Armor, Peace, and Gladiators: 
A Visual Exegesis of Ephesians 6:10–17

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Introduction

Ephesians 6:10–17 employs clothing and armor imagery to describe the spiritual struggle of the Pauline communities addressed in the letter. A growing field of interpretation looks to the systematic interpretation of such imagery in relation to and in dialogue with the sociopolitical visual landscape. For my part, I wish to engage with the iconographic panorama of the cities in which the biblical texts were written, heard, and read to illuminate the meaning of the text. In this essay, using an adapted sociorhetorical analytic, I engage in a visual exegesis of the clothing and armor images in Eph 6:10–17 in light of findings in a gladiator graveyard in Ephesus and in the context of the Pax Romana in Asia Minor. Although there are difficulties with provenance, destination, and dating for the Letter to the Ephesians, I examine the schema of visual images in the broader context of cities strategically connected with Ephesus via trade routes and where other Christ-communities may have received and heard the Letter to the Ephesians.¹ I propose that the detailing of “the whole armor of God” in 6:10–17 evokes vivid images of military armor that are enhanced by the spectacle of gladiatorial combat in a time of relative peace. This spectacle recalls the victories of Rome that brought about the Roman peace across the Empire. The spiritual battle that the Ephesians are called to is for a lasting reign of peace, the peace of Christ.

¹ The Letter to the Ephesians is generally considered to be a circular letter written to a group of Christ-following communities in Asia Minor.
Context

In examining the context I address three specific areas: Ephesus and surrounding cities in the period of the *Pax Romana*, the Letter to the Ephesians as a circular letter, and the discovery of a gladiator graveyard at Ephesus.

The *Pax Romana* was celebrated with the Secular Games of 17 BCE. The Secular Games were inaugurated in Republican Rome in 249 BCE and held only once per century. The Secular Games were a once in a lifetime experience and heralded a new age. According to the decree of the Senate, “For religious reasons it would be appropriate for as many as possible to witness them.” After a lapse of many years, Augustus seized the opportunity to reinstitute the games, interweaving Greek and Roman religious elements in “an invention of tradition.” This sacred ceremony marked the dawning of the golden age of peace. The Calendar Inscription at Priene and fragments of inscriptions at Halikarnassus, Apameia, and Eumeneia in Asia Minor proclaim the introduction of the Julian calendar reform and praise Augustus as the savior (σωτήρ) who would bring an end to war. Coins depict images of the reign of peace, including the closed Temple of Janus (fig. 1). This peace is understood in the Roman order as pacification and subjugation. It is often referred to as the “Augustan peace,” and it gives rise to one of Augustus’s proud claims inscribed on the Res gestae divi Augusti:

Janus Quirinius which our ancestors ordered to be closed whenever there was peace, secured by victory, throughout the whole domain of the

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6. Janus was the two-faced Roman god of doors and beginnings. His temple had doors on both sides. When the doors were open, there was war; when they were closed, there was peace. Augustus refers to Janus in Res gest. divi Aug. 13.
Roman people on land and sea and which before my birth is recorded to have been closed but twice in all since the foundation of the city, the senate ordered to be closed thrice while I was princeps. (Res gest. divi Aug. 13)\(^7\)

Following the civil war of 69 CE, the Flavian dynasty emerged with what was perceived as a divinely ordained mission to restore the Augustan order.\(^8\) As part of this mission, the Flavians exploited images on coins in a systematic manner in order to reach a mass audience through a large range of denominations of coins. The major themes of the images were *Concordia* and *Pax*, reconnecting to the harmony and global peace espoused in the pre-Neronian era (figs. 2–3).\(^9\) The interrelationship of *Pax* and *Virtus* is illustrated on a coin issued to commemorate the death of Mark Anthony. *Pax* appeared within a victory wreath on the reverse of this coin, minted in Ephesus.\(^10\) On the obverse around the image of Augustus is the

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10. The reverse shows *Pax* standing at an angle to the left, holding a caduceus in

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Figure 1. Nero (54–68 CE). The coin is a sestertius (34 mm, 26.63 g) and was struck at the mint in Rome, 65 CE (during Nero’s reign). Obverse: laureate head left. Reverse: Temple of Janus with latticed window and garlanded and closed double doors. Image reproduced courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group Inc. http://www.cngcoins.com.
legend IMP CAESAR DIVI F COS VI LIBERTATIS P R VINDIX, celebrating Augustus as the champion of the Roman people’s liberties, libertatis populi Romani vindix. The release of this coin to commemorate Anthony’s death heralds peace with the image of Pax but also ushers out Mark Anthony, whose coins distinctly portrayed the cista mystica (basket used for housing sacred snakes) surrounded by a wreath of ivy leaves on the obverse. This commemorative coin style did not appear for any of the succeeding Caesars.

During the reign of Vespasian (69–79 CE), the imperial mints issued about 230 coin types. Vespasian had inherited the “dispersed, opportunistic, perhaps chaotic production of his predecessors.” By the end of his ten-year reign, there was only one mint operating at Rome. The imperial mint in Ephesus issued coins only during the period 70–74. Coins issued at the beginning of Vespasian’s reign depicted themes of the restoration of peace, the new dynasty, and Victory. An example of this is a denarius minted in Ephesus with Vespasian on the obverse and on the reverse Victory is striding right, holding a palm and a wreath with PACI AUGUSTI


11. Ibid.
12. The cista mystica with the ivy leaves alluded to Dionysus and specifically to initiation rites. In the Dionysian mysteries, a serpent, representing the god Dionysus, was carried in a cista (basket or box) on a bed of vine leaves. The symbol of the cista mystica was linked with Eumenes II and then taken up by Mark Anthony. The diminution of the cista mystica to a small symbol next to the significant presence of Pax indicates a new era. See Lyn Kidson, “Minting in Ephesus: Economics and Self-Promotion in the Early Imperial Period,” Journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia 23 (2012): 29, fig. 2. Interestingly, the established Latin translation of μυστήρια (mysteries) became initia, meaning “initiation.” See Walter Burkert, Ancient Mystery Cults (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 7.

15. Ibid. These were predominantly silver denarii, a few rare aurei and, in 72 CE, some extremely rare cistophoric tetradrachmas (ibid., 377).
16. Ibid., 383.
inscribed around her.¹⁷ Vespasian includes images of his sons Titus and Domitian on the coins struck during his reign, connecting the future Flavian reign with the Augustan peace via the depictions of Pax and Victory on the reverse (see fig. 2). Vespasian also built the Temple of Peace beginning in 71 CE, dedicating it in 75 CE (Suetonius, Vesp. 9.1 [Rolfe, LCL]).

In a style similar to the Vespasian denarius struck at the mint in Rome (fig. 3) with seated Pax on the reverse is a silver denarius from the mint at Ephesus with Concordia on the reverse. Ceres is draped and seated left in a decorated chair with a high back, likely a throne. She holds two ears of corn and a poppy in her right hand and a cornucopia in her left.¹⁸ These coin styles distributed in Asia and Rome contribute to the ideology of global peace through victory, recalling Augustus’s reign.

Figure 2. Titus under Vespasian (79–81 CE). A sestertius (36 mm, 27.39 g, 6 h), Rome Mint, struck 80–81 CE. Obverse: IMP T CAES VESP AVG P M TR P P P COS VIII, laureate head right. Reverse: PAX AVGVST, Pax standing left, holding an olive branch and cornucopia; S C across field. RIC II 154; BMCRE 175–6; BN 161. Image reproduced courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group Inc. http://www.cngcoins.com.

Figure 3. Vespasian (reigned 69–79 CE). AR denarius (18 mm, 3.44 g, 7h), struck in Rome, January–June 70 CE. Obverse: IMP CAESAR VESPASIANVS AVG, laureate head right, COS IT ER TR PO[T]. Reverse: Pax, draped, seated left, holding an olive branch in her extended right hand and cradling a winged caduceus with her left arm. RIC II 29; BMCRE 26–30; BN 18; RSC 94h. Image reproduced courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group Inc. http://www.cngcoins.com.

¹⁷ An example of this is Vespasian (69–79 CE), denarius struck at Ephesus, 74 CE: IMP CAESAR VESPAS AVG COS V TR P PP. On the reverse, PACI AVGUSTAE around Victory, advancing right with a wreath and palm. Available in the Tricario collection at Asia Minor Coins, http://tinyurl.com/SBL4819g1.

The Letter to the Ephesians was written in this sociohistorical and ideological context to communities of messianic believers. It was likely a circular letter, possibly the lost letter to the Laodikeians (cf. Col 4:16), perhaps a warning against magical practices associated with the cult of Artemis, or having some other function.19 As a circular letter, it addresses a group of believing communities in Asia Minor. MacDonald suggests 90 CE as the date of writing, though that seems late.20 This dating would place the audience in the reign of Domitian. I prefer an earlier date, between 70 and 80 CE in the time of Vespasian. My preference is grounded in a considered opinion that the writing of Colossians was by a close disciple of Paul shortly after his death.21 Ephesians clearly seems to be dependent on Colossians, written some amount of time later.22 The visual imagery in Colossians appears to align closely with the time of Nero (54–68 CE), and that of Ephesians has synergy with the time of Vespasian (69–79 CE).

The Letter to the Ephesians offers its audience members a rich narrative of imperial political language, imagery, and metaphor aimed at building their identity and unity as believers and taking up the spiritual struggle “against the wiles of the devil” (6:10). In its dependence on Colossians, I believe this to be a letter from a Pauline school of thought located in the region of Ephesus with links to the Lycus Valley and other strategically connected cities such as Smyrna, Philadelphia, Pergamon, Sardis, and Thyatira.23 Here I include Ephesus and the surrounding cities of Asia Minor as the likely geographical context.

The third element of the context is the spectacle of gladiatorial combat and gladiators’ armor, notably in relation to Ephesus, with reference to

the discovery of a gladiators’ graveyard. First discovered by archaeologists in 1933, the graveyard has attracted more recent attention following the unearthing of human remains. Fabian Kanz and Karl Grossschmidt from the Medical University of Vienna undertook analysis of the remains of sixty-eight individuals, comprising sixty-six males ranging in age from twenty to thirty years, one female, and one male approximately forty-five to fifty-five years of age. The focus of their investigation was on the injuries sustained by the gladiators.24

My attention was drawn to the images of the armor of the gladiators and the possibility that these images interplay with the network of imperial and emperor images.25 In this period of restoration of peace, could the images of armor and weaponry, both military and gladiatorial, provide a vivid parallel to and illustration for the metaphors used in the Letter to the Ephesians? When the Roman peace and the peace of Christ are juxtaposed and connected to battle, armor, and weaponry, it appears that these images have specific relevance in the Letter to the Ephesians. With these considerations of the intersecting contexts, I turn briefly to the methodological model.

The Model

The model I employ is drawn from my recently published work Clothing the Body of Christ at Colossae: A Visual Construction of Identity.26 In the present essay, I engage in a “visually literate reading” of the available “image network” in order to demonstrate a visual exegesis of Eph 6:10–17 with specific reference to 6:11, 14, 15, and 17.27 My interest is the dialogue


26. Canavan, Clothing the Body, 53–66. The model is described in the chapter entitled “Methodology.”

27. I combine terminology drawn from Davina Lopez and Takashi Onuki: Davina Lopez, Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul’s Mission (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 168–70; Takashi Onuki, Jesus’ Time: The Image Network of the Historical Jesus, ESEC 13 (Dorset, UK: Deo, 2009), xvii–xviii.
between the material data of the Greco-Roman world and its represented form in the text. How do these images of putting on military armor and taking up weapons adopt, adapt to, and interact with the material culture iconography in the built and lived environment of the author and recipients of the letter? Diagrammatically (see fig. 4), I illustrate this as engaging the five arenas of texture identified by Vernon K. Robbins in a dynamic structure that interacts with the Greco-Roman world and the world of the interpreter. A further modification illustrates sacred texture as both intersecting with the other textures and having its own layer in the text.

Figure 4. Adapted sociorhetorical model. Updated from the adaptation in Canavan, Clothing the Body, 63, fig. 1 © Mohr Siebeck Tübingen (with permission).

I will concentrate initially on inner texture, which involves the texture of the language itself, and then move to the intertexture defined as ‘the interaction of the language in the text with ‘outside’ material and physical
‘objects,’ historical events, texts, customs, values, roles, institutions, and systems.” 28 These are two perspectives in this complex system of interpretation that add value to the layers of meaning available to those reading or hearing the text of Ephesians in the context of the first-century city of Ephesus or its strategically connected cities. In engaging these textures, I will briefly comment on the ideological and sacred textures with regard to the Pax Romana and the gospel of peace.

**Inner Texture**

Inner texture involves “the texture of the language itself.” Such “inner textual analysis” centers on words as the locus of communication. 29 An interpreter observes and listens to how words are used in a text: repeated, sequenced, and structured for meaning. 30 In Eph 6:10–17, the author creates a framework for this communication, bringing before the eyes of hearers or readers an Opening-Middle-Closing structure that elucidates and transforms the vivid imagery of armor:

- Opening: 6:10–12
- Middle: 6:13
- Closing: 6:14–17

In this way 6:10–12 introduces the call to “be strengthened [passive of ἐνδυναμῶ] in the Lord” and to “put on [or clothe yourself (ἐνδύω)] the whole armor of God.” The opponents or enemies are identified (vv. 11–12), and from this beginning it becomes clear that the “struggle” (πάλη, v. 12) and “armor” (πανοπλία, v. 11) imagery are to be applied to a different realm of existence. The middle, 6:13, is signified by the use of “on account of this” (διὰ τοῦτο) and instructs recipients now “to take up” (ἀναλαμβάνω, rather than put on/clothe themselves) with “the whole armor of God.” The “whole armor” and the purpose are repeated here, heightening the emphasis and urging what is unfolding as a “call to battle.” 31 In the closing, 6:14–17, the author moves with “therefore” (οὖν) and the command “stand” (ἵστημι),

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29. Ibid., 7.
30. For an explanation and example of the inner texture of a text, see ibid., 7–39.
reiterating the force by the repetition of this verb (ἵστημι) in both 6:11 and 6:13. Previously the imperatives have been to “put on” and “take up” the whole armor so that the hearers and readers will be ready to stand firm, and now, in the closing, the imperative is to “stand firm,” ready for battle, and ready for the onslaught. Then follows a graphic elaboration of the components of the “armor of God,” drawing on the experience of the hearers and readers to apply the images of armor to the spiritual battle. In this way the “closing” delivers the ekphrastic detail available to be interpreted by the hearers or readers in relation to their own knowledge of the imagery of armor and weaponry, whether military or gladiatorial.

Figure 5. Roman oil lamp with depiction of gladiator, Burdur Museum. Photo by Carole Raddato, 2013, http://tinyurl.com/SBL4819k1.

The pattern of verbs across the Opening-Middle-Closing framework of the passage presents a battle strategy, indicated earlier as a “call to
battle.” The audiences must engage with language that commands preparation for fighting.32 The battle plan is elucidated in a progressive pattern, beginning with the clothing with full armor in 6:11 (see appendix 1). The terminology employed by the author gives insight into his experience, which may well include the divine warrior motif of Isaiah as well as the Roman imperial army and the spectacle of the gladiatorial arena.33 It is not my intention to speculate on the mind of the writer or on that of the audience. It is important to recognize that the audience will also interpret terminology employed by the writer through their own experiences in their sociocultural context. The investment of emperors in providing games and spectacles reflected, in part, the popularity the emperors derived from providing them. For instance, Tiberius (14–37 CE) did not provide games, but Caligula (37–41 CE) did, and he won popularity at least in the short term. The popularity of the games is also observed in the images of gladiators included in mosaics, painting on glass and pottery, and oil lamps.34

At the outset, the terminology employed is military in origin. The full armor (πανοπλία) in its Greek context refers to the suit of armor of hoplites (ὁπλίτης, pl. ὕπλιται), known to be heavily armed foot soldiers.35 This panoply included shield, helmet, breastplate, greaves, sword, and lance and largely corresponds to the descriptions found in Polybius (ca. 200–118 BCE).36 Roman historian Titus Livy (ca. 59 BCE–17 CE) in his History of Rome records first-class armor as that of the Greek hoplite panoply: helmet (galea), shield (clipeum), greaves (ocreae), cuirass (lorica), all of bronze, plus a spear (hasta) and a sword (gladius) (1.43.2). Second-class armor is identical but has an oblong wooden shield (scutum) and no cuirass (1.43.4). This rank of soldier and armor corresponds to the Roman infantry. The breastplate (θώραξ: Eph 6:14) was recognizable body armor for the upper torso and was also known as the cuirass. The cuirass was also used as the dress of victory by emperors and military leaders. The

32. The warrior motif has been elucidated from Isaiah to Ephesians in Thomas Yoder Neufeld, Put on the Armour of God: The Divine Warrior from Isaiah to Ephesians, JSNTSup 140 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997).
35. See “πανοπλία,” LSJ, 1298.
36. Polybius states that the armor and weaponry of the Roman army was fashioned on that of Greece in the Hellenistic Period (Polybius, Hist. 6.23–25).
“shield” (θυρέος: 6:16) is a large oblong shield that in Latin is scutum, as mentioned above.37 In the imperial period the scutum was modified to become a shorter rectangular shield.38 The scutum and gladius (sword) are often paired as the weapons of the infantry. The gladius, a short sword used for both thrusting and stabbing, was considered “the hallmark of the Roman soldier” from the period of the Republic.39 The word gladiator is derived from the name of the sword.40 However, the sword (μάχαιρα: 6:17) was a large knife that, as a weapon, was a short sword or dagger that was the instrument of an assassin, not a soldier.41 In this instance the military and gladiatorial weaponry fused in meaning though the nomenclature used in Ephesians is less distinct. Similarly, the arrows of 6:16 are βέλοι, a generic term for missiles, darts, and especially arrows.42 The shield was one of the best protections for arrows, and this combination was part of the military machine.

The “struggle” (πάλη) certainly has the meaning of “fight” or “battle” yet is particularly linked to wrestling. It can refer to the fine dust or sifted sand sprinkled on oiled bodies before wrestling.43 Gladiatorial combats were often called a πυγμή (boxing match), partly for the etymological link to the Latin pugna and punare.44 The use of πάλη is a hapax legomenon here, which indicates a special choice, perhaps in order to emphasize a different arena. In gladiatorial training, the palus (Latin, transliterated in

37. θυρέος takes its name from θυρά, meaning “door,” because the shield is shaped like a door. See LSJ, 811. Scutum refers to an oblong shield and is also used to describe heavily armed soldiers bearing shields. In general terms, scutum can mean a shield as a defense, protection, shelter, or safeguard. See Charles T. Lewis and Charles Short, A Latin Dictionary (London: Clarendon, 1880), 1651.

38. The shield was made in a semicylindrical shape with straight sides. For further information, see Richard A. Gabriel, The Ancient World (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2007), 273.


41. LSJ, 1085.

42. LSJ, 313.

43. πάλη means “wrestling” and in general refers to a fight or battle. πάλη or παλή also means “fine dust,” with the latter version being used to distinguish from the former (LSJ, 1291).

Greek as πᾶλος) was the wooden pole used for practicing sword maneuvers.45 This name came to indicate not just this pole but the arena and a class of gladiators.46

English translations typically employ the words “belt” (6:14) and “shoes” (6:15), although participles are employed in Greek: περιζάμενοι τῆν ὀσφύν more literally means “girding the loins”; υποδήσαμενοι τοὺς πόδας means “binding under the feet,” referring literally to a sole bound onto the foot or to a sandal (ὑπόδημα).47 The Roman calceus, which was a shoe or half-boot, was referred to as υπόδημα κοῖλον, but many authors simply used υπόδημα.48 Neither of these terms is specifically military, and thus the range of meaning is broadened for their use in Ephesians. The binding of the feet appears more related to being ready than to specific styles of shoe, sandal, or boot. The definition given earlier for a suit of armor does not include shoes or boots but does mention greaves.

The “helmet” (6:17) is a περικεφαλαία, which literally means “around the head” and is thus a covering for the head, such as a helmet.49 From the time gladiatorial contests began and extending through the Republican period, soldiers and gladiators were equipped with similar armor, though some used armor distinctive of their ethnic origin.50 Those with distinctive armor may have been captured warriors using their own equipment.51 Following the reforms of Augustus, gladiators were divided into types, with some symbolizing conquered ethnic groups such as Samnite, Gaul, or Thracian (samnis, gallus and thraex, respectively).52

45. Tullia Ritti, ed., Museo Archaeologico di Denizli-Hierapolis Catalogo delle iscrizione greche e latine (Naples: Liguori, 2008), 154. πᾶλος, from the Latin palus meaning “stake,” also describes a squad or team of gladiators. See LSJ, 1294.
46. The verb πάλλω meaning “wield,” “brandish,” or “slay” may also have contributed to the naming. See LSJ, 1293.
47. “ὑπόδημα,” LSJ, 1879.
48. LSJ, 1879.
49. περικεφαλαία is a covering for the head such as a helmet, a cap or a bandage. See LSJ, 1376.
50. John Travis and Hilary Travis, Roman Helmets (Stroud, UK: Amberley, 2014), 122.
The pictorial language of armor and weapons in Eph 6 is obviously metaphorical. From the beginning the author marks out a spiritual battle with enemies not of blood and flesh. The vivid imagery is turned to the defeat of the devil, and the weaponry and specific parts of the armory are transformed into descriptors of the gifts God gave through Jesus: truth (v. 14), righteousness (v. 14), the peace of Christ (v. 15), faith (v. 16), and salvation (v. 17).

The Opening-Middle-Closing framework of the inner texture can be illustrated by the repetitive and progressive components of the battle strategy, as shown in the following table (inner texture progression and repetition; this table is elucidated in appendix 1).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>Armor</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>clothe–stand</td>
<td>full armor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of God</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>take up–resist–stand</td>
<td>full armor</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>of God</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>stand–gird–clothe</td>
<td>belt and breastplate</td>
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<td>truth and righteousness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>bind under–readiness</td>
<td>“shoes”53</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>gospel of peace</td>
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<td></td>
<td>receive</td>
<td>helmet and sword</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>salvation and Spirit–word of God</td>
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Through this brief look at inner texture, I highlight the evocative language of battle: the actions of standing, standing ground, resisting, making ready, struggling, and extinguishing. These are incorporated with the static images of armor and weaponry: full armor, belt, breastplate, shield, helmet, and sword.54 These take on new meaning in the victory and peace of Christ as they are connected through the armor of God, gospel of peace, and word of God. The significance of the victory and peace won through Christ in contrast to the enacted spectacle of Roman victory and peace provides a context for this use of this military imagery. This military

53. Although English translations often employ the word “shoes,” the Greek text uses the verb ὑποδέομαι, meaning “bind under.” Rather than the translation “as shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace,” I prefer “bind under your feet in readiness to proclaim the gospel of peace.”

54. I have omitted “shoes” here for the reason given in n. 53.
imagery in turn has synergy with gladiatorial dress and weaponry, which we now examine through intertexture.

**Intertexture**

Intertexture is described by Robbins as

a text’s representation of, reference to, and use of phenomena in the “world” outside the text being interpreted. In other words, the intertexture of the text is the interaction of the language in the text with “outside” material and physical “objects,” historical events, texts, customs, values, roles, institutions and systems.55

In the arena of intertexture, I wish to connect with vivid visual images from the cultural milieu of the audiences of Ephesians. The intertexture with the Old Testament, especially Isaiah, is well documented in connection with the “divine warrior” motif.56 Here I want to engage the relationship between the text and the image that Robbins calls rhetography.57 This term brings together “rhetoric” and “graphic” in one word.58 Robbins defines it as “the graphic images people create in their minds as a result of the visual texture of a text.”59 Rhetography is closely related to ekphrasis (ἐκφρασίς), known in the Progymnasmata as vivid language that enlivens the imagination.60 Aelius Theon, an Alexandrian sophist thought to have written

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55. Robbins, Exploring the Texture of Texts, 40.

57. Rhetography is included in the glossary in Vernon K. Robbins, The Invention of Christian Discourse: Volume 1, RRA 1 (Dorset, UK: Deo, 2009), xxvii. Robbins explains the term rhetography as emerging at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

58. Vernon K. Robbins, “Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text,” in Words Well Spoken: George Kennedy’s Rhetoric of the New Testament, ed. C. Clifton Black and Duane F. Watson (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 89. Robbins explains that “‘rhetology’ (the art of reasoning)” is not enough when interpreting the imaging of people and objects; thus he combines rhetology with “‘rhetography’ (the graphic picturing in rhetorical description).” Robbins draws on classic rhetoric to direct our understanding of both rhetology and rhetography, elucidating the focus on speaker, speech, and audience as being concerned with both the reasoning and the picturing of the situation. See Robbins, Invention, 1:16–17.


60. Progymnasmata means “preliminary exercises.” The term first appeared in the Rhetorica ad Alexandrum, which is a rhetorical handbook probably written by
in the first century CE, provides the definition: “Ekphrasis is descriptive language, bringing what is portrayed clearly [ἐναργῶς] before the sight” (Theon, Prog. 7 [Kennedy, 45]). Theon further clarifies this, noting that the virtues of ekphrasis are “most of all clarity and a vivid impression of all-but-seeing what is described” (Theon, Prog. 7 [Kennedy, 47]). This puts the responsibility on the writer or speaker using ekphrasis to recreate an image in descriptive language that is immediately recognizable to recipients.

What is evident from examining the text is the synergy of armor, weapons, and battle with peace in the order of the Roman Empire. It was Roman victory through war that brought peace. In Asia Minor, in places like Ephesus and surrounding cities, the Pax Romana dominated in the form of the new order of the empire. With the establishment of the Roman provinces in Asia Minor, competition and concord were uneasy partners but were developing in the light of the overarching imperial rule. By the time of Vespasian (69–79 CE), the cities were not involved in war. The call to battle was waning. Statuary of victory certainly decorated the urban streetscapes and architecture. The storyboard of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias narrated the victory of Rome with dramatic attention to the humiliation and bondage of the vanquished and the glory of the victor. But in this context, the military might and power of Rome, with all its armor, struggle, and victory, emerged visibly in the spectacle of gladiatorial combat. In the arena, Roman victories were fought again and again, and the crowd participated in the glory of Rome and the peace that ensued.

In first-century Ephesus, gladiatorial contests were most likely conducted in the stadium in the northern part of the city, at the north foot of Panirdag. The gladiator graveyard is located 300 meters east of this location.61 The stadium was rebuilt during the time of Nero (54–68 CE) as a place for festivals, chariot and horse races, and athletic contests.62 A

Anaximenes of Lampscus in the latter half of the fourth century BCE and preserved with Aristotle’s Rhetorica. The author advises students that understanding the forms and styles of composition contained in the progymnasmata would adequately provide them with material for writing and speaking. See George A. Kennedy, ed., Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric, WGRW 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), ix–x.


62. John McRay, Paul: His Life and Teaching (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 184. An alternate theory proposes that the circular space for gladiatorial contest was prepared to the east of the stadium. See Roland H. Worth Jr., The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Asian Culture (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1999), 23.
circular area at the eastern end of the stadium was set aside for gladiatorial contests. There is some argument concerning the location of gladiatorial contests, suggesting that they were held in the theater. The main basis of this argument is an inscription in the theater honoring Titus Flavius Montanus stating that he “finished the theatre, dedicated it during his high priesthood, and gave gladiatorial combat and wild beast hunts.” This inscription celebrates his modifications in the early second century. This being the case, some gladiatorial combat could have been held in the theater at this later date. The theater in Ephesus today shows the remains of modifications for holding animals and a wall around the stage.

Gladiators were recruited primarily from among slaves and free volunteers. Occasionally criminals were sentenced to a gladiatorial school. They could gain their freedom if they survived three years of contest and a further two years of service to the school. Evidence of healed wounds found in the remains examined from the graveyard at Ephesus suggests that people did survive contests and were provided with a high level of medical care due to their economic value.

Professional gladiators, those who chose freely to fight in the arena, took on themselves a life that looked like that of condemned slaves. “Hobby” or volunteer gladiators included citizens, senators, nobles, and emperors who trained in the gladiatorial schools. The perceived benefits were enough for them to take the risk. Roman citizens are attested as gladiators in graffiti and inscriptions. In Ephesus, Tiberius Claudius Tatianus Julianus, Asiarch, is described in an inscription in white marble

63. This area was also used for the baiting of animals (McRay, Paul, 184).
64. Michael J. D. Carter, “The Presentation of Gladiatorial Spectacles in the Greek East: Roman Culture and Greek Identity” (PhD diss., McMaster University, 1999), 274–75.
65. Carter provides evidence of gladiatorial combat in stadia, including the one in Aphrodisias, where a graffito of a retiarius, literally, a “net fighter,” was found on a seat (ibid., 274–76). See retiarius as one who fights with a net, a “net fighter,” in Lewis and Short, A Latin Dictionary, 1586.
68. Ibid., 208.
69. Wiedemann lists a number of examples from Pompeian graffiti and a fragmentary list of a gladiatorial family from Venusia (Wiedemann, Emperors and Gladiators, 106–7).
as having a family (φαμιλία) of gladiators.\textsuperscript{70} Citizens were required to take the gladiator’s oath, which described the dishonor that they took on: “to be burnt, to be chained up, to be beaten, and to be killed by an iron weapon.”\textsuperscript{71} This meant that even a free citizen became fully dependent on his master. It was the lowest form of degradation and would imply the loss of all status, including economic position.\textsuperscript{72} This does not always appear to have occurred for, as will be shown, epitaphs were raised by the wives of gladiators.\textsuperscript{73}

The existence of stelae raised to the memory of gladiators is a testament to these professionals. Most epitaphs are for free or freed gladiators and represent only a minority of those who fought.\textsuperscript{74} One such stela, raised to Palumbus, is in situ near the graveyard in Ephesus.\textsuperscript{75} This stela is a stylized representation that is observed on similar stelae found at Laidikeia and at Herakleia Salbake.\textsuperscript{76} The gladiator is portrayed wearing a loincloth, a banded belt, and a greave on his left leg. In his right hand is a palm frond that stands at least to his height, and his left hand rests on his helmet, which is placed on his rectangular shield, the scutum. The scutum was used by both the Roman infantry and gladiators. The helmet and shield resemble those of a secutor or “follower/chaser,” who appeared during the time of Caligula (12–41 CE).\textsuperscript{77} The thraex gladiators with Attic

\textsuperscript{70} “A Family of Gladiators,” IEph 1182. See http://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/249615, early second century CE. The title “Asiarch” was taken by wealthy inhabitants with Roman citizenship in the province of Asia, but the functions of this position remain unclear. See Richard S. Ascough, Philip A. Harland, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., \textit{Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook} (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 105–6.

\textsuperscript{71} The wording is attested both by Seneca (who compares the binding power of the oath to the promise to follow Stoic moral teaching in his \textit{Ep.} 37) and in Petronius, \textit{Satyricon}. See Wiedemann, \textit{Emperors and Gladiators}, 107.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 108.

\textsuperscript{73} Wiedemann suggests that the dishonor is moral, not economic, and cites instances of honor and wealth given to an ex-gladiator (see ibid., 108–17; also see the funeral stela of Nikephorus in this essay).

\textsuperscript{74} Knapp, \textit{Invisible Romans}, 267.


\textsuperscript{77} The term \textit{secutor} was drawn from \textit{sequor}, meaning “I follow, come, or go after.” The secutor was a pursuer, a light-amored gladiator who fought with the \textit{retiarii}
crested helmets and Hellenistic style greaves were the most popular in Ephesus. As noted above, early types of gladiators included the samnis, gallus, and thraex, representing Samnites, Gauls, and Thracians in contests reenacting Roman conquests. The Samnites, decommissioned in the early imperial period, were the forerunners of the murmillo and secutor. Similarly, the galli disappeared from the arena when Gaul was incorporated into the empire. The survival and popularity of the thraex in Ephesus are likely related to the number of Greek spectators who could take their side in combat against other types of gladiator. The palm frond symbolizes victory. This symbol was adopted by the Romans from the Greeks and was illustrated on the coin for Vespasian, minted in Ephesus in 74 CE (n. 18).

Following the same style, the stelae from Laodikeia and Heraklia Salbake (fig. 6) illustrate victory with a palm frond. The gladiator shown on the stela from Laodikeia has a loincloth, a belt of several bands, and a greave on his left leg. With the palm frond in his right hand, his left hand holds his helmet on his rectangular shield. On the stela of Nikephorus from Heraklia Salbake, there is the addition of a manica on his right arm. The subligaculum, a bandage or binding around his loins, gives

(see Lewis and Short, A Latin Dictionary, 1657). Mattesini describes and illustrates the provocator, murmillo, thraex, hoplomachus, secutor, scissor, and retiarius among the main categories of gladiators and expands the list to other lesser-known categories (Mattesini, Gladiators, 70–147). Junkelmann describes and illustrates the equites, murmillo, thraex, hoplomachus, provocator, retiarius, and secutor for the Imperial Period (“Familia Gladiatoria,” 45–64). Specifically for the secutor, see Mattesini, Gladiators, 110. See also Marcus Junkelmann, Das Spiel mit dem Tod: So kämpften Roms Gladiatoren (Mainz: von Zabern, 2000); Kanz and Grossschmidt, “Head Injuries,” 208. The murmillo (see murmillo), was a kind of gladiator who fought with the thrax or thraex, or the retiarius. The murmillo wore a Gallic helmet with an image of a fish on a crest (see Lewis and Short, A Latin Dictionary, 1149).

82. The style of this stela replicates that shown in fig. 7 from Heraklia Salbake. An image of this stela from Laodikeia of Lykos can be seen in Robert, Les Gladiateurs dans l’Orient grec, pl. 23:119.
83. A manica is an overlapping sleeve of metal or leather used by soldiers in the
a visual indication of “girding of loins.” His common name, Nikephorus, means “victorious” and is well suited to a combatant and the arena. The inscription is translated: “Nikephorus, gladiator of the first class. His wife, Marcellina, prepared the memorial from her own funds” ([Ν]ΕΙΚΗΦΟΡΩ ΠΑΛΟΥ Α (ΠΡΩΤΩΝ) / ΜΑΡΚΕΛΛΕΙΝΑ Η ΓΥΝΗ ΤΟ / ΜΝΗΜΕΙΟΝ ΕΚ ΤΩΝ ΙΔΙΩΝ / ΚΑΤΕΣΚΕΥΑΣΕΝ).84

A fully armored gladiator is visible on a stela in the Selçuk Museum near Ephesus. He is depicted with the familiar palm frond but shown in action, possibly advancing or defending, with shield raised and sword ready to strike. This posture is easily comparable to the description in the text of Eph 6:10–17.85 In addition, two gladiator stelae are on view on Marble Street in the ancient city of Ephesus near the theater (see figs. 7a–7b).86 Figure 7a depicts a thraex type A gladiator with a small round shield, wearing a helmet, manica, and double greaves and wielding a short lance or spear.87 Figure 7b is badly eroded but

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84. Translation mine. The inscription with description and comments are published in Ritti, Museo Archaeologico di Denizli-Hierapolis, 154, no. 63.

85. Similar fully armored examples of gladiators can be seen in Robert, Les Gladiateurs dans l’Orient grec, pls. 209, 210, 212, 213, 214, 215.

86. The Sacred Way of Roman imperial time (around the first century BCE) extended around the eastern side of Mount Pion to the Artemision and back to Ephesus along the northern side of the mountain, passing on the west side of the stadium, where there was a monumental gate. The stadium was renovated and enlarged during the time of Nero (54–68 CE). For further information, see Ekrem Akurgal, Ancient Civilisations and Ruins of Turkey, trans. John Whybrow, 10th ed. (Istanbul: Net Turistik Yayinlar, 2007), 159; John C. Kraft et al., “Ancient Ephesus and the Artemision in Anatolia,” Geoarchaeology: An International Journal 22 (2007): 121–49.

87. Thraex type A is described as a gladiator using a small round shield similar to those used by Thracian warriors. This type is sometimes denoted as a hoplomachus. See Dario Battaglia and Luca Ventura, De Rebus Gladiatoriis: Dal gymnasion al ludus attraverso i sepolcri (Rome: ArsDimicandi, 2010), 111.
may indicate a retiarius with a trident extended. Both show the stance of readiness for battle.

Figure 7a (left). Gladiator stela, possible *thraex*. Photo mine. Figure 7b (right). Gladiator stela. Photo mine. Both figs. 7a and 7b were displayed on Marble Street, Ephesus, in December 2014, near the theater. Their original location is not indicated.

An image of the style of the *secutor* is etched on the wall of a terrace house in Ephesus (fig. 8). The *secutor*’s helmet, rectangular shield, and greaves are clearly evident. His body is clothed in a breastplate that is outlined and inscribed, and there is a belt around his waist. His right hand appears to be wielding a weapon, possibly an ax.

Figure 8. *Secutor* etched into the wall of a terrace house at Ephesus. Photo courtesy of Alan Cadwallader, *Fragments of Colossae: Sifting through the Traces* (Hindmarsh: ATF, 2015), 91, pl. 4:30.
A recent discovery in Honaz (near the site of ancient Colossae) of a relief of gladiators adds to the imagery that was likely known in the circulation range of the Letter to the Ephesians (fig. 9). This relief shows two tiers of images of gladiators in battle. In the upper register there is an oblong shield at the far left, indicating a provocator or secutor. In the lower register of the relief, a fully armored gladiator, likely a secutor (according to the shape of the helmet), lies on his back on the ground, defeated, and awaiting the death blow. Above the secutor is the victor, his short sword raised, either in victory or indicating readiness to deliver the final blow.

These few images begin to build in our minds the complexities of meanings associated with armor, breastplates, helmets, shields, and swords. The language of the biblical text is not consistently or irrefutably only military but prompts images behind the eyes of the hearers or readers from their own visual contexts. This visual context reasonably includes gladiators and gladiatorial combat in the arena and the propaganda of the victory, peace, security, and good news the empire offered its constituents. The other side of the victorious peace is the storyboard of the vanquished, defeated, and degraded people like those displayed in relief at Aphrodisias (see fig. 10). The crowning of

Figure 9. Gladiators Relief on a wall at Honaz, Denizli, Turkey. Photo reproduced courtesy of Alan Cadwallader, Fragments of Colossae, 88, pl. 4:27.

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88. This relief was noticed by Alan Cadwallader on a visit to the site of Colossae and the neighboring town of Honaz (ibid., 88–89).

89. Cadwallader favors provocator, citing the other details of armor that are quite indistinct in the photograph of the relief. See the chapter entitled “Theatre,” in Fragments from Colossae, ed. Alan Cadwallader (Adelaide: ATF, 2015). Provocator means “challenger” and is a gladiator type that wears armor derived from the military (see Lewis and Short, A Latin Dictionary, 1481).
Augustus by the personification of Rome in this relief confirms his victory and the means of establishing peace. Augustus’s right hand is on the trophy of his victory, the cuirass of the armor of battle and his armies. Below the trophy a bound and partially naked female kneels. She represents a defeated nation. The female image in disarray dishonors the nation in defeat. The personification of Rome, by contrast, is finely dressed and coiffured. The naked hero image of Augustus adds to his victorious posture.

This panel sits in the three-tier structure of the Sebasteion, illuminating the history of Rome’s power and victory and serving as a testament to the ongoing victory of the empire.

With the resurgence of imagery associated with the Augustan peace during the Flavian period, pictures of battle and armor or sword and victor are displayed in the arena of the gladiatorial contest. The contest between pairs of combatants wearing various styles of helmets from other parts of the empire reiterates the ideology of conquest, victory, and peace. This ideology is amplified in the reliefs at Aphrodisias.

**Figure 10.** Relief from the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias showing Augustus crowned by the personification of Rome. Photo mine, taken in 2012. The relief is dated to the first century CE, and is currently located in the Aphrodisias Archaeological Museum, near the modern city of Geyre, Turkey.

**Dialogue: Interaction of Image and Text**

The images on the imperial coins revive the Augustan ideology of victory and peace with the personifications of Pax and Victory. The symbolic palm frond held by Victory appears as the mark of triumph on the gladiatorial stela. The battle in which the gladiators engaged contributes to the maintenance of the Roman ideology. In this dialogue and interaction between image and text, ideological texture comes into play.90 The author of the

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90. Analysis of ideological texture begins at the furthest point from the analysis of the inner texture and engages with the biases and perspectives of the people involved
Letter to the Ephesians evokes the imagery of armor for his own purpose of urging his audiences to take up the armor of God in their spiritual battle.

The juxtaposition of the imperial and military images of *Pax Romana* with the armor of God and the gospel of peace demonstrates the amenability of these images to persuasive speech. The word πανοπλία (“full armor”) is, as described earlier, a military term that commonly referred to a full suit of armor, including shield, helmet, breastplate, greaves, sword, and lance. When the author incorporated this image in his writing, the picture he envisaged may well have been a Roman soldier fully equipped. When this image was conveyed to audiences in Ephesus or other cities in Asia Minor, the hearers may have constructed the image before their eyes from what was in their own sociocultural environment. In this way it can be imagined that “full armor” was perceived as that of gladiators observed in the stadia of the cities. Gladiatorial combat involved two combatants drawn from different gladiator types.91 There were regular pairings, such as the *retiarius* and the *secutor*, which matched skill and contrasted armor and weaponry. The entertainment of the crowd was heightened as spectators took sides and cheered on one combatant against the other, highlighted by the popularity of the *thraex* in Ephesus. The Roman martial virtues of bravery and skill were displayed in the battle to death where, on the decision of the crowd, the vanquished was expected to accept his fate of death without opposition and to exhibit *virtus* in doing so.92

In a time of relative peace, the spectacle of the gladiatorial combat brings life to the metaphors of armor and military weaponry in the context of the Roman order of power through subjugation and pacification. The message of the author of Ephesians transforms this Roman order specifically with reference to God and through Christ: the helmet of salvation is salvation through Christ; the shield is the shield of faith in Christ; the gospel of peace is the peace of Christ; and the sword is of the Spirit, the word of God. This armor gives protection and acts as an offensive weapon.

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The protection comes from the strength and might of God to a unified group of communities distinct from the outsiders. As an offensive weapon, they are able to stand firm. The armor makes them strong in the power of God and in the order of right relationship to God through Christ.

The peace of Rome inaugurated by Augustus and restored under the Flavians was won through war. The victor held the power, and the conquered peoples had a place in the new body, Rome and its empire, only through submission to that power. Their place was secured at the lowest level, as slaves stripped of any previous status, humiliated and abused. In contrast, peace in Ephesians is described as that inaugurated through Christ:

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace…. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. (Eph 2:14–15, 17)

In the body of Christ there is no longer division between those “who were far off,” gentiles, and “those who were near,” Jews. The struggle (πάλη) is “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). It is in this spiritual battle that the faithful are asked to answer the call to battle, not with the armor of the arena but with the instruments of the gospel of peace: righteousness, faith, salvation, and the word of God.

**Conclusion**

The investigation of the visual context of the words of battle, armor, and weaponry employed in Eph 6:11–17 bring the gladiators and the spectacle of their combat into view. Central to the understanding of the imagery is peace: Roman peace and the peace of Christ. The author of Ephesians creates a synergy of visual imagery transforming the metaphors of armor and weaponry to the purpose of the spiritual battle. He does this within a context where the ideology of the Roman peace is actively being restored by Vespasian and the glories of the victories that secured this peace are played out in the arena. The author transforms the use of weapons and armor in conjunction with the “gospel of peace.” In contrast to the Roman victory-peace narrative played out on the gladiatorial arena, it is righteousness,
faith, salvation, and the word of God that are the implements of the spiritual battle that secure their place in the reign of the peace of Christ.

Ephesians stakes a claim on the unity of the communities of faith it addresses. They are to arm themselves in the manner of combatants, whether soldiers or gladiators. Their fight is “not against enemies of the flesh.” It is a spiritual battle. The call to arms accentuates the serious struggle they face and transforms the armor into the strength they have from God.

Examining the inner texture and intertexture has affirmed for me that gladiatorial armor and combat in the arena offer important images for understanding the metaphors of armor, battle, and peace in the social and cultural environment where the Letter to the Ephesians was written and heard.

**Appendix 1: The Text of Ephesians 6:10–17 with Repetitions and Progressions (translation mine)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening</th>
<th>Middle</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6:10</strong></td>
<td>Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power.</td>
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<td><strong>6:11</strong></td>
<td>ἐνδύω clothe, put on stand</td>
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<td><strong>6:12</strong></td>
<td>πάλη struggle, wrestle</td>
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<td><strong>6:13</strong></td>
<td>ἀναλαμβάνω take up stand</td>
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