

Negotiating a New World View in Acts 1.8? A Note on the Expression ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς*

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This article argues that the expression ‘to the end of the earth’ in Acts 1.8, while not referring to one specific geographical location, as has often been argued in contemporary scholarship on Acts, is best understood as a way of (re)ordering the world geographically and, therefore, ideologically. Drawing on Greco-Roman geographical and literary conventions, the article suggests that the author of Acts invites the work’s readers to look at the world in a new way, with Jerusalem and the gospel emanating from it as its centre – and the rest, including Rome, as its ideological (and therefore geographical) periphery. In this way, Acts proceeds to renegotiate the ‘world-view’ of its readers in an intercultural and subversive way.

Keywords: Acts of the Apostles, Roman Empire, geography, mission, intercultural theology, post-colonialism

1. Introduction

This article argues that a geographically and ideologically sensitive interpretation of Acts 1.8, in particular of ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς, in the context of the whole of Acts leads both to an understanding of ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς in terms of a rather generic expression and to the positioning of Jerusalem at the ideological and therefore also geographical centre of the Christ movement.

Thus the article goes beyond current disputes concerning this expression in Acts 1.8, which tend to focus on what the reference of that turn of phrase might be, e.g. Ethiopia, or Rome – an issue which has everything to do both with questions of the theology of (Luke-)Acts, taking into account the movement of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome (see Acts 28; cf. also Luke 24.27 ἄρξάμενοι

* With thanks to Martine van der Herberg, BA, of the Protestant Theological University (Amsterdam) for a critical review of the paper and helpful suggestions, and to Dr Iveta Adams for copy-editing the text.

ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ), and with questions concerning a more or less Europe-centred perspective on Acts that would ‘automatically’ favour an interpretation of Rome over another one, e.g. one taking its cue from Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch and accordingly interpreting the ‘end of the earth’ in terms of Ethiopia or Africa.¹ Such interpretations are often and to a large extent rightly backed up by observations such as Johnson’s, who notes that the ‘roadmap’ outlined in Acts 1.8 corresponds to the broad flow of the narrative of Acts: chapters 1–7 are primarily concerned with Jerusalem, chapters 8–12 with Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13–28 with the spread of the mission ‘all the way to Rome’.² In this way, he agrees with the observation of Penner and Umurhan that the remainder of Acts is ‘essentially a spatial meditation on Jesus’ opening proclamation’.³ However, the picture that Johnson paints (and with which Penner and Umurhan concur insofar as the focus on Rome is concerned) is somewhat imprecise, given that the area covered by ‘end of the earth’ comprises more than just Rome, even if Rome is Paul’s and the narrative of Acts’ final station. Such imprecision, which allows Paul’s ending up in Rome to dominate the second part of Acts’ narrative and marginalises other references to geography, can and is picked up on by critiques of such potentially Europe-centred perspectives, e.g. from a self-consciously Afrocentric perspective.⁴ Also, already in 1966, Van Unnik drew attention to a particular kind of circular reasoning that occurs frequently in exegeses of Acts 1.8, consisting of (a) the assumption that Luke makes a programmatic statement in Acts 1.8; (b) the observation that Acts ends in Rome; (c) the conclusion that the end of the earth mentioned in Acts 1.8 must therefore be Rome. This way of reasoning is fallacious because of the immediate assumption that Acts 1.8 contains a narrative programme, which is then recognised in the remainder of Acts.⁵ In this article, taking my cue from

1 E.g. the (as of yet unpublished) paper presented by Gosnell Yorke to the SNTS seminar on ‘The Mission and Expansion of Earliest Christianity’, which met in Szeged, Hungary (2014): ‘From Jerusalem to the Ends of the Earth: An Afro-missiological Take on Acts 1:8’.

2 L. T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006) 27.

3 See O. Umurhan and T. Penner, ‘Luke and Juvenal at the Crossroads: Space, Movement, and Morality in the Roman Empire’, *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture* (ed. S. E. Porter and A. Pitts; Leiden: Brill, 2013) 165–93, 186.

4 See Yorke, ‘Jerusalem’. For a (published) theoretical underpinning of his Afrocentric approach, see G. Yorke, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics: An Afro-Centric Perspective’, *Religion and Theology* 2 (1995) 145–58.

5 See W. C. van Unnik, ‘Der Ausdruck ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς (Apostelgeschichte 1:8) und sein alttestamentlicher Hintergrund’, *Studia biblica et semitica: Theodoro Christiano Vriezen qui munere professoris theologiae per xxv annos functus est* (Wageningen: Veenman, 1966) 335–49, which was republished in W. C. van Unnik, *Sparsa collecta*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 386–401. Van Unnik receives the support of e.g. H. Omerzu, ‘Das Schweigen des Lukas: Überlegungen zum offenen Ende der Apostelgeschichte’, *Das Ende des Paulus: historische, theologische und literaturgeschichtliche Aspekte* (ed. F. W. Horn; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001)

such discussion and critique, I will argue, without assuming that Acts necessarily makes a programmatic statement at 1.8, but nonetheless noting that the unclear expression ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς which is used there may well be further unpacked in the course of the narrative, (a) that the notion ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς is too general to make it possible to pinpoint one reference at the exclusion of others, and therefore probably includes all peripheries mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, including both Ethiopia and Rome; (b) that the point is rather to re-organise the world with Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria at the centre and Ethiopia and Rome at its periphery. The place of Ethiopia at the margins is no surprise given the typical take of texts from the Mediterranean world on that area (even if those from both Ethiopia and Rome might be somewhat surprised to find themselves in the same geographical and ideological category), but the presentation of (colonial) Jerusalem with Judea and Samaria as the world's real centre and the relegation of imperial Rome that could be referred to as the 'end of the earth' by other early Jewish texts as well (in particular *Pss. Sol.* 8.15, but this is disputed), even if the precise meaning of the expression always depends on its narrative context,⁶ to the margins is striking indeed. The impact of this literary renegotiation of space is, in this particular instance, all the more remarkable, as the author of Acts achieves it at a time in which Jerusalem was largely in ruins after Titus' siege and the subsequent fall of the city in 70.⁷ The result is a reordering of space, a literal remapping of the world, in which the actual political centre and colonial periphery are reversed.⁸ In this way, Jerusalem is well established as

127–56, at 132, who herself is content with establishing that the expression is generic in nature and probably Isaianic in background (Isa 8.9; 48.20; 49.6; 62.11; see further for the exact same expression 1 Macc 3.9 and *Pss. Sol.* 1.4). For a broader consideration of the Isaianic background, see the survey offered by T. S. Moore, "To the End of the Earth": The Geographical and Ethnic Universalism of Acts 1:8 in the Light of Isaianic Influence on Luke', *JETS* 40 (1997) 389–99.

- 6 As is rightly stressed by Johnson, *Acts*, 27, who goes on to list the following instances of the expression, referring to a number of different locations around the globe: Herodotus, *Persian Wars* 3.25, uses it to refer to Cambyses' war against the Ethiopians; Strabo, *Geography* 1.1.6 also refers to Ethiopia as the end of the earth, while Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 13.9 uses the term to mean 'everywhere', and the Septuagint employs the expression in a very general sense as well (see e.g. Deut 28.49; Ps 134.6–7; Isa 8.9; 14.21–2; 48.20; 49.6; 62.11; Jer 10.12; 16.19; 1 Macc 3.9).
- 7 If Acts is dated (very) late, as proposed by R. E. Pervo, *Dating Acts* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2006), then the persistent use of the term 'Jerusalem' in the narrative of Acts also seeks to keep alive a memory of a city that was, in the mid-second century, buried under both a new name and a new settlement, that of Aelia Capitolina, established after the Bar Kokhba revolt.
- 8 See already L. Alexander, "In Journeyings often": Voyaging in the Acts of the Apostles and in Greek Romance' *idem, Acts in its Ancient Literary Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2007) 69–96, at 73, noting that Acts 1.8 implies 'a divine bird's-eye view of the world'.

the ideological and therefore also geographical centre of the Christ movement. This is in line with narrative tactics that can be observed in (near-)contemporary texts, such as Hellenistic novels and apocryphal acts.⁹ In order to substantiate this, first a brief overview will be given of some of the issues at stake and tactics involved in the narrative (re)ordering of space, then a consideration will be given to Acts 1.8, with some concluding reflections on the perspective on space of the Acts of the Apostles in general. Through this approach, this study also shows that the idea, put forward by scholars such as Nasrallah, that Jerusalem is somehow superseded, or even replaced, by Rome in Acts, is hardly plausible; the narrative point is rather that the prisoner Paul from Jerusalem captures Rome with his preaching of the kingdom (precisely the kingdom also mentioned in Acts 1.6, leading up to Acts 1.8, where the notion of the kingdom may well receive a narrative reinterpretation).¹⁰ Jerusalem is firmly at the centre of Luke's world-view¹¹ (in line also with Luke 24.47 καὶ κηρυχθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ μετάνοιαν εἰς ἅφεςιν ἁμαρτιῶν εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. ἄρξάμενοι ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ, 'and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem', NRSV; the subsequent final verses of this Gospel also serve to retain the disciples in the city, prior to going out, in order to receive the 'power from on high').¹² In reflecting on this, it will be argued that it can all be understood well in terms of a process of intercultural renegotiation of (colonised) space, which Luke executes as a cultural 'hybrid', someone inhabiting two cultures simultaneously (mainstream Greco-Roman culture and the Christian 'subculture'), in the course of which he invites his readership to revise their mental map of the world, an enterprise that is rhetorically all the more urgent due to the tension between the two cultural discourses inherent in it.

In addressing all these various issues, this article goes beyond existing research on Acts 1.8 both by considering it more thoroughly in the context of the politics of space and geography in the Greco-Roman world and the literary and ideological context of the book of Acts, and by relating it to intercultural and post-colonial theory.

9 See e.g. the contributions in M. Paschalis and S. A. Frangoulidis, eds., *Space in the Ancient Novel* (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2002); I. J. F. de Jong, ed., *Space in Ancient Greek Literature: Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

10 See e.g. R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, vol. 1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986) 70, referring to Rome as the new centre of Christianity; C. S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker: 2012) 439; L. S. Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 107–8; see also Moore, "End", 391.

11 See e.g. J. M. Scott, 'Luke's Geographical Horizon', *The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting* (ed. D. W. J. Gill and C. Gempf; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 483–544.

12 A link rightly stressed throughout by Moore, "End".

2. Space, Memory and Greco-Roman Literature

In line with the 'spatial turn' in cultural studies,¹³ this topic has begun to receive the attention due to it also in the field of biblical studies, and it has become widely recognised that through the ordering of space society is ordered as well: physically, psychologically, socially, religiously, economically etc. Physical boundaries, the naming of spaces and the visual, mental or literary representations of space play a major role in this respect. Through the manipulation of space, all sorts of (value) judgements or (moral) prejudices can be expressed and enacted (e.g. through oppositions such as inside/outside, good/bad), which also applies to questions of social relations and the distribution of power, e.g. by means of references to centre and margin as these are analysed in post-colonial studies, a field of particular importance to the current study.¹⁴ By addressing space in this way, a correction is made to discourses of literary analysis that would privilege time over space and consider the latter of somewhat lesser importance.

In the field of classical studies and biblical literature, this theory has been accepted to a substantial extent, which has led to a clear awareness that (also) in Greco-Roman society space was ordered in line with imperial ideology and the reality of empire was both inscribed into space and created through the (re) ordering of space, virtually through any available means and media: art, architecture, literature, inscriptions, public ritual (e.g. triumphal processions), coins etc.¹⁵ Accordingly, maps, both physical¹⁶ and mental (mediated through, for example, literature), played a role of great significance in conveying the desired representation of the world (quite literally 'world-view') to the public.¹⁷ What such

13 See, in general, e.g. the overview provided by B. Warf and S. Arias, ed., *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2008). See also D. Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994).

14 See e.g. S. Buchholz and M. Jahn, 'Space', *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (ed. D. Herman, M. Jahn and M.-L. Ryan; New York: Routledge, 2005) 551–5; see also the literature referred to there.

15 See, with a focus on literature, e.g. Paschalis and Frangoulidis, *Space*; De Jong, *Space*.

16 See, for such maps, their production and role, e.g. R. J. A. Talbert, ed., *Ancient Perspectives: Maps and their Place in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); and R. J. A. Talbert and R. W. Unger, eds., *Cartography in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Fresh Perspectives, New Methods* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). See also the detailed study of K. Clarke, *Between Geography and History: Hellenistic Constructions of the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). A number of maps is reproduced in J. Harwood, *To the Ends of the Earth: 100 Maps that Changed the World* (Cincinnati: Marshall, 2006) 20–7. For an exploration of the 'end of the world' in terms of Greco-Roman ethnography and geography, see J. S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

17 See e.g., in Talbert, *Perspectives*, the contributions of Talbert ('*Urbs Roma to Orbis Romanus: Roman Mapping on the Grand Scale*' (pp. 163–92)) and B. Salway ('*Putting the World in Order:*

representations aimed at is well demonstrated by the words of the panegyrist Eumenius (third century CE):

Let the schoolchildren see it in those porticoes and look every day at all lands and seas and every city, race or tribe that unconquerable emperors either assist by their sense of duty or conquer by their valour or control by inspiring fear.¹⁸

Narratives, be they Augustus' *Res gestae*, (other) works of history or even novels, continued such representations of the 'mental map' of the world of their authors and readers. How Rome might appear in such maps is well illustrated by a near-contemporary of Luke: Lucan (39–65 CE; himself born in Corduba – present-day Cordoba), who wrote about the centre of his world as follows when recounting the events of the civil war between Julius Caesar and Gnaeus Pompeius:

Aut Collina tulit stratas quot porta catervas,
Tum cum paene caput mundi rerumque potestas
Mutavit translata locum, Romanaque Samnis
Ultra Caudinas speravit volnera Furcas.

What heaps of slain encumbered the Colline Gate on that day when the capital of the world and the government of mankind was nearly transferred to a different seat, and the Samnites hoped to inflict on Rome a heavier blow than the Caudine Forks! (Lucan 2.135–9)¹⁹

Mapping in Roman Texts' (pp. 192–234)). For considerations of the political interests involved, see e.g. C. Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1990); C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); as well as R. Talbert and K. Brodersen, eds., *Space in the Roman World* (Münster: LIT, 2003). See further also O. A. W. Dilke, *Greek and Roman Maps* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

18 Quoted in translation by Dilke, *Maps*, 54; text in R. A. B. Mynors, *XII Panegyrici Latini* IX (iv) (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964). See, for the relevance of this text, also L. Alexander, 'Narrative Maps: Reflections on the Toponymy of Acts', *The Bible in Human Society* (ed. M. D. Carroll R., D. J. A. Clines and P. R. Davies; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 17–57, esp. 18. For a similar sentiment as the one expressed by Eumenius, cf. the following formulation used by Propertius (*Elegiae* 4.3.37): *e tabula pictos ediscere mundos*.

19 Text and translation from J. D. Duff, ed. *Lucan: The Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928) 66–7; there is an ironic twist to Lucan's use of the term 'caput mundi' here and in *Bell. Civ.* 2.655–656, as Micah Y. Myers, 'Lucan's Poetic Geographies: Center and Periphery in Civil War Epic,' in: Paolo Asso (ed.) *Brill's Companion to Lucan*, 399–415, 413, rightly notes; such irony, however, is only able to function if it can mimic a 'serious' use of the same expression. For a broader consideration of Lucan's use of space, see also the 2014 doctoral dissertation of Laura Zientek, *Lucan's Natural Questions: Landscape and Geography in the Bellum Civile* (University of Washington, 2014).

Other examples could easily be adduced, from the field of literature, political rhetoric, map-making and, to be sure, the cultic representation of the Roman Empire, as for instance in the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias.²⁰ Quite in line with such approaches to space and power, in the literature of the Jewish tradition²¹ (including early Christian literature),²² such ordering of space also played a profound role and was usually expressive of a world-view somewhat in tension and certainly in competition with that of other (and stronger) powers in the Mediterranean world, where all concerned with maps would locate at their centre the place that they considered ideologically normative²³ while also seeking to order space within their own community. All of this is well established and therefore does not need to be elaborated any further here. In the helpful turn of phrase of Penner and Vander Stichele: making maps is always about claiming territory.²⁴

With regard to the topic of this paper, the Book of Acts, Loveday Alexander has indicated that the representation of space, in the sense of ‘narrative

20 On which, see, with particular attention to the cosmic and geographical dimensions of this representation, B. B. Rubin, ‘(Re)presenting Empire: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor, 31 BC–AD 68’ (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008) 77–8.

21 See e.g. the series *Constructions of Space*, vols. 1–v (London: Bloomsbury, 2008–14), focusing on the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and the appertaining non-canonical literature (including Qum’ran), or L. Gartner-Brereton, *The Ontology of Space in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2014), as well as the considerations of S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989) 184–96. For a consideration of space in an apocryphal Jewish work, see J. M. Scott, *Geography in Early Judaism and Christianity: The Book of Jubilees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 56, who also mentions the relevance of Acts 1.8 and the resulting Jerusalem-centred world-view.

22 See, for an overview, e.g. Alexander, ‘Journeyings’, 76–9 and also the insightful study concerning space and place in Jesus traditions by H. Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in his Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003). See further the overview offered in Umurhan and Penner, ‘Luke’, as well as the insightful considerations of various dimensions offered by J. Charlesworth, ‘Background 1: Jesus of History and the Topography of the Holy Land’, *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (ed. S. E. Porter and T. Holmén; Leiden: Brill, 2011) 2213–42. For the second century, see also Nasrallah, *Responses*. An awareness of this is not always equally strong: for example, J. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 116 does not pay attention to the political dimension of geography in his comments on Acts 1.8. Similarly, J. Zmijewski, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1994) 111, while recognising that the list of nations in Acts 2.9–11 has a political dimension, argues that Luke uses it in a religious and theological way, which, for Zmijewski, seems to be distinct from the political.

23 See, for a list of evidence for this, also Keener, *Acts*, 701.

24 T. C. Penner and C. Vander Stichele, ‘Le territoire corinthien: point de vue et poétique dans les Actes des Apôtres’, *Regards croisés sur la Bible: études sur le point de vue* (RRENAB; Paris: Cerf, 2007) 83–204, esp. 198: ‘La carte, alors, est territoire et, alors que nous pouvons en témoigner, nos cartes de l’ancien monde transforment le paysage, incluant (et peut-être surtout) notre propre point de vue dans le processus.’ See earlier also T. C. Penner, *In Praise of Christian Origins: Stephen and the Hellenists in Lukan Apologetic Historiography* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004) 62–4.

maps', also plays a role of key importance, given the work's preoccupation with travelling and geography and, therefore, with all sorts of matters associated with it: boundaries, ethnicities etc. Thus, its author participates in the discourse on space current in the Greco-Roman world, where different world-views competed with each other. One of the best-known examples of Luke's interest in space and geography is without doubt the list of nations in Acts 2.9–11, which can be analysed as pointing to various parts of the world in sequence, from the perspective of Jerusalem as the centre of the οἰκουμένη.²⁵ In fact, Luke's geography has received plenty of attention, and it has been placed squarely in the context of the appertaining Greco-Roman discourse, usually with the ensuing argument that Luke turns the world upside down quite literally by taking a Jerusalem-centred world-view.²⁶

3. Acts 1.8 and the Reordering of Space

On the basis of the above considerations, it is now possible to turn to Acts 1.8 and in particular to the expression ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς, discussing it first in general, and then in relation to the narrative of Acts itself, which will provide grounds for a final analysis and conclusions.

3.1 Surveying the 'Ends of the Earth'

As noted above, the expression ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς has drawn the attention of a number of scholars,²⁷ leading to a variety of interpretative options that will be surveyed now. First, a series of interpretations identify ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς

25 On this, see Alexander, 'Journeys', 79, following R. Bauckham, 'James and the Jerusalem Church', *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting* (ed. R. Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 415–80, esp. 417–27. A similar argument is set forth (and documented very well) by G. Gilbert, 'The List of Nations in Acts 2: Roman Propaganda and the Lukan Response', *JBL* 121 (2002) 497–529, who does note the significance of Acts 1.8 in terms of providing an alternative map of the world, but does not expand on it. Jervell, *Apostelgeschichte*, 136, rightly notes that the list intends to express universality. Similarly W. Schmithals, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas* (Zürich: TVZ, 1982) 31.

26 See the evidence in D. P. Bechard, *Paul outside the Walls: A Study of Luke's Socio-geographical Universalism* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2000) 171–353, as well as the earlier contribution by Scott, 'Horizon'. All of this certainly amounts to a world-view that resists the dominant one, partially by mimicking it and using hidden (or not so hidden) transcripts: see e.g. R. A. Horsley, ed., *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul* (Atlanta: SBL, 2004).

27 This survey leaves aside various applications of the expression (which shows its openness to different interpretations) in the course of history, in particular by missionaries or by churches located at the periphery of, for instance, Europe, such as the *ecclesia Anglicana* – on which and the 'ends of the earth' in the work of Bede, see e.g. S. Foot, *Bede's Church* (Jarrow: The Parish Church Council of St. Paul's Church, 2012) 10. Reference courtesy of Miriam Adan Jones, MA, VU University Amsterdam. Keener, *Acts*, 704, notes that *Britannia* was one of the more recent

γῆς as a reference to Rome; these take their cue from a number of texts different from Acts that connect similar expressions with Rome (in particular, *Pss. Sol.* 8.15),²⁸ as well as from the narrative drift of Acts that, as is often noted, moves from Jerusalem and Rome.²⁹ Second, there is an interpretation according to which the expression refers to the boundaries of the land of Israel.³⁰ Third, according to another interpretation, ἕως ἐσχατοῦ τῆς γῆς refers to the geographical end of the world, located somewhere at or near present-day Gibraltar (in line with Paul's apparent plans to go there).³¹ Fourth, some argue for an interpretation in terms of Africa, possibly Ethiopia – both in line with possible meanings of the expression as such as found in the narrative of Acts, in which the converted Ethiopian eunuch continues on his way, not literally to the end of the earth, but at least in the right direction, and also taking into account Luke 11.31 and the βασιλισσα νότου mentioned there.³² Fifth, Rengstorf's proposal can be

additions to the Roman Empire in Luke's day, having been added by Claudius in 43 CE, and thus certainly constituted the 'end of the earth' in the sense of a new frontier.

- 28 Even if e.g. Keener, following Van Unnik, 'Ausdruck', rightly notes that this reference is to the Roman general Pompeius, who, although a Roman general, was active in Spain prior to coming to Israel. See Keener, *Acts*, 705.
- 29 See e.g. Omerzu, 'Schweigen', 132 and the references there, including: E. Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956) 150-2; G. Stählin, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962) 18; H. Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972) 27.
- 30 This has been proposed notably by D. R. Schwartz, 'The End of the ΓΗ: Beginning or End of the Christian Vision', *JBL* 105 (1986) 669-76, who concludes his argument by stating: 'We would suggest, therefore, not only that Acts 1:8 is used by Luke to depict a primitive conception of the extent of Christian potential, a narrow vision to be widened as the story progresses, but also that Luke may well have been justified in linking this opening position to Jesus.' As M. Sleeman, *Geography and the Ascension Narrative in Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009) 71 notes, the inclusion of Samaria in the list makes this suggestion somewhat implausible. C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) 80 is also critical of this view.
- 31 See E. E. Ellis, 'The End of the Earth (Acts 1:8)', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (1991) 123-32, based on Paul's desire to go to Spain and the frequent identification of the area around and beyond Gibraltar, in particular the port of Gades, as 'the end of the earth'.
- 32 See Yorke, 'Jerusalem', as well as works such as the following, mentioned by Schwartz, 'End', 699: H. J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955) 15; E. Dinkler, 'Philippus und der ANHP ΑΙΘΙΟΥΨ (Apg 8,26-40): Historische und geographische Bemerkungen zum Missionsablauf nach Lukas', *Jesus und Paulus: Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. E. E. Ellis and E. Grässer; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) 85-95, at 85-6; T. C. G. Thornton, 'To the End of the Earth: Acts 1 8', *Expository Times* 89 (1977) 374-5; M. Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1979) 80.

mentioned that takes the expression to refer primarily to the Jews of the diaspora.³³ Finally, there are interpretations according to which the expression refers in a more general way to the outer parts of the world, its margins or periphery,³⁴ in Jewish literature often associated with the coming of those living at the end of the earth to worship in Jerusalem at the end of time.³⁵ All of these approaches have their merits. Still, it seems that the expression is primarily rather generic in nature, as is evidenced both by its generic use and by its use in relation to a number of specific locations (which would not be possible, should the expression be tied to one location in particular): if it is to be associated with a particular location, then there should be clear clues to this in its immediate literary context – an argument that transfers the relationship between the expression and a particular location from one literary context to another is potentially fallacious. Therefore, it is necessary to do precisely that: to investigate the context of the expression in Acts, in terms both of its immediate micro-context in Acts 1 and 13 and of the macro-context of the narrative of Acts with its strong interest in journeying, territories and ethnicities, in order to work out how generic or how specific an interpretation can be justified.

3.2 *Narrative Cues as to the Location of the ‘End of the Earth’*

In order to unpack what the expression ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς refers to, it stands to reason to look at the narrative of Luke’s Acts of the Apostles itself. In doing so, three aspects of the narrative appear to be of immediate relevance: (a) the narrative context of the expression in Acts 1; (b) the use of the same expression elsewhere in Acts; (c) further geographical references that could shed light on (a) and (b).

3.2.1 *The End of the Earth in Acts 1*

In Acts 1, ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς occurs in a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples, in the context of Jesus’ final post-resurrection appearance to them. When the disciples ask him the following question: κύριε, εἰ ἐν τῷ χρόνῳ τούτῳ ἀποκαθιστάνεις τὴν βασιλείαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ; (‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’, NRSV; Acts 1.6), Jesus responds by saying: οὐχ ὑμῶν ἐστὶν γινῶναι χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς οὓς ὁ πατὴρ ἔθετο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ, ἀλλὰ λήψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ [ἐν] πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς. (‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will

33 See K. H. Rengstorf, ‘Die Zuwahl des Matthias (Apg 1,15ff.)’, *Studia Theologica* 15 (1961) 35–7, 53–6. This view has not received much following.

34 See esp. Van Unnik, ‘Ausdruck’, which has been broadly accepted. See also the evidence presented by Keener, *Acts*, 704–8.

35 See e.g. the documentation collected by Keener, *Acts*, 702–3.

receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth', NRSV; Acts 1.7–8). Thus, the dialogue moves from one geographical indication, i.e. the kingdom of Israel, to another one: Jerusalem, the whole of Judea and Samaria, and the end of the earth (in the process also taking up and expanding a little more on what was said in Luke 24.47, concerning the beginning of the proclamation ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ). This can mean a number of things, but it certainly suggests that the witness that the disciples will provide will go beyond the confines of the land of Israel. In fact, when thinking geographically, Jerusalem seems to be the centre of an imaginary map, with Judea and Samaria as a further part of this map, and the end of the earth as the map's margins. Even if it is not stated explicitly, one might imagine this as a centre with two or three concentric circles around it. What is of interest, in any case, is that the map that Jesus outlines here is not concerned with identifying particular areas or cities beyond Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. Anything else is, quite literally, relegated to the margins, which is striking, to say the least. When looking for a further specification of what the 'end of the earth' might mean and following the flow of the narrative of Acts, a first reference to geography that does not involve Jerusalem or its vicinity (see e.g. 1.12.19, but also 1.11, Galilee) appears in 2.5, right after we have been told in v. 4 that the disciples had begun to speak ἐτέραις γλώσσαις, having received γλῶσσαι ('tongues') that looked ὡσεὶ πυρὸς ('like fire') in v. 3, where it is recorded that the audience of their speech consists of Ἰουδαῖοι, ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν ('devout Jews from every nation under heaven', NRSV; Acts 2.5). This oddity is emphasised and unpacked by reporting the reaction of this audience verbatim, thus slowing down the narration and placing much emphasis on this episode. The crowd first mentions the circumstance that those speaking are all Galileans (2.7) (something the reader will be familiar with from the previous chapter, where the angels stress this as well (1.11)), then it proceeds to contrast this with the fact that those listening and understanding them are Πάρθοι καὶ Μῆδοι καὶ Ἐλαμίται καὶ οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν, Ἰουδαίαν τε καὶ Καππαδοκίαν, Πόντον καὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν, Φρυγίαν τε καὶ Παμφυλίαν, Αἴγυπτον καὶ τὰ μέρη τῆς Λιβύης τῆς κατὰ Κυρήνην, καὶ οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες Ῥωμαῖοι, Ἰουδαῖοί τε καὶ προσήλυτοι, Κρήτες καὶ Ἀραβες ('Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs, NRSV; Acts 2.9–11).³⁶ This list of nations may function well as a first narrative filling-in of what the rather generic expression ἕως

36 A full discussion of this list cannot be provided here, but it is of significance to note that even though the reference to 'Romans' means 'Roman citizens' rather than 'people from Rome', the association of geography and political realm is still upheld, even if only because Roman

ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς might refer to, specially if following Bauckham's interpretation of the list as reflecting the various regions of the world as seen from Jerusalem (including Judea, to be sure).³⁷ Somehow, the rather particular speech of Galileans in Jerusalem is able to reach an audience from the entire world and is met with substantial approval, as 2.41 indicates. Rome and other places for which the expression 'end of the earth' might be used appear here as members of the same class: peripheral regions. At the same time, the list of nations also mimics Roman imperial lists of nations and, therefore, may well have a political twist to it.³⁸ This seems all the more likely when taking into account that the 'world map' of Acts 1.8 is outlined by Jesus in response to a question of the disciples concerning the restitution of the kingdom of Israel, for which Jesus does not give a timeline, although he may well be indicating the mode of its establishment through the disciples' witness till the end of the earth, which would agree well with the notion of Paul's preaching of precisely the kingdom in Rome; the very last line of Acts depicts Paul's life there as follows: κηρύσσω τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διδάσκω τὰ περὶ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ πάσης παρρησίας ἀκωλύτως ('proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance', NRSV; Acts 28.31).³⁹ Therefore, in relation to the remainder of the

citizenship amounted to the (fictive) association of a person with the city of Rome (even if such a person was never to visit it in his lifetime).

37 See e.g. Barrett *Acts*, 78, who argues that Acts 1.8 both anticipates Acts 2 and 'receives a measure of interpretation from that chapter'. Similarly Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 106. To be sure, the imperial Roman background of such lists is of key importance; there might even be a twist to the list in the sense that Parthia, a territory that posed notoriously difficult challenges to Rome, is the first area to be mentioned here. See G. Gilbert, 'Luke-Acts and the Negotiation of Authority and Identity in the Greco-Roman World', *The Multivalence of Biblical Texts and Theological Meanings* (ed. C. Helmer and C. T. Higbe; Atlanta: SBL, 2006) 83–104, at 102.

38 As is argued convincingly by e.g. Gilbert, 'List', who propounds the thesis 'that the list of nations in Acts 2 echoes similar lists from this period that celebrated Rome's position as ruler over the inhabited world. Acts adopts this well-known rhetorical tool to advance its own theological claims regarding Jesus and the church. The list of nations stands as one part of a larger narrative strategy that responds to Rome's claim of universal authority and declares that the true empire belongs not to Caesar but to Jesus, who as Lord and Savior reigns over all people' (499). See further Umurhan and Penner, 'Luke', for a further consideration of the political dimensions of space in Luke in its Greco-Roman context. See also D. L. Tiede, 'Acts 1:6–8 and the Theo-Political Claims of Christian Witness', *Word & World* 1 (1981) 41–51, who makes an interesting suggestion as to the connection between forgiveness of sins and entry into the fellowship of the apostles (see Acts 2.38) by connecting it with the amnesty granted upon the accession of a new emperor to those wishing to submit themselves to him.

39 For considerations concerning the proclamation of the disciples and the establishment of the kingdom, see also the nuanced remarks of Barrett, *Acts*, 78; see further Zmijewski, *Apostelgeschichte*, 58–60.

narrative of Acts, all of this means that both Acts 1.8 and 2.9–11 have an anticipatory function,⁴⁰ while, just because the two texts have to do with the ordering of the world and because of a link with the re-establishment of Israel, they also have a political aspect. Whether this interpretation has any merit will now be explored further by turning to the second instance of the expression ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς in Acts, which occurs in 13.47.

3.2.2 *The End of the Earth in Acts 13*

Before turning to further geographical references in Acts, of which there are many, attention should be given to the second occurrence of the expression ‘end of the earth’, as it occurs in Acts 13.47. Considering this will yield two results: first, it will show that a number of interpretations as they have been listed above are less than convincing; second, it will help to narrow down the number of relevant geographical references in the narrative of Acts when it comes to determining the reference and meaning of the ‘end of the earth’ in Acts 1.8. As in Acts 1.8, in Acts 13.47 the expression ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς occurs in a dialogue. This time, Paul and Barnabas respond to unidentified objections by Antiochian Jews. They state mainly that due to ‘their’ rejection of the word of God, they will now turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13.46). This, Paul and Barnabas claim is in line with the following statement of the Lord: τέθεικά σε εἰς φῶς ἐθνῶν, τοῦ εἶναί σε εἰς σωτηρίαν ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς (‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth’, NRSV; Acts 13.47). The Gentiles who hear this rejoice and consequently διεφέρετο δὲ ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου δι’ ὅλης τῆς χώρας (‘Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region’, NRSV; Acts 13.49). Whereas these are not specific geographical indications, these texts do make clear that the words of the Lord concerning the end of the earth, be it in their version in Acts 1.8 or 13.47 (which sounds a lot like Luke 2.32), must have something to do with Gentile mission outside the land of Israel and serve to both legitimate and explain it. The link with Gentile mission is obvious from the words that Paul and Barnabas quote, which constitute a parallelism with an explanatory function, i.e. the second half explains the first. This mission takes place somewhere outside the land of Israel, but not at any literal end of the earth; rather, the Antiochian land seems to be the place where all of this takes place. Still, when recalling the use of the expression in Acts 1.8, its possible unpacking in the list of nations in Acts 2.9–11 and the subsequent inclusion of Jews from all over the world into the fellowship of the apostles (2.41), it is hard not to note that the scenario has changed now: rather than involving the inclusion of Jews from all over the world who have come to Jerusalem in the new

40 As it is proposed – and convincingly so – by e.g. A. Thompson, *One Lord, One People: The Unity of the Church in Acts in its Literary Setting* (London: T&T Clark, 2008) 69–70 (with substantial documentation on the list of nations).

community, now representatives of this Jerusalem community are travelling outside of Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria in order to include non-Jews in the same community (note the emphasis on this in 13.48: ἀκούοντα δὲ τὰ ἔθνη ἔχαρον καὶ ἐδόξαζον τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἐπίστευσαν ὅσοι ἦσαν τεταγμένοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον, ‘When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers’, NRSV); apparently, both distant Jews (living in the diaspora) and distant Gentiles (living in the same areas) can be covered by the ‘end of the earth’.⁴¹ Still, it would seem a hard case to argue that the activities of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch and surroundings can cover the full scope of the expression ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς, given that spreading the word in the land of Antioch is hardly the same as being a light for the Gentiles in their entirety and bringing salvation to the end of the earth, certainly given the drift of the narrative of Acts both thus far (including the list of nations in Acts 2) and as yet to come. Some aspects of this broader drift of the narrative of Acts will be considered now, after it has already been established that the reference of ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς cannot be the boundaries of the land of Israel (this is implausible given Acts 1.8 alone), nor one piece of land in particular, given that the land of Antioch belongs to the broader area covered by ‘the end of the earth’, but the area is hardly limited to it. This will now be explored further in relation to some further geographical indicators in the book of Acts.

3.2.3 *Loose Ends*

In the remainder of the narrative of Acts, geography continues to play a significant role, just as it had done up to ch. 13. While it would go widely beyond the

41 See e.g. Sleeman, *Geography*, 71, who warns, with Jervell (*Apostelgeschichte*, 116: ‘Man sollte nicht vorschnell an Heiden denken’; doing precisely this is exemplified by Keener, *Acts*, 697), against assuming that ‘end of the earth’ refers to Gentiles only or even primarily. This would be critical of the position taken by e.g. E. Best, ‘The Revelation to Evangelize the Gentiles’, *JTS* 35 (1984) 1–30, at 3: ‘We can also leave unresolved the question whether “the end of the earth” means Rome or, more probably, the furthest extent of the inhabited world. The reference is in any case to the Gentiles ...’ The fact that Acts 13.47 quotes Isa 49.6 with the explicit reference to being a light for the Gentiles (in the context of clear mission to Gentiles) and Acts 1.8 does not (in the context of Jerusalem, with subsequent speeches being directed at Jews from over the entire world) might also give reason to think of the expression ‘end of the earth’ as being capable of referring to both – possibly with its meaning being extended in the course of the narrative of Acts. That is, it seems to refer first to diaspora Jews (Acts 1.8, no reference to being the light for the Gentiles), and subsequently, with an added reference to being a light for the Gentiles, it refers to the latter as well (see e.g. Bruce, *Acts*, 36). See Moore, “‘End’”, 392. C. Burchard, ‘Fußnoten zum neutestamentlichen Griechisch’, *ZNW* 61 (1970) 157–71, at 161, captures well how geography is expressive of ideology insofar as it concerns the orientation of the proclamation of the apostles: ‘Act 1,8b drückt ... geographisch aus, was sachlich “vor Juden und Heiden” heißt.’ See also Zmijewski, *Apostelgeschichte*, 59.

purposes of this article to survey all of it, a few aspects should be mentioned. To begin with, it is obvious that in the first seven chapters of Acts are concerned primarily with events in Jerusalem, that the focus shifts to events taking place in Judea and Samaria in chs. 8–12, and that Paul’s journeys eventually bring him to Rome (chs. 13–28).⁴² However correct this broad picture may seem, there are a number of elements in Acts that make it more complicated than it would seem at first. This feature of Acts has to do with the centrality of Jerusalem in its narrative, given that Paul returns to this city a number of times, e.g. in such momentous chapters as 15 and 22. In other words, Paul takes a rather circuitous route to Rome and there is no unequivocal progression from Jerusalem to Rome that would narratively follow the stages of the map provided by Acts 1.8.⁴³ This is of significance, as in the various chapters in between, other localities and ethnicities also occur that cannot be filed away under the headings Jerusalem, Judea or Samaria. These would include Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in ch. 8 (who continues on his way to Ethiopia), Paul’s calling *en route* to Damascus in ch. 9, the extensive account of Peter’s encounter with Cornelius in ch. 10, Barnabas’ mission to Antioch in ch. 11, and from ch. 13 onwards a whole series of spots in the eastern Mediterranean, before, from 19.21 onward, Paul, who has now become the main character of the narrative, expresses his intention to set out for, first, Jerusalem, and then Rome (see also 23.11 for a pairing of these two cities). What this means is that whatever is covered by the reference to the end of the earth in Acts 1.8 (and 13.47) must be much more than just Rome, even if Rome is the last port of call, as it were, in the apostles’ exploration of the rather vast realm of the ‘end of the earth’ beyond Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria.⁴⁴ Such an impression would be confirmed by the equally Jerusalem-centric statement of Jesus in Luke 24.47, ‘that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ἀρξάμενοι ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ)’, and is in line with the ‘universal’ stage that is set for the Gospel narrative (and Acts) in Luke 2.1: ἐξῆλθεν δόγμα παρὰ Καίσαρος

42 Johnson, *Acts*, 27.

43 See e.g. L. Alexander, ‘Reading Luke-Acts from Back to Front’, *The Unity of Luke-Acts* (ed. J. Verheyden; Louvain: Peeters, 1999) 419–46, at 426–7, also noting that there are other locations in the narrative of Acts that may well be associated with the exotic and barbaric nature of the ‘end of the earth’, e.g. the ‘barbarians’ mentioned in 28.2 (Malta).

44 See e.g. the conclusions of B. L. Melbourne, ‘Acts 1:8 Re-examined: Is Acts 8 its Fulfillment?’, *JRT* 57 (2001) 1–18, at 18: ‘Luke, therefore, used Acts 1:8 as the theme and index of contents for his work. Moreover, he also demonstrated the fulfillment of the command of Acts 1:8 in the programmatic expansion of the Gospel. He has done so not just in one chapter of his work but in all of Acts.’ The place of Rome in this all is captured well by G. Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelischer Verlagsanstalt, 1994) 72, noting that the mission to the Gentiles has as its goal not the literal end of the earth, but ‘die letzten Ausläufer der Welt ... deren Hauptstadt Rom heißt’.

Αυγούστου ἀπογράφεσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην ('a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered', NRSV).

3.2.4 *A Broader Survey?*

The considerations offered in the previous section can be expanded – and find confirmation – when considering the primary intertext of both Acts 1.18 and 13.37, on the one hand, and other references to the earth and its in in biblical tradition on the other. This is helpful for the purposes of this article, as interpretations of Acts 1.8 tend to focus on the expression itself as it is used in Acts 1.8 (and 13.47), without paying too much attention to similar expressions elsewhere, or to Isa 49.6 as an indicator of the most plausible meaning of the expression in Acts.

First, the primary intertext at stake is Isa 49.6, in its LXX version: καὶ εἶπέν μοι μέγα σοὶ ἐστὶν τοῦ κληθῆναί σε παῖδά μου τοῦ στήσαι τὰς φυλάς Ἰακωβ καὶ τὴν διασπορὰν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἐπιστρέψαι ἰδοὺ τέθεικά σε εἰς διαθήκην γένους εἰς φῶς ἐθνῶν τοῦ εἶναί σε εἰς σωτηρίαν ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς ('And he said to me: "It is a great thing for you to be called my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to return the dispersion of Israel, look, I have placed you as a covenant of the people and as a light of the Gentiles, that you will be for the salvation to the end of the earth"', translation by the author). What ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς might mean here is not defined further in the text. It is clear, however, that it refers to an enormous geographical expanse; as such, it may well be a hyperbolic expression. Nonetheless, its reach is unlimited.

Second, a similar point can be made with regard to other expressions that point into the direction of the earth's limits. Examples (an exhaustive overview cannot and need not be offered here) include Rom 10.18 (εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξῆλθεν ὁ φθόγγος αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ ῥήματα αὐτῶν, 'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world'), which quotes Ps 19.4 (εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξῆλθεν ὁ φθόγγος αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ ῥήματα αὐτῶν). In this passage, as in many other passages in the Psalms, the 'ends of the world' (here indicated with the Greek *πέρας*, a more frequent noun in such expressions than *ἔσχατος*),⁴⁵ refers not to a specific region, let alone city, but rather, quite literally,

45 See e.g. Deut 33.17 ἕως ἐπ' ἄκρου γῆς; Ps 2.8 τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς; 22.27 πάντα τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς; 47.11 ἐπὶ τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς; 59.14 τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς; 65.6 ἡ ἐλπίς πάντων τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς; 67.8 πάντα τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς; 72.8: ἕως περάτων τῆς οἰκουμένης; 98.3 πάντα τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς; Isa 24.16 τῆς γῆς τέρατα; Dan 4.21 ἕως τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς; Wis 6.1 δικασταὶ περάτων γῆς; 8.1 ἀπὸ πέρατος ἐπὶ πέρας; Matt 12.42 ἐκ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς (par. Luke 11.31). For *ἔσχατος*, see: Deut 28.49 ἀπ' ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς; Ps 134.7 ἐξ ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς; Isa 45.22 ἀπ' ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς; Isa 48.20 ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς; Isa 62.11 ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς; Jer 10.13 ἐξ ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς; 16.19 ἀπ' ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς; 28.16 ἀπ' ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς; 1 Macc 3.9 ἕως ἐσχάτου γῆς. Less common is the expression

the entire *orbis terrae*. In the gospel literature, similar expressions also occur, as for example in Mark 13.27 (par. Matt 24.31): καὶ τότε ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ ἐπισυνάξει τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς [αὐτοῦ] ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων ἀπ' ἄκρου γῆς ἕως ἄκρου οὐρανοῦ ('Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven', NRSV). Here another expression, ἀπ' ἄκρου γῆς, is found, which indicates, as the context of the sentence in which it is used suggests, the entirety of the globe. Likewise, in other instances where this expression is used, a similar space is in view.⁴⁶ Beyond this, when surveying the various expressions involved, it also becomes apparent that the phrase 'end(s) of the earth' virtually always connotes one or the other kind of Gentile territory: either territory into which Israel will be dispersed, a forlorn place from which an enemy will emerge, the expanse of space to which the glory of YHWH will be revealed, or the realm from which either the nations or the dispersed people of Israel (or both) will come in order to worship YHWH in his holy place. In other words, it is a broad, undefined and Gentile space.

The considerations on Mark 13.27 that have just been presented also offer the opportunity for returning to another element that occurs in both Acts 1.18 and 13.47: the word ἕως. This may well indicate a very large piece of the globe indeed, as it is the word that covers everything between whatever geographical centre is assumed in a text and the 'ends of the earth', in particular when these are assumed to be a generic indication covering the world as a whole and not referring to a particular faraway place (e.g. Spain, Britain etc.). For the interpretation of Acts 1.8, this would mean that all areas between Jerusalem, Samaria and Judea on the one hand and the boundaries of the world on the other are covered by ἕως.⁴⁷

used in Jer 25.31, ἐπὶ μέρος τῆς γῆς, which recurs in Jer 32.33, ἐκ μέρους τῆς γῆς καὶ ἕως εἰς μέρος τῆς γῆς.

46 See e.g. Deut 13.8 ἀπ' ἄκρου τῆς γῆς ἕως ἄκρου τῆς γῆς, meaning 'anywhere'; similarly Deut 28.64 ἀπ' ἄκρου τῆς γῆς ἕως ἄκρου τῆς γῆς, as well as Ps 45.9 τέρατα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; 60.3 ἀπὸ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς; Isa 5.26 ἀπ' ἄκρου τῆς γῆς; 41.5 τὰ ἄκρα τῆς γῆς; 41.9 ἀπ' ἄκρων τῆς γῆς; 42.10 ἀπ' ἄκρου τῆς γῆς; 40.28 τὰ ἄκρα τῆς γῆς; 43.6 ἀπ' ἄκρων τῆς γῆς; 52.10 πάντα τὰ ἄκρα τῆς γῆς; Micah 5.4 ἕως ἄκρων τῆς γῆς; Jdt 2.9 ἐπὶ τὰ ἄκρα πάσης τῆς γῆς; 11.21 ἀπ' ἄκρου ἕως ἄκρου τῆς γῆς; Prov 17.24 ἐπ' ἄκρα γῆς; 30.4 πάντων τῶν ἄκρων τῆς γῆς; Sir 44.21 ἕως ἄκρου τῆς γῆς; 1 Macc. 1.3 ἕως ἄκρων τῆς γῆς; 8.4 ἀπ' ἄκρου τῆς γῆς; 14.10 ἕως ἄκρου γῆς; cf. also Isa 13.5 ἀπ' ἄκρου θεμελίου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

47 Kind suggestion of Dr Martijn Smit, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University.

4. Understanding the End of the Earth: The Intercultural Renegotiation of Space

The dynamics of what has been surveyed so far can, in line with the 'spatial turn' in cultural studies, which has already been addressed above, and informed by insights from postcolonial studies, be further understood in terms of a subversive attempt at an intercultural renegotiation of space. That Acts is remapping the world by presenting Jerusalem as its centre and the rest as periphery, 'end of the earth', will be fairly clear by now. The dynamics inspiring it, however, can be unpacked further. A major challenge for (colonised) minorities in the structure of an empire such as the Roman one was one is to carve out a cultural space of their own. Given that culture can be convincingly regarded as an instrument of domination, 'regaining control over the means of collective self-definition is [to be] regarded as an important strategy in the political struggle for emancipation'.⁴⁸ There needs to be a cultural space other than that of 'mainstream' culture, in other words – and that includes mainstream topography. Alternative ideas, certainly alternative communities, need their own cultural expression to exist and, accordingly, their own 'world-view', i.e. a dissident topography, or, in a broader sense, geography.⁴⁹ In other words: identity is always bound up with the naming of space. Literature, including history writing, virtually always plays a major role in such processes of naming space, as an expression of both mainstream culture and (subversive) sub-cultures.⁵⁰ Thus, (post-)colonial struggles tend to produce their own (post-colonial) geographies.⁵¹ The force and subversive potential of such alternative geographies becomes apparent especially when they are viewed through the lens of 'mainstream' culture and 'alternative' culture at the same time: only when the tension between the mainstream and subaltern geographies is appreciated can their potential for making meaning unfold fully. Consequently, both the creation of such geographies and their appreciation

48 C. Barnett, 'Postcolonialism: Space, Textuality and Power', *Approaches to Human Geography* (ed. S. Aitken and G. Valentine; London: Sage, 2006) 147–59, at 147. Such theorising has received fundamental impetus from the work of Edward Said, notably his *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978).

49 See e.g. the title and contents of A. Blunt and J. Wills, *Dissident Geographies: An Introduction to Radical Ideas and Practice* (Harlow: Pearson, 2000).

50 See e.g. the essays collected in J. Anderson, ed., *Page and Place: Ongoing Compositions of Plot* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

51 For an overview, see e.g. J. D. Sidaway, 'Postcolonial Geographies: an Exploratory Essay', *Progress in Human Geography* 24 (2000) 591–612, as well as T. Jazeel, 'Postcolonialism', *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Cultural Geography* (ed. N. C. Johnson and R. H. Schein and J. Winders; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) 17–22. See also J. P. Sharp, *Geographies of Postcolonialism* (London: Sage, 2009); the contributions in A. Blunt and C. McEwan, eds., *Postcolonial Geographies* (London: Continuum, 2002); and C. Berberich, N. Campbell and R. Hudson, eds., *Land and Identity: Theory, Memory, and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

require cultural ‘hybrids’,⁵² people who inhabit two (or more) cultural discourses at once and are able to communicate between them as cultural brokers.

Such insights have become influential in biblical studies, including New Testament studies to some extent, usually operating under the label of post-colonial biblical interpretation,⁵³ whereas ‘minority criticism’ has also developed a sensitivity for geographical matters.⁵⁴ The Acts of the Apostles have also been approached from this angle, but a study of Acts 1.8 that takes such considerations into account is still lacking.⁵⁵ The present study aids in filling this void, by highlighting the literary, cultural, geographical and post-colonial factors identified here.

5. Conclusion

Where does all this leave us with regard to the expression ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς in Acts 1.8? To begin with, it can be established that because the expression is part of a brief ‘world map’, it is a turn of phrase with both geographical and political aspects, simply because the geographical is always political and vice versa, certainly when in an imperial context the (destroyed) capital of one of the colonial subjects is presented as the world’s centre. Even though Acts 1.8 itself does not mention ethnicity or culture explicitly but ‘only’ refers to geographical matters, texts to which it seems to be related (such as Acts 2.9–11, the list of nations, and certainly Acts 13.47) do engage with these issues explicitly, in particular in the context of the inclusion of groups of people (both Jews and Gentiles) from the areas covered by the ‘end of the earth’ in the fellowship of the apostles,

52 For this notion, see esp. H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

53 See e.g. the contributions in F. F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah, eds., *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (London: T&T Clark, 2009); F. F. Segovia and S. D. Moore, eds., *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007); R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012); M. Dube and J. Staley, eds., *John and Postcolonialism: Travel, Space, and Power* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002); J. Punt, *Postcolonial Biblical Interpretations: Reframing Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), esp. 38–9 (geography).

54 See e.g. R. C. Bailey, T. B. Liew and F. F. Segovia, eds., *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: SBL, 2009). The work continues earlier exploits of Segovia, who has worked to ‘decolonise’ the discipline of biblical studies as such, e.g. through his *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000).

55 For example, J. L. Staley, ‘Postcolonial Reflections on Reading Luke-Acts from Cabo San Lucas and Other Places’, *Literary Encounters with the Reign of God* (ed. S. Ringe and P. Kim; London: T&T Clark, 2004) 324–40 does mention Acts 1.8, but does not analyse it; also the broader study of R. Muñoz-Larrondo, *A Postcolonial Reading of the Acts of the Apostles* (Atlanta: SBL, 2011) 132–3 hardly addresses the expression in depth; Yorke, ‘Jerusalem’ does address the expression from a post-colonial angle, but, as has been pointed out, in an unconvincing manner.

both when Jewish and present in Jerusalem, and when non-Jewish and not in Jerusalem. All of this gives the impression that the world map provided by Acts 1.8 has an anticipatory function vis-à-vis the narrative of Acts, in which the proclamation of the Gospel moves from the (ideological and therefore geographical) centre to the margins, albeit in a rather circuitous fashion that keeps tying the centre to the periphery. Given the context of Acts 1.8, which is part of a response by Jesus to a question of the disciples pertaining to the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, and the note on which Acts ends, Paul's unhindered preaching of the kingdom in Rome (Acts 28.31), one may well get the impression that the world is indeed being rearranged into an order that can be understood as part of the establishment of the kingdom (at least in the proleptic mode of its announcement and proclamation), beginning at the centre, Jerusalem (see also Luke 24.47).⁵⁶ All are included, both Jews and Gentiles,⁵⁷ but in an order that is (ideologically and therefore geographically) Jerusalem-centred.⁵⁸ Considering, with this as background, what the expression 'end of the earth' covers in Acts, principally in the immediate narrative context of Acts 1.8 and 13.47, but also when taking into account its narrative as a whole, it is most likely that the term is used in a generic sense: everything that is not Jerusalem, Samaria or Judea (be it Parthia, Ethiopia, Antioch, or Rome). Such an interpretation is more plausible than one privileging a particular location and designating it as 'the end of the earth' exclusively. This has all sorts of consequences for the areas that are thus relegated to

56 In many ways, the present reading agrees with the (seemingly often overlooked) contribution of Moore, "End", who concludes his essay by stating: "'To the end of the earth" signifies Luke's universalistic perspective regarding the expansion of the gospel by means of the apostolic mission. It is not limited to only one aspect of the expansion (geography) but rather carries ethnic significance as well. Geographically the phrase denotes the end of the world in a general sense. In its ethnic significance *heōs eschatou tēs gēs* denotes the movement of the gospel into the Gentile world, without however implying a final turning from the Jewish people. Luke has not "written the Jews off." The determinative factors in deciding the geographical and ethnic significance of the phrase for Luke are (1) its Isaianic background and (2) its place in the flow of the Lucan narrative, coming after the conceptually parallel statement in Luke 24:47.' (p. 399).

57 See e.g. B. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 111.

58 See e.g. Schmithals, *Apostelgeschichte*, 22: 'Lukas ... läßt erkennen, daß und wie er die Zwölf Apostel als den maßgeblichen Ursprung und Jerusalem dementsprechend als den bleibenden Ursprungsort der christlichen Tradition vorstellen will, von denen die christliche Gemeinde zu allen Zeiten und an allen Orten herkommt und von denen ... auch der Weltmissionar Paulus ... sein aus *diesem* Grunde authentisches Evangelium schöpft - weit entfernt davon, selbst ein "direkter" Zeuge Jesus Christi zu sein ...' Different (and implausibly so) is Keener, *Acts*, 439, 701 (having Paul move 'from heritage to mission'); the fact that Paul keeps returning to Jerusalem is a major indication that, even if Jerusalem was destroyed already when Acts was published, Luke intended to present Jerusalem as a place of continuing (ideological) importance.

this peripheral category. The main consequence, however, is precisely that: they are peripheral, not central, regions geographically speaking (even if the absolute ends of the earth may be even further away – and vaguer – than any locale mentioned in Acts), and with that also of peripheral, not central, ideological significance, which is precisely what any ancient (or, for that matter, modern) map communicates by the choice of its centre as well (the city vs the countryside, the own city vs other cities, the centre of an empire vs the rest of it). This may not be surprising with regard to many of the ethnicities and cultures encountered throughout Acts (and as listed in 2.9–11), given the political reality of the day that relegated them to the category of the peripheral and (often and often also literally) provincial, e.g. Egypt or Cappadocia, or just plainly exotic (not always in the modern positive sense of the word), e.g. Ethiopia. Those living there, also as part of the Jewish diaspora, were, in the context of the Roman world, defined from the point of view of the Empire's centre and needed to legitimate themselves in relation to it, just like, in another discourse, the Jews in the diaspora (Acts 2.9–11) were defined in relation to Jerusalem as centre of the Jewish world and needed legitimate their its existence and the possibility of authentic Jewish life in it vis-à-vis the centre,⁵⁹ rather than vice versa (cf. also Acts 15 for a very similar dynamic!). However, the inclusion of Rome in this very same category in Acts, at least from Acts 2.10 onward, does come as a surprise, given that to every reader of Acts, it would have been self-evident that Rome was the actual political and economic centre of the world in every meaningful sense of the world (ideological, political, military, economic, architectural etc.) when considering this world *qua* Roman Empire. Rome is not *the* end of the world in Acts, but it is one of many areas and cities covered by it, or, at least, one of the areas between Jerusalem, Samaria, Judea and the end of the world. Rome is, however, not central and is therefore marginal, to be integrated into the community that starts at Jerusalem and that has Jerusalem as its ideological centre. Such a construction is subversive and engages in resistance against the dominant mode of Roman colonial culture. Only a cultural hybrid familiar with both the 'Roman' and the 'Jewish' (at this point it is too early in history to speak of a separate Christian perspective) would have been able to appreciate the tension present in the remapping of the world in Acts 1.8 (and onward) – and it is often held that Luke writes for precisely such 'hybrids'. Luke thus engages in the intercultural and subversive re-mapping of the world, claiming a cultural space for the movement that he identifies with. The result is the relegation of Rome to the status of its own

59 See e.g. G. E. Sterling, 'Opening the Scriptures: The Legitimation of the Jewish Diaspora and the Early Christian Mission', *Jesus and the Heritage of Israel* (ed. D. P. Moessner; Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998) 199–225. See also A. Lieber, 'Between Motherland and Fatherland: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and the Spiritualization of Sacrifice in Philo of Alexandria', *Heavenly Tables: Interpretation, Identity and Tradition in Ancient Judaism* (ed. L. LiDonnici and A. Lieber; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 193–210.

colonies: end of the earth, periphery, and the firm establishment of Jerusalem as the world's centre, while the precise ideological significance of Jerusalem becomes apparent from the preaching emanating from it, that of a kingdom that proceeds to include the entire world into itself, even its very end. What this will entail precisely is, to be sure, left open in Acts, given that the narration of Paul's sojourn in Rome is left incomplete and the end of the story open.⁶⁰

When considering this at the background of the (political) history of the real Jerusalem and the real, historical Rome, the impact of the geographical politics of Acts as they are encapsulated already in Acts 1.8 and the boldness of these politics stand out even more: the work was penned at a time at when Jerusalem, having been conquered by Titus, was anything but the self-evident centre of the world. It seems that, at a time at which Rome has clearly conquered Jerusalem and turned it into a part of its periphery, Jerusalem, through Luke's pen, returns the compliment and presents Jerusalem as the ideological centre of the world and the source of the good news of God's kingdom, relegating the rest of the world, including Rome, to its periphery.

Finally, by way of an aside, it can also be mentioned that the pairing of Jerusalem (Acts' geographical and ideological centre, but de facto political periphery) and Rome (part of Acts' geographical and ideological periphery, but de facto political centre) in Acts 19.21 and 23.11, and the fact that the latter verse stresses that Paul should witness in Rome as he had done Jerusalem, could well give rise to the idea that what Acts ends with is a view of the Mediterranean as having a number of centres of Christ devotees, in Jerusalem, in Rome and the eastern Mediterranean. Is Paul conceptualising Christianity in a polycentric way *avant la lettre*? It is the fate, it seems, of the centre of every 'empire' or 'kingdom' to be overtaken eventually by its margins or periphery, and it may well be that the seeds for that are already present in the narrative of Acts where it concerns Jerusalem; the history of reception of Acts certainly points in that direction, given that, as a matter of historical fact, the proclamation starting ἄπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ (Luke 24.47) would also begin to mean a moving away from this city, partially because of political necessity, but partially also because of ideological convictions.⁶¹

60 See e.g. Witherington *Acts*, 110–11; also Alexander, 'Reading'. Jervell, *Apostelgeschichte*, 116 likewise mentions this in relation to 'ends of the earth' in Acts 1.8, as does Keener, *Acts*, 708, rightly noting that the generic (and therefore 'open') meaning of 'end of the earth' agrees well with the open-ended nature of Acts as a whole.

61 See e.g. the contributions in M. Poorthuis and C. Safrai, eds., *The Centrality of Jerusalem* (Kampen: Kok, 1996).