένοις και οὔσιν, ἐκ τε τῶν ἀρσένων και τῶν θ-  
 ηλειῶν, εἴη λώϊον και ἄμεινον ποιούσιν και πρᾶσ-  
 5 σουσιν, ἔχρησεν ὁ θεός, ἔσεσθαι λώϊον και ἄμει-  
 νον αὐτοῖς ἰλασκομένοις και τιμῶσιν

When Poseidonios sent to inquire of Apollo for himself and for members of his family, past and present, both the men and the women, regarding what to do and what to accomplish, the god answered: “It is more desirable and better for them to do as their ancestors did and to appease and honor [the following gods].”<sup>29</sup>

Here also, Poseidonios has honor and authority bestowed on him through receiving this oracle and having it publically recorded on an inscription. In *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1365, we learn that one Xanthos was “chosen” by the god and thus consecrates a sanctuary for him (Ξάνθος Λύκιος καθειδρούσατο ἱερὸν τοῦ Μηνὸς Τυράννου αἰρετίσαντος τοῦ θεοῦ: “Xanthos the Lykian consecrated the temple of Mēn—the god having chosen him”<sup>30</sup>). The authority to consecrate a sanctuary here depends on this claim to have been singled out by the god. All these examples show that ordinary people, not just elite emperors and rulers, could claim to receive authority to do things based on encountering a deity in a dream or vision. This was an entirely ordinary way for one to establish authority in an association.

The very fact of setting up a dedicatory statue or plaque signals to anyone who sees it the relative wealth of the person responsible for it. In some cases, the social cues are even more complex. In one inscription (*IG* XIV 1012), a certain Hermes, an imperial freedman, makes a dedication to the goddess Nemesis and lists his gifts to her (an altar, a pedestal, and a mixing vessel). The inscription is in both Greek and Latin. Thus, as Harrison observes, what Hermes is really doing, in addition to engaging in an honorific practice, is displaying his extensive education and wealth.<sup>31</sup> While we know nothing from such a sparse inscription about the wider association devoted to Nemesis (if there even was one), we can surmise that the social prestige that Hermes cultivated as a benefactor was also valuable to other members. They could claim him as their (educated and wealthy) benefactor who provided specific

<sup>29</sup> Greek text taken from Packard Humanities Institute, “PHI Greek Inscriptions”; translation from Philip Harland, *Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations and Commentary II North Coast of the Black Sea, Asia Minor* (BZNV 204; Berlin; de Gruyter, 2014) 187–88.

<sup>30</sup> Greek text taken from Packard Humanities Institute, “PHI Greek Inscriptions”; translation from Ascough, Harland, and Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Greco-Roman World*, 32.

<sup>31</sup> Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire*, 220.

and valuable cultic objects to Nemesis's temple. Indeed, the patron or founder of the group who experiences the encounter with the deity had access to social capital that the other members would naturally want to share. By entering into the standard patron-client relationship, they would have (some) access to that prestige.

Whether members of an association believed the founder or patron's claim of a divine encounter is not the point. Such claims are rhetorically functional, especially in a written medium. They are literary devices that act as a "good indicator of [a person's] fame and reputation; the more successful [a person] is, the more stories of signs from the gods will grow up around him or her."<sup>32</sup> In other words, ancient Romans would have been conditioned to understand these claims not solely for their truth value, but also for what they indicated about a person's social status and value, and where they should place him or her on their social landscape.

In addition to the social capital that such claims generated for patrons/founders and association members, stories of encountering deities also provided a shared sense of identity for the group. Voluntary associations often drew a diverse constituency—this was, in fact, one of the attractions. Since many of them featured a flat or rotating hierarchy, participation in the group gave members access to status and authority that they might have lacked in wider society.<sup>33</sup> Yet this diversity meant that the collective group identity could be rather tenuous. In some cases, members might share an occupation or neighborhood, but, in others, their associative activity or devotion to a particular deity was the main feature they had in common. This made it all the more critical to establish a myth of origins that the group could hold in common. In other words, the group's relationship to a foundational myth (their myth of origin) together with the benefits bestowed on them by a deity (often mediated by a patron or founder) provides a common feature that they can all share. I would suggest that nearly every claim among association inscriptions to communication with a deity could (directly or indirectly) relate to a legendary myth of origins for the group or for their distinctive customs.<sup>34</sup>

Association inscriptions often contain these "backstories" that translate into a shared means of expressing belonging. As seen above with *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 985, Dionysios receives instructions for how to establish his household cult. For those in his household, named in the inscription as including "men, women, free people, and household slaves," this translates into a foundational moment for them. Zeus visited the head of their household to instruct their association in moral, sacrificial, and other practices. *IG* X/2.1 255 provides an even more elaborate myth of origins. This time, the deity Sarapis visits Xenainetos in a dream, spurring him to take a written message to his political rival Euronymos. Though he initially hesitates, Euronymos eventually concedes to receiving Sarapis and Isis among his household

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>33</sup> Kloppenborg, "Collegia and Thiasoi," 26–27.

<sup>34</sup> On associations formed by explicit divine sanction, see Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations*, 34–42.

gods and establishes an association for their devotion. For the members of this group (perhaps only those in his household), this foundational account is almost dramatic and constitutes a great backstory: their association's founding involved the overcoming of a political rivalry to get off the ground.

Indeed, dramatic myths with explicit obstacles seem to work well as memorable, attractive myths of origin. Consider *SIG*<sup>2</sup> 663, which contains a rather complex narrative, only a few excerpts of which are included here:

- 1 ὁ ἱερεὺς Ἀπολλώνιος ἀνέγραψεν κατὰ  
 πρόσταγμα τοῦ θεοῦ· ὁ γὰρ πάππος ἡμῶν  
 Ἀπολλώνιος, ὃν Αἰγύπτιος ἐκ τῶν ἱερέων,  
 τὸν θεὸν ἔχων παρεγένετο ἐξ Αἰγύπτου
- 5 θεραπεύων τε διετέλει καθὼς πάτριον ἦν  
 ζῶσαί τε δοκεῖ ἔτη ἐνενήκοντα καὶ ἑπτὰ.  
 διαδεξαμένου δὲ τοῦ πατρός μου Δημη-  
 τρίου ἀκολούθως τε θεραπεύοντος τοὺς θε[ο]ύς,  
 διὰ δὲ τὴν εὐσέβειαν ἐστεφανώθη ὑπὸ
- 10 τοῦ θεοῦ εἰκὼνι χαλκεῖ ἢ ἀνάκειται ἐν τῷ ναῶι  
 τοῦ θεοῦ· ἔτη δὲ ἐβίωσεν ἐξήκοντα καὶ ἕν.  
 παραλαβόντος δὲ μου τὰ ἱερά καὶ προσκαθη-  
 μένου ταῖς θεραπαίαις ἐπιμελῶς, ὁ θεὸς μοι ἐχρη-  
 μάτισεν κατὰ τὸν ὕπνον ὅτι Σαραπιεῖον δεῖ
- 15 αὐτῷ ἀναδειχθῆναι ἴδιον καὶ μὴ εἶναι ἐν μισ-  
 θωτοῖς καθὼς πρότερον, εὐρήσειν τε τόπον  
 αὐτὸς οὗ δεῖ ἐδρασθῆναι σημαίνειν τε τὸν  
 τόπον. . . . τοῦ δὲ θεοῦ βουλομένου συνετελέ-  
 σθη ἡ ὠνὴ κατεσκευάσθη τε τὸ ἱρὸν συντόμως  
 ἐν μηνσὶν ἕξ. ἀνθρώπων δὲ τινῶν ἐπισυνστάντων  
 ἡμῖν τε καὶ τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐπενενκάντων κρίσιν κατὰ τοῦ ἱεροῦ
- 25 καὶ ἐμοῦ δημοσίαν, τί χρὴ παθεῖν ἢ ἀποτεῖσαι, ἐπι-  
 γείλατο δ' ἐμοὶ ὁ θεὸς κατὰ τὸν ὕπνον ὅτι νικήσομεν.  
 τοῦ δ' ἀγῶνος συντελεσθέντος καὶ νικησάντων ἡμῶν  
 ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐπαινοῦμεν τοὺς θεοὺς ἀξίαν χάριν ἀποδιδόντες.

The priest Apollonios [II] inscribed this according to the command of the god. For our grandfather, Apollonios, an Egyptian from the priestly class, having brought his god with him from Egypt, continued serving his god according to ancestral custom and, it seems, lived for ninety-seven years. My father, Demetrios, followed him in serving the gods and, because of his piety, he was honored by the god with a bronze image which was set up in the temple of the god. He lived for sixty-one years. . . . After receiving the sacred things and being appointed to perform the services in a diligent manner, the god instructed me through a dream that I should dedicate his own temple of Sarapis (*Sarapieion*), and that he was not to be in rented rooms anymore. Furthermore, he would find the place where the temple should be located, indicating this by a sign. . . . Now since the god willed it, a contract of purchase was completed and the temple was quickly built in six months. Now certain people conspired against us and the god. They sought a judgment against the

temple and myself in a public trial, seeking either punishment or a fine. But the god promised me in a dream that we would win the case. Now that the proceedings have ended and we have won as is worthy of the god, we praise the gods by demonstrating appropriate gratitude.<sup>35</sup>

The dedicator describes being instructed in a dream that he must build a dedicated temple for Sarapis, since the god is tired of being worshipped in rented rooms. After the temple was built, there was a conspiracy against the group, that perhaps involved a lawsuit and culminated in a public trial, which the Sarapis devotees evidently won. However, there is an even more elaborate backstory here. Before the dedicator describes his dream, he recounts how Sarapis ended up on Delos in the first place: his grandfather Apollonios brought Sarapis from Egypt and established his cult on Delos. Apollonios's son continued to serve Sarapis, as does his son, the dedicator. Thus, we see in this elaborate account the many details of a legendary origin story that the entire group could share. Their god was transported out of Egypt to Delos, where he demanded a new temple, after which there was public resistance involving a lawsuit, and their god ensured the association's success at trial.

Sometimes, however, these narrative details are more implicit, as in *IMagnMai* 215 (A):

- 1 Ἀγαθῆ τύχη.  
ἐπὶ πρυτάνεως Ἀκροδήμου τοῦ Δι-  
στείμου ὁ δῆμος ὁ Μαγνήτων ἐπερω-  
τᾶ τὸν θεὸν περὶ τοῦ σημείου τοῦ |  
5 γεγονότος ὅτι πλατάνου κατὰ τὴν  
πόλιν κλασθείσης ὑπὸ ἀνέμου εὐ-  
ρέθη ἐν αὐτῇ ἀφείδρυμα Διονύσου,  
. . . ἀλλὰ  
καὶ ὥς, ὃ δῆμε μεγάσθενες, ἴδρνε  
νηροῦς θυρσοχαροῦς· ἱερῆα τίθει  
δὲ εὐάρτιον ἀγνόν· ἐλθέτε δὲ  
25 ἐς Θήβης ἱερὸν πέδον, ὄφρα λάβητε  
Μαινάδας, αἱ γενεῆς Εἰνοῦς ἄπο Κα-  
δημείης· αἱ δ' ὑμῖν δώσουσι καὶ  
ὄργια καὶ νόμιμα ἐσθλά καὶ θιά-  
σους Βάκχοιο καθειδρῦσουσιν  
30 ἐν ἄστει. κατὰ τὸν χρησμόν διὰ  
τῶν θεοπρόπων ἐδόθησαν ἐκ Θηβῶν  
Μαινάδες τρεῖς Κοσκῶ Βαυβῶ  
Θετταλή, καὶ ἡ μὲν Κοσκῶ συνήγαγεν  
θίασον τὸν Πλατανιστηνῶν,  
35 ἡ δὲ Βαυβῶ τὸν πρὸ πόλεως, ἡ δὲ  
Θετταλή τὸν τῶν Καταιβατῶν·  
θανοῦσαι δὲ αὗται ἐτάφησαν

<sup>35</sup> Greek text taken from Packard Humanities Institute, "PHI Greek Inscriptions"; translation from Ascough, Harland, and Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Greco-Roman World*, 133.

ὑπὸ Μαγνήτων, καὶ ἡ μὲν Κοσκῶ  
 κεῖται ἐν Κοσκωβούνῳ, ἡ δὲ Βαυ-  
 40 βῶ ἐν Ταβάρνει, ἡ δὲ Θετταλῇ  
 πρὸς τῷ θεάτρῳ.

To good fortune! When Akrodemos son of Dioteimos was civic president, the Magnesians consulted the god concerning the sign which occurred: An image of Dionysos was discovered in a plane tree, located opposite the city, which made a loud piercing sound caused by the wind. . . . [The god said:] Do the following, oh exceedingly strong people: Dedicate temples which delight in the wand and appoint a perfect and sacred priest. And come onto Thebes's holy ground, so that you may receive maenads from the race of Ino daughter of Kadmos. They will also give to you good rites and customs and will consecrate Bacchic societies in the city.<sup>36</sup>

In this instance, an image of Dionysos is discovered in a tree. After consulting the oracle at Delphi, the Magnesians learn that they are meant to establish a temple and cult to Dionysos. Thus, the mythic beginning of this cult in Magnesia can be traced to this foundational moment. Furthermore, even if the legendary founding of an association is not present in an inscription, we sometimes find instead the mythic origins of the group's distinct practices. An example of this was already seen in *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 985, wherein Dionysios received instructions from Zeus himself regarding their association's practices. In *IMagnMai* 215 (A), it occurs again, because after the oracle stipulates the founding of the temple for Dionysos, it requires the appointment of a priest and the reception of maenads, who will "give to you good rites and customs." So also, *SEG* 15, 637, in addition to giving a backstory for the foundation of Poseidonios's household association, decrees that his family show honor to Zeus Patroos, Apollo, the Fates, the Mother goddess, and the family *daimons*. In all of these cases, members of the group would have an explanatory narrative to justify why their group met in a particular location and engaged in their specific practices—these can be traced all the way back to direct communication with divine sources. In other words, these brief narrative instances become the collective memory for the association's membership.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to providing a common denominator for member identification with the group, such revelatory claims often provide temporal connections beyond the present. That is to say, they articulate experiences relevant to the group in a manner that extends the group's history by connecting it with events in the past. These connections, though often more discursively than sociologically real, also

<sup>36</sup> Greek text taken from Packard Humanities Institute, "PHI Greek Inscriptions"; translation from Harland, *Greco-Roman Inscriptions II*, 344–46.

<sup>37</sup> On collective memory, see, of course, Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); idem, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row Colophon Books, 1980); Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies* (trans. Rodney Livingstone; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006). See also, Ritva Williams, "BTB Readers' Guide: Social Memory," *BTB* 41 (2011) 189–200.

strengthen each individual member's sense of the group's importance, because they project a common group "past" into a time before the group may actually have existed. This is closely related to the group cohesion that was just discussed, and we can see this operating in many of the examples we have already considered.

*IG X/2.1 255*, which we have seen to narrate the founding of an association after a political rivalry had been overcome, creates a mythic past for the group. The group is linked to a previous historical moment in which Xenainetos encounters Sarapis in a dream. This means that the group's history started not when individual members joined the group, or when they all met together for the first time; rather, the group's supposed existence was initiated in the past and thus precedes all the individual members' histories. *SIG<sup>2</sup> 663* offers an even deeper temporal connection to the past. The brief narrative extends the association's history both geographically and temporally. Geographically, it links the group on Delos to Egypt, where Sarapis was originally revered. As noted, the inscription provides an explanation for how the god ended up on Delos. Temporally, it extends the group's history back several generations. The inscription reminds members of a series of occupants of a hereditary priesthood, traced back to one Apollonios, who was responsible for bringing Sarapis to Delos. Apollonios's grandson draws out the association's history even further when he describes the group's past meetings in rented rooms and, after a visit from Sarapis in a dream, subsequent meetings in a dedicated *Sarapieion*.

These are two of the best examples that work to extend the collective experience of the group beyond the transitory present. They link the group to past interactions, events, and locations. Many other inscriptions could be mined for similar strategies of creating a "past" for a group, though sometimes not as explicit as this. After all, any time a group recounts a foundational moment, especially those involving their founder figure or their patron deity, members could understand their common history to extend at least to that moment in time. In other words, such narrative elements allow the group to connect not only horizontally to one another to create relationships, but also vertically through time, to forge broader networks across time and space.

This discussion demonstrates the varieties of "work" that claims to encounter deities accomplish within the context of ancient associations. Given that these claims are common motifs within epigraphic evidence, it seems reasonable to conclude that members would have certain expectations when a founder approached them with such stories. They would automatically correlate the claim with the founder's authority and prestige and situate the claim within their own understanding of what belonging to the group meant. Paul's claims to encounter Jesus, I now suggest, would have fit neatly into this framework.

## ■ Contextualizing Paul's Visions of Christ and Heaven

Paul's vision on the road to Damascus has often been interpreted as one of the most significant "events" in Christian history. Whatever happened was regarded by Paul as an axial moment in his life that set the stage for his missionizing activity. Scholars have spilled copious amounts of ink on interpreting Paul's version of this event. Here, I want to decenter that discussion and ask: what would Paul's claims have sounded like to his audiences, especially if they were familiar with the rhetoric of founder figures, foundational visions, and other mythic backstories that were common in other associations? My primary suggestion is that Paul's claims to have seen the risen Jesus function in strikingly similar ways to those found within documents pertaining to associations. This is an argument about the reception of his statements within groups that already had particular sets of social experiences and expectations about how social formation would unfold.

In his own reporting, Paul claims to receive a special communication directly from Christ (Gal 1:12) that initiated his mission to non-Judeans (Gal 1:15–16). The somewhat more vivid version of Acts (Acts 9:3–19) includes a heavenly light, a dialogue with Jesus, and an unfortunate blinding. While we should not conflate the Acts version with Paul's own report,<sup>38</sup> especially given Luke's proclivities toward the fanciful,<sup>39</sup> there is no reason to think that Paul did not relay an equally fantastic account to his audiences. What Paul says he "received" (1 Cor 15:3: παρέλαβον; Gal 1:12: παρέλαβον . . . δι' ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) was a body of knowledge about a divinely sent figure (Christ) and about a series of visions that his early followers had (1 Cor 15:3–7); these narrative elements, which are often labeled as the "kerygma," act as a kind of basis for his preaching. If we append Paul's

<sup>38</sup> As some have noted, the Acts account looks remarkably similar to Plutarch's story of Julius Proculus's encounter with Romulus (*Romulus* 28.1–3; see Hector Avalos, *The Bad Jesus: The Ethics of New Testament Ethics* [The Bible in the Modern World 68; Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015] 127). It is also worth noting that the Acts version corresponds perfectly to Hanson's remarks on the common literary form that dream/vision reports would take: an "audio-visual" dream includes an identification of the dream figure (Jesus), a description of it (a light and a voice, the latter witnessed by Paul's companions), the position of the figure (unclear, but note that Paul is on the ground), the dream figure's message (go to Damascus to be told what to do), the departure of the figure, and the reaction/response by the dreamer (despite blindness, he obediently goes to Damascus and meets Ananias, after which he is baptized and immediately begins to "proclaim Jesus in the synagogues"). See Hanson, "Dreams and Visions," 1410–13. Nevertheless, scholars have consistently insisted that Paul's vision and those of other early Christians are something different and special. For instance, Hanson himself claims that while the Christian examples are "congruent, on a formal level" with Greek and Roman evidence, their elaboration, especially in apocalyptic contexts, is often "a result of theologizing . . . which may be connected with shifts in ancient religiosity" (1425). Similarly, Harrison engages in a strategy of bracketing early Christian accounts when she describes the dreams and visions in the gospels as something different from other ancient accounts in that "the events of the Gospels are supposed to be unusual and miraculous, and separated from everyday life" (*Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire*, 96).

<sup>39</sup> Michael Goulder, for instance, has noted that Luke's writing style is marked by "colourful details" (*Luke: A New Paradigm II* [JSNTSS 20; Worcester: Sheffield Academic, 1989] 97 n. 27).

special visit to the “third heaven” or “paradise” to this moment of reception (2 Cor 12:1–4), the story becomes even more robust. My proposal is that when Paul relayed his miraculous account of seeing the risen Christ and being commissioned to preach to the Gentiles, his audiences, familiar with these sorts of claims in other settings, including associations, would have treated them similarly: as a legendary story recounting the crucial moments in the foundation of their group by Paul, the “founder.”

Like similar accounts in associations, Paul’s claims work to establish his authority vis-à-vis his recipients. His authority stems from a number of features of his encounter. First, his story reveals that he had an unambiguous vision sent by a deity (Christ). Christ, he narrates, “appeared to me [or: was seen by me] also” (ὡφθη κάμοι) (1 Cor 15:8). Elsewhere, he claims that God “was pleased to reveal (εὐδόκησεν ἀποκαλύψαι)” his son to him (Gal 1:16; see also, 2 Cor 12:1). Second, he presents himself as one specially chosen by God for the vision of Jesus, which sets him apart from others. Indeed, in Galatians, he styles himself as having been set apart for the encounter before he was even born (ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ), and in 1 Corinthians, he emphasizes that it was due to God’s “grace” (χάρις) that he received the vision. Moreover, some of the revelations that he receives are so extraordinary that they cannot be shared (2 Cor 12:4). Third, he is at pains to underscore that the message he brings to his recipients came from his special divine encounter, not from anyone else (Gal 1:17–22), and thus carries more authority than what one might learn secondhand. Fourth, Paul also emphasizes the personal effort that he exerted to spread his ideas (Gal 1:17–21; 1 Cor 15:10). In these ways, he establishes a particular reputation of authority within his groups. His strategy was reasonably successful (at least at first), since many of his letters suggest that his recipients were writing to him to ask for clarification on theological matters or practical advice.

The strongest point of comparison between epiphanies in associations and Paul’s claims is perhaps 2 Corinthians 12, where Paul famously describes “visions and revelations of the Lord,” and an episode in which he was “caught up into paradise” (ἠρπάγη εἰς τὸν παράδεισον). In the midst of this experience, Paul claims to receive special knowledge, in his words, “things which cannot be told, which man may not utter” (ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι, 2 Cor 12:4).<sup>40</sup> It is clear that Paul uses this divine encounter to solidify his authority within the group, for it comes in the midst of his discussion of those who are apparently trying to usurp his authority (2 Cor 11:1–15; 12:11–21). Moreover, it appears just after his discussion of his own sufferings (2 Cor 11:16–33), which is itself a common trope in Paul’s letters that James A. Kelhoffer has convincingly shown to be a similarly

<sup>40</sup> There are several possibilities for why he cannot disclose this revelation: the experiences are literally unutterable; he has been forbidden from doing so; or they are not useful for his missionizing (Matera, *II Corinthians*, 281).

useful strategy to cultivate authority.<sup>41</sup> Paul's extraordinary heavenly vision and the special knowledge that he receives during it act to remind his readers of his unique role as their founder and of the remarkable experience that compelled him to travel and share his ideas about Christ—experiences that he no doubt hopes the “superapostles” will lack.

That Paul describes himself in the third person in this critical passage is admittedly odd, especially if one interprets the claims for their authoritative currency, as this analysis does. Yet his dissembling is in keeping with his tendency toward carefully subdued conceit that appears elsewhere in his letters (1 Cor 1:14–17; 14:18–19; Gal 6:11–16; Romans 15:14–21). Indeed, in this passage, Paul walks an awkward line of boasting about “this man” who experienced heavenly visions, while also wanting to give the appearance of humbly refraining from bragging. Nearly all commentators agree that “this man” is, of course, Paul himself.<sup>42</sup> Thus, although 2 Cor 12 is a deliberate rhetorical creation that allows Paul to boast of his own authority that stems from his visionary experiences, it also contains just enough play to allow him to feign appropriate humility.<sup>43</sup>

That he styles himself as a former “persecutor” of the assembly (Gal 1:13; 1 Cor 15:9) only heightens his authority, for it signals to his recipients that in spite of his bad behavior, God nevertheless singled him out for the vision of Christ and for his “grace” (Gal 1:15; 1 Cor 15:10). Lest anyone doubt Paul's chosen status, he reminds his recipients that when all this took place, he was no one special, especially in comparison to the original apostles (1 Cor 15:8–9). He famously refutes the charge that he is any sort of unique leader (1 Cor 1:10–17) in order to project a kind of feigned humility and resist the authority that he had clearly mustered in the group. In 2 Corinthians, moreover, this false humility manifests again when Paul reminds his readers that he was even given some sort of physical obstacle<sup>44</sup> to discourage him from boasting about his visions—though, as noted, the posturing in verses 1–5 do precisely that.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> According to Kelhoffer, Paul's letters are among many texts in the New Testament that “construe the withstanding of persecution as a form of cultural capital convertible to power, authority, legitimacy, or standing within the Christian community” (*Persecution, Persuasion and Power: Readiness to Withstand Hardship as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament* [WUNT 270; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010] 16; for specific remarks on Paul's rhetoric of suffering, see 30–65).

<sup>42</sup> Matera, *II Corinthians*, 277.

<sup>43</sup> According to Margaret Thrall, the experience may have been a kind of out of body, ecstatic experience that Paul actually experienced as an outsider, which resulted in his use of the third person (“Paul's Journey to Paradise: Some Exegetical Issues in 2 Cor 12, 2–4” in *The Corinthian Correspondence* [ed. R. Bieringer; BETL 125; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996] 325–46, at 352). See also, Colleen Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle's Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 93–101.

<sup>44</sup> The meaning of Paul's “thorn in the flesh” is much debated; for an overview, see Victor P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 547–50; Matera, *II Corinthians*, 282–84.

<sup>45</sup> Some commentators note that the overall thrust of this passage is to emphasize his weakness, and so his “boasting” is not what his audience might expect (Matera, *II Corinthians*, 275).

Yet these claims alone are not enough to create authority immediately, otherwise many in antiquity would be found doing it. As Heidi Wendt has recently argued, claims to divine revelation are one of the many strategies that “freelance experts” use to establish their authority as religious leaders.<sup>46</sup> Although I have some hesitation in using the terminology of “freelance experts,”<sup>47</sup> Wendt amasses ample data about the ways in which figures of religious authority frequently engaged in competition with each other. Greek, Roman, and Jewish sources all witness to a variety of authoritative claims and rhetorical posturing that religious leaders deployed to market their services, ranging from healings to fertility manipulation to communication with the divine. In associations, we are dealing with something slightly different, because the founder figures and patrons explored above were not always priests or office holders within the association, that is, religious “experts.” Yet her comments are apt when applied to Paul. In the nexus of competitive “experts” that he was vying with (the so-called “superapostles” and “Judaizers,” for instance), his claim to speak personally and directly with the risen Christ, as well as to have had a heavenly journey of some sort, became the authoritative bases by which he justified all of his teaching and traveling. This further suggests, though it is difficult to confirm, that Paul appeared to his groups as a kind of educated “expert” and not as a charlatan. Were he perceived as the latter, his claims and teachings would not have been received well at the outset. Thus, the authority that these claims could engender depends also on the social conditions in which his audiences were embedded.

Paul is thus akin to the founder figures assessed above, such as Dionysios, Xenaitenos, and Apollonios’s grandson, who have a special encounter with a deity and then narrate the encounter to an association. Their chosen status signals their authority within the association, which makes them compelling founder figures who are able to influence the beliefs and activities of their members by solving problems, prescribing rituals or special teachings, altering activities, or otherwise affecting the proceedings of the association. Their experience also marks a critical moment in the history of the group, a point to which I will return below.

The authority and prestige that Paul gains from these claims potentially transfers to his groups as well—and many of his recipients seem to expect access to it. The Corinthians are evidently used to aligning with the person who baptized them in order to participate in their social standing (1 Cor 1:10–16). Similarly, the

<sup>46</sup> Wendt, *At the Temple Gates*.

<sup>47</sup> My hesitation stems from the tension between the realization that “religion” as a unique, bounded sphere of activity did not exist in the ancient world, and the obvious need for modern scholars to create our own analytical categories to make sense of ancient data. Wendt’s category of “religious experts” groups together an extensive diversity of figures, such as magicians, healers, prophets, oracle readers, priests, and the like into a single grouping, and discusses them all in terms of a kind of marketplace of religious activity. Space does not permit a full treatment of the merits of such theorizing in antiquity. It suffices to point out that I include this theory here, because it helpfully signals the competitive aspect of the discourse of encountering deities.

Thessalonians' prestige and regional status appears to be based on the reputation of Paul and their patron deity (1 Thess 1:7–10).<sup>48</sup> Merely the affiliation of someone who had a direct encounter with a deity, especially if such knowledge could be made public,<sup>49</sup> would have been inherently valuable as social currency for associations. In other words, by treating Paul as the founder of their group, members gained access to his social capital.

Furthermore, just as is the case with association inscriptions explored above, Paul's claims also establish a common past with which members of his multiple groups, like the associations in the inscriptions, could identify. The logic is thus: Paul's legacy and authority, he claims, are connected to (or at least as prestigious as) the "pillars" in Jerusalem, who in turn inherited theirs from Christ. His audiences are subsequently inserted into this legacy and thus inherit a legendary backstory for their group. This allows his groups to participate in the same origin story as the Jesus followers in Galilee and Judaea, and thus to share a temporal connection to them (in 2 Cor 12, he even provides a time frame of fourteen years to further ground the narrative in their shared timeline).

This connection with Judean followers of Jesus is nowhere clearer than in Paul's formulaic statements in 1 Corinthians 15. In this chapter, he describes a chain of recent history starting with Christ's death, his appearance first to Peter, then to 500 others, then to James, and then to the rest of the apostles (15:3–7). Paul associates himself with this extensive tradition (15:8), and then he passes it on to his audiences (15:3; see also, 1 Thess 2:13). Not everyone, of course, was willing to accept his insertion into this lineage, as Galatians 1:11–2:10 demonstrates. But this usage may represent Paul's strategy of incorporation into the legacy of authority enjoyed by the apostles in Judea, deployed in the hopes that it would resonate among the Corinthians. So, though the Corinthian group's collective memory picks up with Paul's experience, he tries to convince them that it began during the lifetime of Jesus. In fact, this sense of connection across time and space with the Judean Christ followers gives a compelling explanation for how Paul could have possibly expected his groups to send money back to people they had never met in Jerusalem.

This series of "historical" connections invites his recipients to define their connections with one another with those axial moments as well. It also gives the backstory for Paul's proselytizing activity. Just as in the account above, when Sarapis visited Xenainetos and convinced him to approach his political rival to establish the cult, Christ's appearance to Paul marks the moment when Paul orients himself to spreading stories of Christ. Paul's claims to encounter Jesus thus provide

<sup>48</sup> Richard Ascough, "Paul's 'Apocalypticism' and the Jesus Association at Thessalonica and Corinth" in *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians* (ed. Cameron and Miller), 151–86. Ascough argues that the reputation of the Thessalonians in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess 1:2–10) was, akin to the honor-seeking goals of other associations, related to their self-promotion and status of their founders, instead of their evangelizing or charity work.

<sup>49</sup> Note, for instance, that 1 Cor 14:23 assumes a rather porous, semi-public nature to their gatherings.

an explanation for his auditors accepting what he was doing in their cities in the first place.

One could even argue that Paul's rhetorical work establishes an even more distant legacy for his recipients than their connection to the original apostles in Judea. Paul's frequent appeals to key figures in the Israelite tradition, namely Moses and Abraham, also extend the history of the group back through time and connect them to that legacy. For instance, Wendt explains how 1 Cor 10:2–4 acts to style the Israelites as “new ancestors” of the Corinthians.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, “[t]his version of the story about the Israelites' time in the wilderness forges a mythic precedent”<sup>51</sup> for the group, which may have lacked a common one before Paul appeared to convince them of this shared legacy. There are numerous other examples, but especially for non-Judean audiences, Paul's incorporation of authoritative figures from the Hebrew scriptures, which were supposed to have direct bearing on the present salvation of his audiences, acts to append a common “group history” onto a social formation that may have otherwise only come into existence rather recently. This myth-making strategy, we should note, is far more elaborate than the basic claims made in associations, but this is to be expected since Paul has extensive space in his letters to elaborate on his arguments and is not restricted by the size and expense of an inscription or plaque.

Paul's claims to encounter Christ, sparse though they may be, provide a way to construct a shared relationship for the group that is based on a connection to a founder figure (whether understood to be Jesus or Paul himself), Paul's authority and prestige, and the mythic past that they inherit. These are crucial functions, because when Paul writes to his groups, he gives us no sense for why they see themselves as a coherent group. Many of his other letters only provide scant hints of the social connections among the members. Perhaps if there are Judeans, their social networks were in place via a synagogue; there may have also been household networks among Paul's recipients, signaled by his references to husbands and wives, as well as domestic slaves. But this diversity means that the burden was on him to articulate their identity in such a way as to make it depend on their relationship to Christ.<sup>52</sup> These recipients, especially if their collective identity only occasionally manifested or was otherwise weak, needed a vital feature to share in common. For Paul, it was their relationship to him and to Christ that established their “groupness.” Again, by contextualizing Paul's claims within documents from voluntary associations, we see how utterly ordinary his efforts would have been to

<sup>50</sup> Wendt, *At the Temple Gates*, 151.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>52</sup> I have recently argued that this is the case for 1 Thessalonians (Sarah E. Rollens, “Inventing Tradition in Thessalonica: The Appropriation of the Past in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16,” *BTB* 46.3 [2016]: 123–32). Paul gives us almost no information about the Thessalonian group to suggest their common basis for their identity. Some scholars have recently argued that the group may have been an occupational guild (Ascough, “The Thessalonian Christian Community”), which Paul infiltrated and oriented toward Christ—a hypothesis that I find quite reasonable.

his audience's ears. Paul's groups came into being through each member's mutual recognition of a relationship to Paul and Jesus and the history of the group as it emerged through Paul's narration.

Despite the utility of this comparison, Paul's vision of Christ does not represent a one-to-one correspondence with the brief narratives in association inscriptions. For one, Paul's language for encountering his vision explicitly adopts sight-based idioms.<sup>53</sup> In 1 Corinthians, he reminds his audience that Christ "appeared to me also" (ὡφθη κάμοί, 1 Cor 15:8). In Galatians, he claims that God "was pleased to reveal (ἀποκαλύψαι)" his son to him (Gal 1:16). For another, in epigraphic evidence, usually the language of revelation is not one of direct communication with the recipient, as Paul's claims typically are, but rather it is communicated indirectly through dreams and visions. Association inscriptions tend to narrate events that happen "in a dream" or "in accordance with a dream," and less emphasis is put on sight-based idioms. It is simply assumed that a personal encounter has taken place between the deity and the reporter.

But we learn something new precisely where this analogy breaks down. In this case, we are reminded that Paul frequently had his authority challenged (2 Cor 11; Gal *passim*) and that many of his letters are sites to rebuild that authority. Therefore, it is in his interest to emphasize the direct, personal, and sensory aspects of his vision of Jesus in order to authenticate it.<sup>54</sup> This is unlike association inscriptions, which are (semi-) public displays that provide a history for the group and serve honorific functions; while they are argumentative in a sense (in that they are arguing for a certain perspective on the group's founding or activities), they are not actively engaged in defending their claims. More to the point, the association members probably already believed the backstories by the time they had come to be included on public inscriptions. Paul's claims, on the other hand, available as they are only in letters, represent nascent forms of his rhetorical persuasion when he was still "advertising" his origin story.

This way of contextualizing Paul's claims helps explain why such stories are remarkably absent from Romans, a letter in which Paul is often thought to articulate his "fullest" theology but which lacks any reference to his one-on-one encounter with Christ. If, however, we consider the preceding discussion, I would suggest that because the Roman Christ-devotees' sense of belonging together was already in place when Paul was writing to them, he could not have hoped that his claims to see Jesus would have functioned as they did among the emerging Thessalonian or Corinthian Christ groups. One need only consider the conflict at the beginning

<sup>53</sup> Outside inscriptions, *δοχεῖν* and cognates are frequently attested in dream and vision reports. This makes sense because, as noted above, ancient theories of dreaming in particular were often discussed within wider theories of vision and sight.

<sup>54</sup> Notice that even though the experience that Paul describes in 2 Cor 12 is in the third person, he nevertheless uses language that emphasizes the direct and personal nature of the encounter. In 2 Cor 12:1, "the man" sees "ὄπτασις καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις κυρίου"; in 12:4, he hears (ἤκουσεν) special wisdom.

of Galatians to realize the rough reception such group formation strategies could have if others questioned his claims. There were even more reasons to resist using his claims among the Roman group, namely, the Romans would have considered someone other than Paul to be their “founder” and would have already had a common origin story that did not require his patronage or his mythic backstory. Thus, he had to establish his authority among the Romans by outlining his theology of salvation as it relates to a diverse ethnic constituency that is already in place. In other words, Paul does not deploy his vision narrative with them, because he does not think it would persuade them.

## ■ Conclusion

There is an important interpretive context for understanding Paul’s claims to have seen Christ that only emerges with close study of the epigraphic evidence for associations. The move to consider this evidence is justified by the increasing realization that many features of Paul’s groups have counterparts in the hundreds of voluntary associations witnessed in documentary papyri and dedicatory or honorific inscriptions. I argue that Paul’s audiences would have fit his claims about Christ into this interpretative context, because it fulfilled many of the same social functions as the claims in associations: it bolstered his authority and prestige as a “founder,” it gave them a sense of connection, and it linked their group to a mythical founding moment and historical legacy.

One should note that this is certainly not the only way to interpret Paul’s claims to have seen the risen Christ. This suggestion can be read alongside, not instead of, other suggestions about how Paul’s audiences would have understood his activities. Paul may have offered a number of “benefits” to those joining his group, including, in the words of one scholar, everything from “mysterious wisdom and knowledge rooted in ancient, oracular texts, religious skills, health or healing, and an escape from death with the prospect of immortality, even by means of resurrection for any who have already died or might die before Christ returns.”<sup>55</sup> Members may surely have anticipated these benefits when following Paul, but they also, I argue, would have treated his claims to encounter Jesus in a way that directly contributed to their individual identifications with the group and the group’s overall sense of who or what they were. By looking at the specific claims made in documents pertaining to associations and by assuming that at least some of Paul’s audiences must have regarded his Christ associations akin to other voluntary associations, we can better imagine how they would have heard his remarkable claims to receive from a deity a vision that encouraged him to begin traveling throughout the eastern Mediterranean and crafting an urban network of Christ believers.

<sup>55</sup> Wendt, *At the Temple Gates*, 184.

| <b>Selected Epiphanies and Divine Communication in Voluntary Associations</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Association Inscription or Literary Source</b>                             | <b>Brief Narrative Summary</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <i>SIG</i> <sup>3</sup> 985, Philadelphia, late 2nd–early 3rd cent. CE        | A householder named Dionysios receives instructions from Zeus in a dream regarding how the people in his household should form their association and what its bylaws should be.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>IG X/2.1</i> 255, Thessalonica, 1st–2nd cent. CE                           | The association is founded after Sarapis visits Xenainetos in a dream, and Xenainetos then takes a letter to his political rival Eurynomos, who subsequently “receive[s] Sarapis and Isis” after having seen the contents.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <i>IMagnMai</i> 215 (A), Magnesia on the Maeander, ca. 150 CE                 | After the appearance of an image of Dionysos on a tree, the group’s foundation and distinctive practices (including the appointment of a priest, and the reception of rights and customs) are received through an oracle of Dionysos.                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <i>SIG</i> <sup>2</sup> 663, Delos, ca. 200 BCE                               | Sarapis has originally been brought to Delos from Egypt by a priest named Apollonios. Sarapis now appears in a dream to Apollonios’s grandson and tells him not to use rented rooms for the group’s activities anymore, but instead to construct a dedicated temple, the location of which would be indicated by a divine sign. Apollonios then builds the temple, despite certain people “conspir[ing] against [them] and the god.” |
| <i>SEG</i> 42,157, Athens, ca. 116/5–cent. 95/4 BCE                           | A monument base is dedicated to Isis, Sarapis, Anubis, and Harpokrates “in accordance to a command” which may have come in a dream. <sup>56</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <i>SEG</i> 15, 637, Halikarnassos, ca. 300–250 BCE                            | Householder Poseidonios asks Apollo what his family should do (evidently, whom they should honor), and Apollo decrees that they should honor Zeus Patroos, Apollo Lord of Telmessos, the Fates, and the Mother of the Gods, as well as the Agathos Daimon of Poseidonios and of Gorgis (i.e., Poseidonios’s wife).                                                                                                                   |

|                                                     |                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Kaunos 23</i> , found near Küçükkale; no date    | A dedication is erected to Zeus Xenios “in accordance with a dream.” <sup>57</sup>                                                                    |
| <i>IG XII,3 329</i> , Thera, ca. 200 BCE            | The association of Anthister is established by a Pythian oracle. <sup>58</sup>                                                                        |
| <i>IMakedD 7</i> , Edessa, 3 <sup>rd</sup> cent. CE | A dedication is erected to Zeus Hypsistos “in accordance with a dream.”                                                                               |
| <i>IG X/2.1 67</i> , Thessalonica 74–75 CE          | Theos Hypsistos warns G(aius) Iulius Orios of danger in a dream, and he dedicates an inscription in gratitude.                                        |
| <i>IG II<sup>2</sup> 1365</i> , Attica, ca. 200 CE  | Xanthos the Lycian consecrates the sanctuary after the god chooses him. His actions likely result from an appearance of the god to him. <sup>59</sup> |

#### References to Paul’s Visions of Christ and Heaven

|               |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Cor 15:3–8  | A deity (Christ) dies and then appears to Paul, the apostles, and 500 others; since Paul was not part of Jesus’s followers, his vision is exceptional and signals his divine selection.    |
| 2 Cor 12:1–10 | Paul recounts both visions and revelations that he received from his deity. The visions involve being “caught up” into the heavens and learning esoteric information that he cannot share. |
| Gal 1:11–16   | Paul’s authority comes from Christ, who was revealed to him; this divine revelation initiated his mission to the Gentiles.                                                                 |
| Acts 9:3–19   | Paul’s vision of Christ contains a blinding light and a dialogue with Jesus; Christ sanctions Paul’s mission to the Gentiles and predicts his hardships.                                   |

<sup>56</sup> Ascough, Harland, and Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Greco-Roman World*, 200–202.

<sup>57</sup> There are numerous examples of action taken in accordance with a divine dream. See also above, Harrison’s comments on “message dreams,” which are distinguished by the fact that the dreamer is expected to act after receiving them.

<sup>58</sup> There are also numerous examples of oracles being the impetus for cultic activity.

<sup>59</sup> Ascough, *Paul’s Macedonian Associations*, 37