AABNER

ADVANCES IN ANCIENT BIBLICAL AND NEAR EASTERN RESEARCH

*Thematic Issue:
Global and Local
Cultures in the
Roman East*

EABS
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN

UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK

Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research
(AABNER)

AABNER is a Diamond Open Access, forum peer-reviewed journal, run by and for academics, published in collaboration with EABS. It publishes articles in English, German, and French.

AABNER is an interdisciplinary journal covering antiquity and its reception. It seeks to embody an ethos of academic rigor, equal opportunity, and non-discrimination.

AABNER is owned and published by Ami·e·s de la revue Advances in Ancient Biblical and Near Eastern Research, association n° W751258470, Paris, France, with the technical service provider being Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen Universitätsbibliothek, Germany.

The European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS) is a non-profit Association of biblical scholars. AABNER is published by several members of EABS, separate from their activities for EABS. EABS itself has no influence on the contents of AABNER and the sole responsibility for the contents of any AABNER publication lies with Ami·e·s de la revue Advances in Ancient Biblical and Near Eastern Research. In particular the use of the EABS logo or of name EABS does not imply that EABS has any legal or financial responsibility for AABNER.

2023

GLOBAL AND LOCAL CULTURES IN THE ROMAN EAST: AN INTRODUCTION

Raimo Hakola and Nina Nikki

Abstract

Globalization has linked distant and distinct societies and intensified social relations and transactions among them. The spread of Roman imperial rule offers an interesting parallel to modern globalization. In both cases, scholars have long been debating the consequences of this process; while many members of society can benefit from new cultural, social, and economic opportunities, it is also claimed that the exposure to global culture can undermine local identities and produce a sense of isolation and antagonism. The articles in this special issue examine various outcomes of the extension of Roman rule in the eastern Mediterranean from the early Roman to the early Islamic period. The contributors, representing classical studies, archeology, history, early Christian studies, and Islamic studies, offer case studies that investigate how the introduction of Greco-Roman culture to the East changed local cultures and resulted in multicultural innovations and reinvented identities.

La mondialisation a créé des liens entre des sociétés éloignées et distinctes et intensifié les relations sociales et les transactions entre elles. L'expansion de la domination impériale romaine offre un parallèle intéressant à la mondialisation moderne. Dans les deux cas, les chercheurs et chercheuses débattent des conséquences de ce processus ; si de nombreux membres de la société peuvent bénéficier de nouvelles opportunités culturelles, sociales et économiques, il est aussi possible de dire que l'exposition à une culture mondiale peut ébranler les identités locales et produire un sentiment d'isolement et d'antagonisme. Les articles de ce numéro spécial analysent les divers résultats de l'extension de la domination romaine en Méditerranée orientale, du début de la période romaine au début de la période islamique. Les auteurs et autrices, venu·e·s des études classiques, de l'archéologie, de l'histoire et des études du Christianisme et de l'Islam anciens, proposent des études de cas qui analysent comment l'introduction de la culture gréco-romaine en Orient a modifié les cultures locales et entraîné des innovations multiculturelles et des identités réinventées.

GLOBAL AND LOCAL CULTURES IN THE ROMAN EAST: AN INTRODUCTION

Raimo Hakola and Nina Nikki

3

Globalization has linked together distant societies and increased inter-action between various distinct local cultures. While globalization in our time is perhaps more intense and deeper than ever, the spread of Roman imperial rule offers an interesting parallel to the modern phenomenon. In both cases, scholars have been long debating the consequences of this process; while many members of contemporary and ancient societies clearly benefit from new cultural, social, and economic opportunities, exposure to globalizing forces can also undermine local identities and produce a sense of isolation and antagonism.

In this special issue, authors use both literary and archeological sources to examine various outcomes of the extension of Roman rule in the eastern Mediterranean from the early Roman to early Islamic period. The contributors, representing classical studies, archeology, history, early Christian studies, and Islamic studies, offer case studies that investigate how the introduction of Greco-Roman culture changed

local cultural expressions. The arrival of Rome introduced new institutions, new kinds of public buildings, architectural trends, and a new material culture. This may have sometimes triggered opposition but in some other contexts enhanced the attractiveness of the worldwide culture and invited participation in the Empire. Both in classical and early Christian studies some scholars have emphasized the resistance of native cultures to often violent Roman rule and to imperial discourses that were created by the Roman intellectual elite to legitimate this rule. However, others have urged that research should move beyond the binary opposites of Roman vs. native cultures and acknowledge how the spread of Roman power resulted in the formation of various types of cultural and ethnic identities. The articles in this special issue demonstrate how representatives of various local cultures reinvented their identities in relation to a new global culture and at the same time anchored these new self-understandings to various shared or distinct cultural traditions.

From Hellenization and Romanization to the Dichotomy between Roman and Native Cultures

Since Alexander the Great's conquest of the Persian Empire (333–323 BCE), Greek cultural stimuli began to spread more intensively across the eastern Mediterranean. Two centuries later, the grip of a new global force, Rome, was also increasingly felt in the region. The Romans envisioned that they had a civilizing mission in preserving and disseminating the best cultural inventions of the Greeks (Woolf 2001, 311–22), which meant that the exposure to Greek culture, now with a Roman twist, continued and produced new amalgamations of global and local cultures.

In earlier scholarship, these large-scale historical changes were often described with such broad concepts as Hellenization and Romanization. During recent decades, however, it has become obvious that these concepts were loaded from the beginning with subtexts emerging from nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century sociopolitical ideologies. In the nineteenth century, the emergent European nation-states wanted to

present themselves, and Western culture, as the continuation of ancient Greek civilization. In this context, Hellenization was understood as the extension of Greek culture and, in turn, the Hellenization of Rome was seen to lay the ground for the Hellenization/Romanization of the West, which was taken as the establishment of a Christianized Western civilization.[1] In the process, Jews and Judaism were marginalized from the history of Western civilization. This led to the long-standing notion of the incompatibility of Jewish and Greek cultures, even though literary sources as well as archeological and epigraphic evidence have all provided information that has demonstrated how Jews interacted with their environment in a number of ways (Hakola 2022).

The term "Romanization" emerged within a colonial context where Rome and its self-imposed role as the arbitrator of Greek culture to the barbarians served as a model for the attempts to draw conquered and allegedly uncivilized native cultures into the sphere of Western civilization represented by the British Empire (Morley 2010, 38–41). Since the collapse of the modern colonial empires, scholars have increasingly seen the value-laden character of the concept of Romanization. It is based on a simplistic distinction between the center and the periphery where historical and cultural reformations are understood to follow the military conquests of the Romans and their alleged will to civilize "backward" native peoples (Erskine 2010, 58). This conclusion is based on a one-sided view of Roman policy toward various imperial minorities. Even though the Romans were military imperialists and quite often ruthless in their use of violence, they were not cultural imperialists in that they did not impose a top-down cultural policy on the peoples they conquered (Galinsky 2015, 5). As a consequence, cultural interaction did not only spread from Rome to new peripheries. The incorporation of various eastern regions and cultures, especially, into the Empire, also gradually changed the definition of what it meant to be Roman.[2] Nowadays, it is common to conclude that the concept of Romanization privileges the role of Roman metropolitan culture in bringing cultural changes and ignores reciprocal exchanges between the center and its

---

[1] Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 20; Jokiranta et al. 2018, 5–6; Hakola 2022, 83–84.

[2] Erskine 2010, 61; Pieterse 2015, 232–35.

provinces. For this reason, the Romanization debate is generally regarded as having come to an unsatisfactory end, and scholars have since been experimenting with alternative concepts to describe the expansion of the Roman world.[3]

When the former colonies gradually became independent and modern worldwide empires collapsed after World War II, the portrait of Rome started to change from the harbinger of civilization to a ruthless oppressor that the native people had to resist or revolt against. Both in classical and early Christian studies, several scholars have applied postcolonial approaches to describe how newly subjugated peoples were incorporated into the Empire and its ideology.[4] According to some readings, Rome's domination helped some among the local elites gain privileged economic and social positions, while most of the population experienced Rome's rule as oppressive and exploitative. However, we quite rarely have direct evidence that Roman rule was understood as oppressive because, especially in the Roman West including Britain, scholarly conjectures are based largely on non-literary material evidence, while the voice of the Roman subjects is more audible through the authors in the Roman East (Erskine 2010, 50). But even in such a detailed work as Josephus' *Jewish War*, one looks in vain for evidence of sustained or militant anti-Roman attitudes or ideology.[5] Neville Morley (2010, 58–59) has intriguingly suggested that once the conquest of new territories was past, "Romans ceased to be the clear enemy" and "their domination was effectively invisible to the majority of the population, a matter of regular concern only to the client ruling class." This all means

---

[3] Cf. Mihajlović and Janković 2014; Pitts and Versluys 2014.

[4] In classical studies, see, e.g., Mattingly 2006; Webster and Cooper, 1996; Mattingly 2011. In early Christian studies, see, e.g., Campbell 2008; Horsley 2004a; Horsley 2004b; Horsley 2008; Tucker 2010; Tucker 2011. The classic formulations of postcolonial theory include Bhabha 1994; Spivak 1999. In this connection, we cannot do justice to the many studies applying postcolonial perspectives in classical and Biblical studies. With these studies, we share the aim of complexifying the relationships within the Empire and highlighting the ambiguities in power relationships.

[5] Goodman 2007, 395; Mason 2016, 279.

that, for the most part, the people's experience of being ruled was local and very much in continuation with what they had experienced earlier.

Studies depicting Rome as the oppressor and various native people as the oppressed often build upon James C. Scott's publications, particularly on Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990). In Scott's thinking, the purpose of domination lies in appropriation, which "unavoidably entails systematic social relations of subordination that impose indignities of one kind or another on the weak" (1990, 111). At the core of Scott's thinking is the dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed, and in ancient applications of this dichotomy, imperial Rome appears as the force violently dominating various native minorities. While postcolonial approaches have been a way forward from the Romanization debate, these approaches have been criticized in classical studies because the narratives of colonialism and imperialism only reproduce, and even strengthen, the Roman–native dichotomy (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 6). Similarly, there has been a dissatisfaction with anti-imperial interpretations of early Christianity, since this paradigm describes the relationship between Rome and imperial minorities like Jews and Christians exclusively in terms of conflict, clash, and opposition (Lehtipuu and Labahn 2015, 9). To avoid this simplistic inclination, Greg Woolf (1995) suggested some time ago that scholarship should move beyond the binary opposite of Roman vs. native cultures and consider how the expansion of Roman power invited various responses and contributed to the emergence of manifold cultural and ethnic identities. In his often-cited article, Woolf proposed that we should not think of the growth of the Empire as the expansion of one culture at the expense of others, but as "the emergence of a new, highly differentiated social formation incorporating a new cultural logic and new configuration of power" (1995, 347).

Globalization in the Ancient World

To clarify diverse and complex dynamics between various local cultures and the expanding Roman Empire, many scholars have recently used perspectives first developed for the study of globalization in the

modern world.[6] The term "globalization" is commonly understood to denote various forms of "connectivity and de-territorialisation" (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 11), a "trend of growing worldwide interconnectedness" (Pieterse 2015, 235), and even the idea of limitlessness, which chimes well with Virgil's idea of Rome as *imperium sine fine* in *Aeneid* 1.278–79. The application of this concept to the ancient world is helpful for both historical research and globalization studies, because a deep, historical perspective helps to dismantle presentist and Eurocentric views of world history (Pieterse 2015, 226, 235–36). Globalization perspectives complement earlier cultural and archeological studies on antiquity that have already emphasized the "mobility, connectivity and mélange" of the Roman world (Pieterse 2015, 229).

The perspective of globalization deconstructs the above-presented dichotomy between Rome and native cultures by stressing the plurality of identities, interconnectedness between different areas and peoples, and the importance of cultural transmission alongside economy and politics. Romanization studies and later anti-imperial readings differed in their evaluation of whether Roman rule was civilizing or oppressive, but they both moved from the center to the provinces and emphasized state-centric actions, institutions, and ideologies as unifying the Mediterranean world. A globalization perspective moves the emphasis from top-down ideologies to "connectivity, mobility, objects, and knowledge networks" as creating a unifying culture (Pieterse 2015, 229).

Seen from a globalization perspective, local cultures are not "static, 'authentic', immured against change but in constant dialogue with … the 'globalising' forces that create, structure and (to an extent oppose)" them (Whitmarsh 2010, 3–4). The expansion of a global culture quite evidently produces a significant degree of cultural homogenization, but this process also quite often increases cultural variation and, in this way, promotes cultural heterogeneity (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 14). Cross-cultural communication and connectivity can increase the per-

---

[6] Whitmarsh 2010; Jennings 2011; Pitts and Versluys 2014; Hakola 2022. While the term "globalization" was invented to describe a modern situation, these studies argue in their own way that the phenomenon itself is not restricted to modernity.

ceived similarity between cultures, but, at the same time, it can evoke articulations of imagined boundaries between different groups affected by globalization (Hodos 2014, 242). The process of globalization thus has the potential to heighten the awareness of distinct local identity that can lead to the reaffirmation of one's cultural roots in the form of symbolic and/or real resistance (Whitmarsh 2015, 3).

The above-presented perspective does not superficially assess the outcomes of globalization only as positive. There is room for the sense of resistance, but the forms of resistance are not seen as being separate from the process of cultural adaptation and exchange. The globalization framework has made it possible to recognize seemingly contradictory tendencies that occur hand in hand when representatives of local cultures try to cope with the exposure to globalizing forces. Cultural adaptation and resistance can be understood as two sides of the same process when local communities claim to possess the same global cultural capital as their various contemporaries but, at the same time, portray themselves of loyal custodians of their indigenous traditions.

9

Articles in This Special Issue

The articles in the present special issue reflect the developments summarized above in a variety of ways. In his article "Jesus and Poverty in the Context of Imperial and Local Economies in First Century Galilee," Raimo Hakola argues that the models presenting Jesus and his fellow Galileans as living close to a subsistence level are based on an outdated view of the Roman economy and ignore recent archeological findings in Galilee. Recent advances in the study of the Roman economy challenge the view that the Roman global economy as it manifested itself locally in Galilee was primitivist and served only the interests of the small elites. Recent studies have also clarified the significant role of local economic agents (agricultural producers, manufacturers, artisans, traders, fishermen) in the shaping of local and regional economic networks. Jesus's rhetoric of the poor and the destitute, on the other hand, can be explained as an identity construction trope that draws on the ancient idealization of voluntary poverty. The article revisits the portrait of the

Galilean population as oppressed and Rome as the ultimate oppressor, and argues that Galileans including Jesus and his followers benefited from the progress of the regional and global economy.

In her article, "Divinely Sanctioned Domination: Accommodating Roman and Native Identities in Dionysius's *Roman Antiquities* and Josephus's *Jewish War*," Marika Rauhala investigates two authors who belonged to a people subjugated by the Romans and attempted to reconcile their native and ethnic identities with Romanness. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek author under Roman rule, seeks to demonstrate in his *Roman Antiquities* that Romans were, in fact, Greeks as far as their best qualities were concerned. The Jewish historian Josephus, on the other hand, offers in his *Jewish War* a divine rationalization for the Roman victory over the Jews. Both authors exemplify ways in which a lower status group can achieve positive distinctiveness either through social mobility—by moving from one group to another—or social creativity—by redefining ingroup identities in a beneficial way. Josephus and Dionysius exemplify members of the local elites who renegotiated their identities as members of the nations subjugated by imperial Rome.

Nina Nikki's article, "A Multicultural Paul in the Globalized Roman Empire," looks at the apostle from the perspective of multiculturality. Multiculturality is defined as a person's access to more than one knowledge system and acculturation as the mutual adjustment of these systems on the level of groups and social identities. The article takes Paul's robust Jewishness as a starting point but argues that Paul has access to other knowledge systems as well, such as a Roman one, which becomes salient when Paul views Jewishness critically and stereotypically. Together with the recent advancements in the globalization studies of the Roman Empire, this argument complicates any simplistic anti- or pro-imperial readings of Paul. In Nikki's reading, Paul becomes an example of a lower-level agent who was at home in multicultural Rome and, at the same time, holds fast to his inherited native identity as a Jew.

In his article, "Global and Local Narratives at Palmyra," Eivind Heldaas Seland argues that ancient Palmyra has been defined as either Eastern, Western, or local, depending on the interests of the respective researcher. Palmyrenes have often appeared at the periphery of either the Roman or Persian world and not at the center of their own world.

Seland gives a voice and agency to the Palmyrenes by looking at their epigraphy, iconography, and architecture as performative speech-acts, identifying five kinds of narrative that the Palmyrenes told about themselves: the family, the lineage, the city, the desert, and the world. Seland's Palmyrenes show that the identity of an individual or a group is always multilayered and cannot be reduced to a single trait.

Jussi Rantala's article, "Citizenship and Ethnicity in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*," discusses the senator and historian Cassius Dio's views on Roman citizenship especially in light of Emperor Caracalla's contemporary edict, the *Constitutio Antoniniana*. Through the edict, the emperor granted citizenship to almost all free men in Rome, affecting especially the situation in the Roman East and raising the question of the relationship between ethnicity and citizenship. Dio remains critical of citizenship granted or sold beyond "natural" Italian origins and resists the changes he witnesses in the Empire, clinging to an ideal of the monarchical rule of Augustus. Rantala's article demonstrates that the issues related to ethnic identity and its boundaries were controversial already in antiquity.

Jarkko Vikman's article, "Letter from Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne as a Diaspora Quest for Authenticity," deals with a letter that has survived in Eusebius's *Church History*. The letter is sent from the Roman West, but it expresses the sentiments and values of a diaspora group whose historical origins are in Asia Minor. The letter can be read as a message to an idealized native land emphasizing how a diaspora group of Asians and Phrygians living in Lyons and Vienne hold fast to the honorable behavior of their ancestors. Vikman applies modern diaspora studies that have shown how diaspora groups often become obsessed with the authenticity of their way of life by claiming how closely they follow the perceived "original" cultural system of their native lands. This process often leads to essentializing caricatures of both the majority culture and the idealized native minority culture. The letter thus gives voice to an ethnic minority group living in the diaspora in an imperial context.

In her "From Bad Barbarians into Good Romans? Themistius and the Case of Goths in the Fourth Century," Maijastina Kahlos examines Themistius's argumentation concerning Goths in his speeches in the changing contexts of Romano-Gothic relations from the 360s to the

11
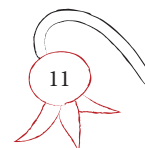
380s. Kahlos shows how the concept of the barbarian was versatile and could be modified in varying ways for different purposes. Themistius's speeches belong to a host of Greco-Roman accounts of the incorporation and acculturation of peoples into the Roman Empire. These discourses were an intrinsic part of understanding Romanness. Barbarians, in these cases usually Goths, mirrored Roman writers' values and notions about how things should be, what Romans should be like, what the emperors should be like, and how the government and army should be organized in the late Roman Empire. Kahlos's article thus gives an example of how imperial self-understandings are not stable but often adjusted to the politics of the day.

In his article, "The Seed of Abraham: Gentile Ethnicity in Early Christian Texts and the Quran," Ilkka Lindstedt moves east of the Byzantine Empire and south of the Sasanian Empire to the birthplace of Islam and the Quran. Lindstedt asks why the Quran invokes Gentile Abrahamic ethnicity as an identity that the believers participate in, as a *positive* marker of identity, and what this Quranic Abraham meant for the Arabian religious map, social categorizations, and ethnic legitimization before Islam and in early Islam. Lindstedt conjectures that by showing appreciation to the Gentile (*ḥanīf*) Abraham, the Quran appropriates a term used pejoratively by some Jews and Christians about the communities where Muhammad lived. The Quran makes the label a positive one denoting membership in the ingroup. Despite this focus on the gentility of Abraham as a prototypical character, the Quran allows some Jews and Christians into the group of believers (*al-muʾminūn*), thus putting forward a novel believer identity in which the different followers of Muhammad were accepted as part of the same group regardless of their existing identities (which could be understood as sub-identities) as Jewish, Christian, or Gentile. Abraham was esteemed by many non-Jews already in antiquity and appropriated by many Jewish and Christian groups, but Lindstedt's article shows how Abraham's legacy continued to be discussed. This justifies the designation of the early Islamic period as the continuation of late antiquity, one which scholars are now starting to make more frequently.

Bibliography

Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Campbell, William S. 2008. *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*. London: T & T Clark.

Erskine, Andrew. 2010. *Roman Imperialism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Galinsky, Karl. 2015. "Introduction." In *Cultural Memories in the Roman Empire*, edited by Karl Galinsky and Kenneth Lapatin, 1–22. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum.

Goodman, Martin. 2007. *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations*. London: Penguin Books

Hakola, Raimo. 2022. "Jewish Cultural Encounters with the Greco-Roman World: A Critical History of Research and New Theoretical Perspectives." In *Scriptures in the Making: Texts and Their Transmission in Late Second Temple Judaism*, edited by Raimo Hakola, Jessi Orpana, and Paavo Huotari, 81–110. Leuven: Peeters.

Hodos, Tamar. 2014. "Global, Local and in Between: Connectivity and the Mediterranean." In *Globalisation and the Roman World: World History, Connectivity and Material Culture*, edited by Martin Pitts and Miguel John, 240–53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Horsley, Richard A. 2004a. *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.

Horsley Richard A. 2004b. "Introduction: Jesus, Paul, and the 'Arts of Resistance': Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott." In *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul*, edited by Richard S. Horsley, 1–28. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Horsley, Richard A. (ed.). 2008. *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Jennings, Justin. 2011. *Globalizations and the Ancient World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jokiranta, Jutta, Katri Antin, Rick Bonnie, Raimo Hakola, Hanna Tervanotko, Elisa Uusimäki, and Sami Yli-Karjanmaa. 2018. "Changes in Research on Judaism in the Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods: An Invitation to Interdisciplinarity." *Studia Theologica* 72, no. 1: 3–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/0039338X.2017.1402370.

Lehtipuu, Outi and Michael Labahn. 2015. "Introduction: Christians, Jews, and Roman Power." In *People under Power: Early Jewish and Christian Responses*

13
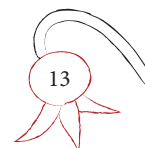
to the Roman Empire, edited by Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu, 7–13. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Mason, Steve. 2016. *A History of the Jewish War, AD 66–74*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mattingly, David J. 2006. *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire, 54 BC–AD 409*. London: Allen Lane.

Mattingly, David J. 2011. *Imperialism, Power and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mihajlović, Vladimir D. and Marko A. Janković. 2014. "Foreword: Edges of the 'Roman World', Imperialism and Identities." In *The Edges of the Roman World*, edited by Marko A. Janković, Vladimir D. Mihajlović, and Staša Babić, x–xix. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Morley, Neville. 2010. *Roman Empire: Roots of Imperialism*. London: Pluto Press.

Pieterse, Jan N. 2015. *Globalization and Culture: Cultural Mélange*, 3rd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Pitts, Martin and Miguel John Versluys. 2014. "Globalisation and the Roman World: Perspectives and Opportunities." In *Globalisation and the Roman World: World History, Connectivity and Material Culture*, edited by Martin Pitts and Miguel John, 1–31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1999. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tucker, J. Brian. 2010. *You Belong to Christ: Paul and the Formation of Social Identity in 1 Corinthians 1–4*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.

Tucker, J. Brian. 2011. *Remain in Your Calling: Paul and the Continuation of Social Identities in 1 Corinthians*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.

Wallace-Hadrill, Andrew. 2008. *Rome's Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Webster, Jane and Nicholas J. Cooper, eds. 1996. *Roman Imperialism: Post-Colonial Perspectives*. Leicester: Leicester University Press.

Whitmarsh, Tim. 2010. "Thinking Local." In *Local Knowledge and Microidentities in the Imperial Greek World*, edited by Tim Whitmarsh, 1–16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Woolf, Greg. 1995. "Beyond Roman and Natives." *World Archaeology* 28, no. 3: 339–50. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00438243.1997.9980352.

14

Woolf, Greg. 2001. "Inventing Empire in Ancient Rome." In *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, edited by Susan E. Alcock, Terence N. D'Altroy, Kathleen D. Morrison, and Carla M. Sinopoli, 311–22. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

15

JESUS AND POVERTY IN THE CONTEXT OF IMPERIAL AND LOCAL ECONOMIES IN FIRST-CENTURY GALILEE

Raimo Hakola

Abstract

The article studies various portraits of the local Galilean economy in consideration of developments made in recent research on the Roman economy. It challenges the view that the Roman economy as it manifested itself locally in Galilee was primitivist and served only the interests of the elite. As it turns out, the economic activities in the countryside were led by various local and regional agents and not by the elite as has often been assumed. Looking at the Roman economy writ large not only helps to correct earlier one-sided views of an allegedly poor Galilee, but also provides comparative material that helps to place the local Galilean Jesus movement as one among many groups in the globalized Roman world that used discourses of poverty as instruments of self-definition and exclusion. The language of poverty does not always indicate a lack of material resources or employment, because it is often used to connote a sense of social marginalization.

Cette contribution s'intéresse aux présentations de l'économie locale galiléenne en tenant compte des développements de la recherche récente sur l'économie dans le monde romain. Elle conteste l'idée selon laquelle l'économie romaine, telle qu'elle se manifestait localement en Galilée, était primitiviste et ne servait que les intérêts des élites. Les développements économiques dans les campagnes ont été le fait de divers agents locaux et régionaux et non d'une élite riche, comme on l'a souvent supposé. Une compréhension plus large de l'économie romaine corrige non seulement une perspective unilatérale sur la Galilée prétendument pauvre, mais fournit également des éléments de comparaisons qui permettent de situer le mouvement galiléen autour de Jésus parmi les nombreux groupes du monde romain mondialisé qui utilisaient les discours sur la pauvreté comme instruments d'autodéfinition et d'exclusion. Ce discours de la pauvreté n'indique pas toujours l'absence de moyens nécessaires à la subsistance ou l'absence d'emploi, mais est souvent utilisé pour connoter un sentiment de marginalisation sociale.

JESUS AND POVERTY IN THE CONTEXT OF IMPERIAL AND LOCAL ECONOMIES IN FIRST-CENTURY GALILEE

Raimo Hakola

Introduction

In recent decades, economic models and theories have had a significant role in the study of Christian origins in first-century CE Roman Galilee. It is still common in New Testament and early Christian studies to argue that most of the Galilean population was extremely poor and lived close to subsistence level. This reconstruction is used as a fitting background for the presentation of the historical Jesus as the spokesperson for many oppressed Galilean tenant farmers. The Roman presence in Palestine is described as economically oppressive and the period before the First Jewish Revolt (66–70/74 CE) as one of growing economic and social distress and mounting anti-Roman attitudes among many Jewish groups, including the early Jesus movement.

In this article, I review portraits of the local Galilean economy considering the developments made in recent research on the economy in the Roman world. I argue that the above-presented scenarios is based

on models that have been increasingly criticized in recent research. Many studies are based more on rigid sociological or other models than on recent archeological findings in Galilee. Studies on the Roman economy have clarified the central role of local economic agents (agricultural producers, manufacturers, artisans, traders, fishermen) in the shaping of the social and physical environment in which people lived and worked. These recent advances challenge the view that the Roman global economy as it manifested itself locally in Galilee was primitivist and served only the interests of the small elites.

Archeological excavations, most notably in Magdala, demonstrate that urbanization and integration into global socioeconomic networks began in Galilee already in the first century BCE. This makes urgent the incorporation of recent advances in the study of the Roman economy into the first-century Galilean context. I argue that the investments in Magdala supported local economic networks and encouraged the participation of the rural population in regional economy. The economic developments in the countryside were led by various local and regional agents and not by the rich elite as has often been assumed. The larger perspective on the Roman economy not only helps to correct earlier one-sided views of an allegedly poor Galilee but also provides comparative material that helps to place the local Galilean Jesus movement as one among many groups in the globalized Roman world that used discourses of poverty as instruments of self-definition and exclusion. The language of poverty does not always indicate the lack of necessary livelihood, because it is often used to connote a sense of social marginalization.

Oppressive Imperial Economy in Galilee?

Some scholars continue to argue that most of the population in first-century CE Galilee, especially in rural areas, lived permanently at or close to subsistence level.[1] In this scenario, the historical Jesus is por-

---

[1] Hanson and Oakman 2007; Oakman 2012; Horsley 2013, 44, 113; Crossley and Myles 2023, 40, 70.

trayed as the spokesperson of many oppressed Galilean tenant farmers. The Galilean economy is understood as a part of the political state economy under the tight control of Herod Antipas (tetrach of Galilee, 4 BCE–39 CE) and his imperial patrons.

The above-described model fails to engage in depth with recent advancements made both in the archeological study of the local Galilean economy and major trends in the study of the globalized Roman economy. Using evidence related to archeological field surveys, excavated domestic architecture, and local agricultural, fish, or ceramic production, scholars have increasingly challenged the state economy model and argued that the rural population in Galilee was in many ways involved in regional market exchange and benefited from the growth of the local economy.[2] The supporters of the underdeveloped Galilean economy are often aware of these recent reappraisals, but old models still persist and are recycled in recent interpretations. For example, K. C. Hanson's graph of how the imperial fishing economy functioned in Galilee has since its publication been recycled in many accounts even though neither literary sources nor archeological remains give any direct evidence for the details of the model it represents (Fig. 1).

Applying Marxist class struggle theory to first-century Galilee, Robert Myles (2019b) has recently rejected attempts to understand how the Galilean economy had developed above subsistence level by labeling these revisions as representing neoliberal ideology. Myles is extremely critical of my earlier suggestion (Hakola 2017) that the expansion of the local fishing economy opened new opportunities not only for the Galilean elite but also for ordinary fishermen. Myles turns my proposal into a caricature by saying that it presents *petite bourgeoisie* practicing laissez-faire fishing in Galilee (2019b, 124–29). Myles shuts off any relevant discussions of recent archeological discoveries by repeating an old argument that "material remains cannot, as such, be adequately understood without consideration of the prevailing patterns of power relations within Palestine and the Roman Empire" (2019b, 125). I suggest that what Myles describes as "the prevailing patterns of power relations"

21

---

[2] Edwards 2007; Mattila 2014; Overman 2014; Mattila 2015; Hakola 2017; Zangenberg 2019.
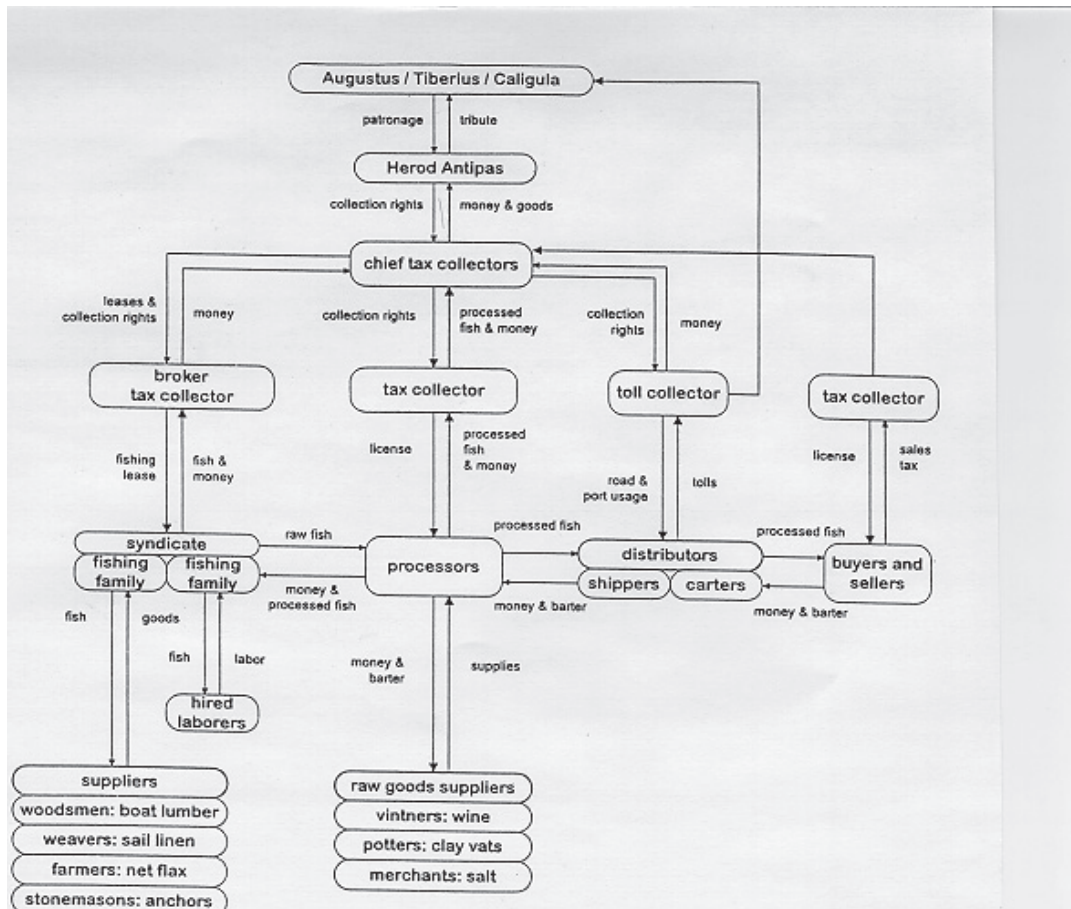
Figure 1. Hanson's (1997) model of the imperial fishing economy in Galilee; taken from a reprint of the original article at
https://www.kchanson.com/ARTICLES/fishing

is more based on his theoretical toolbox than on recent studies on the Roman economy or archeological discoveries on the ground in Galilee.

Myles's criticism of my position is but one example of static and detailed sociological models that are based at least implicitly on the so-called "primitivist" position on the Roman economy articulated by Moses Finley in his classic book *Ancient Economy* (originally 1973). Finley's main contention was that the economies of ancient Greece and Rome differed completely from modern economies. According to Finley, the obsession of the ancients with social status meant that economic systems were embedded in status relations. The strict social hierarchy regulated all commercial activities to the extent that a free economy was never able to develop. The economy served the status concerns of the elites, who did not have any interest in developing

economic systems to become more efficient. There is no room for any interdependent markets and trade in this reconstruction.

Finley's influential model was controversial already when it was first introduced, especially among classical archeologists. This criticism has since increased. Just like new archeological discoveries are rarely incorporated into fixed models of the Galilean economy, one of the recurrent criticisms of Finley's proposal is that, although he used archeological data, he remained skeptical about the capability of archeology to reveal essential characteristics of the ancient economy. For this reason, the "contrast between the views of Finley and those of current archaeology could not be starker" (Erdkamp 2020, 41).[3]

Unlike Finley and many operating with the same presumptions in the field of Galilean studies, most recent research takes as a self-evident point of departure that there was modest per capita economic growth in most parts of the Roman world during the early imperial era.[4] Furthermore, the difference between ancient and modern economies is no longer taken as predetermined. As John Bintliff has concluded: "Older views, famously presented in Moses Finley's classic study *The Ancient Economy* in which Hellenistic and Roman economies were set far apart from capitalism and modern economics are yielding to a proto-capitalist, 'globalist' perspective" (2013, 290). One of the corollaries of this change is that scholars increasingly see it as necessary to apply such modern economic concepts as capital, investment, or markets to the study of ancient economies (Erdkamp et al. 2020b, 3). Earlier, model-based reconstructions of the Galilean economy should be subjected to the same criticism that in retrospect has been directed at Finley's views. These models underestimate the role of markets for production factors, goods, and services as well as the size and complexity of ancient global and local trade (Zuiderhoek 2015, 9).

23

---

[3] In a similar way, Flohr and Wilson 2016, 35. For Finley's reluctance to use archeology in the study of classical world, see also Hall 2014, 213–14.

[4] Bintliff 2013, 285–90; Flohr 2014, 2344; Erdkamp et al. 2020b, 4–5. Erdkamp (2015, 18) succinctly summarizes: "I do not think that anyone would still argue that stagnation rather than growth characterized the economy of the Roman world."

A catchphrase like neoliberalism can easily be used to belittle the relevance of the intense research that has recently been done on many aspects of the Roman economy. These include the development of grain markets (Erdkamp 2005), the agency of various workers, traders, craftspeople, and professionals,[5] trade and commerce (Bowman and Wilson 2017), and the presence of investment, capital, or innovation (Erdkamp et al. 2020a). While many previous economic models applied in Galilean studies move deductively from a universalist theory to local circumstances, recent studies on the Roman economy represent a bottom-up approach where archeological, epigraphic, and papyrological evidence plays a great role. It seems that if scholars like Myles continue to reject any reappraisals of the Galilean economy as neoliberalism, they need to do the same with regard to most recent studies on the Roman economy; now, they simply ignore this research. It could be a possible yet bold move to discard the relevance of this research and claim that it represents an elite perspective imbued with neoliberalist tendencies. Instead, I see it as a desideratum that the recent advancements in the study of the Roman economy are tested in the local Galilean context so that we could gain a fuller picture of the society where the early Jesus movement first emerged.

There is one more criticism that should be made at the depictions of the Galilean economy based on either Finleyan or Marxist models: they reduce many different worker groups to the single category of the exploited protelariat. Arjan Zuiderhoek (2013) takes issue with both the Finleyan model and the Marxist understanding of the ancient economy; Robert Myles is not the only scholar who has recently applied the latter, but class struggle theories are enjoying a sort of renaissance in the study of early Christianity.[6] Zuiderhoek's criticism applies to

---

[5] Verboven and Laes 2016; Wilson and Flohr 2016.

[6] Zuiderhoek targets his critical remarks at Geoffrey de Ste. Croix's Marxist classic *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (1981). This work is one of the most important sources on the ancient economy for the writers of a recent article collection on the class struggle in the New Testament (Myles 2019a). However, there are not many, if any, references to more recent discussions of the ancient economy. For the more diverse discussions

many blatant portraits of the allegedly oppressive imperial economy in Galilee. Just like the unspecified ancient proletariat in Marxist theories, the Galilean rural population is often described as exploited by the property-owning classes and as unable to enjoy the products of their own work.[7] The potential surplus from the labor of the oppressed majority is explained as maintaining the extravagant lifestyle of the elites and, ultimately, the emperor and his local client, Herod Antipas. As Zuiderhoek (2013, 39) argues, this kind of position produces "one single class of exploited workers" and minimizes "real legal, social and economic differences" between various forms of forced work (slaves, tenant farmers, debt-bondsmen, etc.) and obscures the distinction between two types of ancient laborers, slaves and free wage workers.[8]

Paradoxically, the theoretical models that seek to embrace and make visible the actors in the lowest levels of the society strip local farmers, fishermen, workers, traders, and artisans of any agency of their own by blending them into one undefined cog in the wheels of the imperial economic machine. The agency and the voice of many of these groups can be discovered in rich epigraphical material and wealthier funerary reliefs that do not express exploitation but "great pride in work and skills, and a strong sense of occupational identity" (Zuiderhoek 2013, 34). This evidence should not be dismissed as representing elite interests but taken as proof that the dichotomy between the abusive elite and abused working class is misleading and the situation on the ground is much more multilayered.

---

of the concept of class in early Christian studies, see the articles in Keddie et al. 2021. The collection contains some critical evaluations of the relevance of the concept of class in ancient and early Christian studies, but there are not many references to recent studies on the Roman economy, trade, markets, etc.

[7] Hanson and Oakman 2007, 109; Crossley and Myles 2023, 35.

[8] For non-slave labor in the Roman world, see Garnsey 2020, which is in a collection dealing with the different kinds of non-slave work in Greco-Roman antiquity. Garnsey concludes that slave labor "was never dominant in agriculture outside Italy and Sicily" (2020, 35).

The Local Galilean Economy in the Globalized Roman World

The above-described models of the Galilean economy could be taken as products of a "top-down, essentialist perspective," which Jürgen Zangenberg (2019, 271) sees as characterizing many "conventional" approaches to Galilee. Contrary to what is still often claimed (Crossley and Myles 2023, 25), archeological evidence does not reveal only the luxurious lives of the ruling elite but can be used in the reconstruction of various local agents who practiced their professions on the lower levels of the socioeconomic ladder. While the recent findings in Magdala demonstrate the wealth of the local urban elite, this evidence can be connected to the flourishing study of ancient fish production, fishing technologies, and fish markets in the Roman world (Hakola 2017). The Greek name for Magdala, Taricheae, implies that the place was associated with the processing of fish.[9] The same is suggested by Strabo, who mentions Taricheae by the lake and adds that "the lake supplies excellent fish for pickling."[10] The recent excavations have revealed the urban character and prosperity of the site and exposed a regularly planned street grid, a large bath complex with a water network, a fountain house, affluent domestic buildings decorated with mosaic floors, and a harbor (Fig. 2).[11]

The Magdala harbor was built in the late second or early first century BCE and extended in the early Roman period (mid-first century CE).[12]

---

[9] Ταριχεύω, to preserve meat or fish by salting, pickling, or smoking; ἡ ταριχεία, a preserving, salting; in pl. αἱ ταριχεῖαι, factories for salting fish. In rabbinic sources, Magdala is referred to as *Migdal Nunayya* (b. Pes. 46a: מגדל נוניה) meaning "fish tower." For this and other rabbinic references to מגדל, see Leibner 2009, 218, 229–32; De Luca and Lena 2015, 280 n. 1–3, 298.

[10] *Geogr.* 16.2.45: ἡ λίμνη μὲν ταριχείας ἰχθύων ἀστείας παρέχει.

[11] From 2007 onward, the excavations in Magdala have been carried out by three different teams. The most well-documented excavations have been directed by Stefano De Luca at the Franciscan property; see De Luca and Lena 2015, 280–342. For domestic and mercantile area in Magdala, see Zapata-Meza 2018, 89–108.

[12] De Luca and Lena 2015, 325–26; Lena 2018, 69–88.

26

Figure 2. A building in Magdala that was earlier taken as a "mini-synagogue" but is now securely identified as a Late Hellenistic fountain house. See Bonnie and Richard 2012; photo by the author.

The earliest harbor structure included a *quadriporticus*, consisting of an enclosed rectangular courtyard surrounded by porticoes on all four sides. The proximity of this courtyard to the quay with mooring stones suggests that the *quadriporticus* had an economic purpose as part of

a commercial complex and was not an exercise area as has also been suggested (Fig. 3).[13] Rick Bonnie supports this conclusion by explaining how "the *quadriporticus* was the first space merchants and fishermen had to enter after having loaded and unloaded goods from the boats moored along the quays, and … the harbor could only be reached from the town via the *quadriporticus*" (2019, 46). The number of coins found in this area suggest intense commercial transactions (Guijarro 2018, 165–66). A lot of small-value coinage with different provenances circulated in Magdala, which speaks for the intensity of trade networks around the Sea of Galilee and toward the Mediterranean (Callegher 2023, 54).

The other finds in Magdala include imported artifacts such as glassware, *terra sigillata*, and amphorae, which also suggests that Magdala was an important place of exchange and the center of local, regional, and extra-regional trade.[14] The harbor supported transregional trade across the Lake of Galilee and provided a pathway from the cities and territories east of the lake (Hippos, Gadara) to the Mediterranean.[15] The harbor structures demonstrate the scale of investments that were put into the development of the infrastructure that facilitated the Galilean economy.

We now may have evidence in Magdala for small-scale urban structures related to fish processing. Salted fish was produced such that the fish were placed in alternating layers of salt in either rectangular or circular vats (Greek ταριχεῖαι, Latin *cetariae*) of varying size (Ellis 2011, 67–68). It has been suggested that a series of four plastered, rectangular pools or vats (c. $0.5 \times 0.5 \times 0.7$ m) in a building complex along a street in Magdala could have been used for salting fish.[16] This suggestion is corroborated by references to smaller urban workshops with only a

---

[13] Guijarro 2018, 163; Bonnie 2019, 45–46.

[14] De Luca and Lena 2014, 122; Guijarro 2018, 180.

[15] Guijarro 2018, 179; Zangenberg 2019, 284.

[16] Avshalom-Gorni and Najar 2013; Hakola 2017, 115; Bauckham 2018, 253–58; Zangenberg 2019, 294.

Figure 3. A quay with mooring stones found in Magdala. The boats were moored either to a hanging cable, metal rings, or wooden poles held by mooring stones. See Lena 2018, 79. Photo by the author.

few vats and with varying floor plans found in several sites around the Mediterranean.[17]

The evidence in the Gospels as well as various small finds such as net weights, sinkers for nets, anchors, and hooks show that various

---

[17] For the references, see Hakola 2017, 115 n. 15.

fishing technologies common throughout the Mediterranean were used by local fishermen in the Lake of Galilee (Hakola, Forthcoming). The casting net can be operated by a single fisherman either from the shore (Matthew 4:18; Mark 1:16) or from a vessel (John 21:6). Casting nets were especially suitable for catching small gregarious species such as the endemic Kinneret sardine. Despite its small scale, net casting is an efficient method because it can provide significant catches with a minimum of resource input (Bekker-Nielsen 2010, 191). A single fisherman can operate a casting net, but other net types require the coordination of groups of fishermen. One of the most used types in the ancient world was a beach seine, often called a dragnet (σαγήνη; cf. Matthew 13:47–48). The rationale behind using seines instead of casting nets has to do with the productivity of each method. While casting nets can provide significant catches with a minimum workforce, the production rises more rapidly than the number of required workers when a team of fishermen works with larger nets. This means that the team achieves a greater total catch than if members are fishing with their own casting nets (Bekker-Nielsen 2010, 191). In addition, the catches become more varied and include species difficult to catch onshore by a single fisherman.
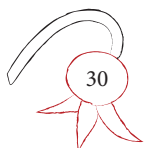
The scene described in Luke 5:1–11, where Jesus tells Peter to go into the deep water and let down (χαλάω) his nets (Luke 5:4), most likely refers to fishing with stationary nets, which includes gill and trammel nets. Depending on the mesh size, the gill nets can be used for catching fish of specific sizes because smaller fish can pass through the mesh. The scene suggests that the nets were operated by a group of fishermen (Luke 5:6–7). The term (μέτοχος) used for those who fish together with Peter (Luke 5:5) is used elsewhere for individual "partners" in a local fishing collective, while the term κοινωνός used later to describe James and John as Peter's partners (Luke 5:10) is related to the terminology used in the context of associations (κοινόν).[18] Other passages in the Gospels indicate that fishing was a collaborative business. Simon and

---

[18] For the dedicatory inscription to Poseidon and Aphrodite from Cyzicus, on the Sea of Marmara, mentioning μέτοχοι, see Marzano 2013, 42–43. Marzano comments that the inscription possibly but not certainly dates to the first century

Andrew are depicted as fishing jointly with casting nets (Mark 1:16; Matthew 4:18) and James and John as mending their nets together with their father Zebedee in a boat (Matthew 4:18). These descriptions imply that the collective work of local fishermen was at least loosely organized and that in Capernaum, like elsewhere in the Roman world, local partnership networks were based on kinship ties.[19] The business by the local fishing collective headed by Zebedee was clearly doing well enough so that hired workers (μισθωτόι) were employed in addition to family members (Mark 1:20).

Fishing with hooks (ἄγκιστρον) is referred to in the New Testament only once (Matthew 17:27), but hooks of varying sizes have been found in different sites around the lake. In addition to recreational elite fishing, fishing with hooks and lines was an efficient commercial fishing technology, especially for larger species (Bekker-Nielsen 2010, 191). This short overview of ancient fishing methods in the region of the Sea of Galilee demonstrates the use of various fishing technologies ranging from small-scale onshore fishing for the needs of small household economies to teams of fishermen using beach seines, nets, and boats planned and constructed for fishing. The stories that mention beach seines (Matthew 13:47), nets used from boats (Luke 5:1–11; John 21:1–11), or fishing with hooks (Matthew 17:27) clearly imply that local fishermen customarily caught also larger fish species.[20] The use of casting

---
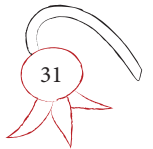
BCE (42 n. 139). For various Greek terms used for associations and their members, see Harland 2009, 27.

[19] For example, two inscriptions from Parium on the Sea of Marmara show that many participants in a local fishing collective were connected by family ties or by manumission; see Marzano 2013, 42–46.

[20] Alicia Batten has suggested that stories of large catches such as John 21:1 play with ancient status hierarchies and "turn the big fish … ideologies upside down" (2017, 5–14). Batten mentions many Greek and Roman literary sources that describe the consumption of larger fish species as a special prerogative of the elites. It is indisputable that especially some fresh and large marine fish species were often regarded as a luxury food and eating them was associated with social status and wealth (Marzano 2013, 273–75). However, a distinction was made between freshwater and marine fish, and marine fish was, with some exceptions, valued more than freshwater fish (Marzano 2013, 282). Therefore, it is not self-evident

nets for small gregarious Kinneret sardines or larger beach seines and nets used from boats for larger species has great potential for producing significant catches. Aelian already commended the productivity of net fishing (δικτυεία) and said that it was wealth-bringing (πλουτοφόρος).[21] Local fishing communities could have used parts of their catches for their own needs, but it was necessary to preserve, process, or market the surplus. New findings in Magdala make it likely that the fishermen on the lake, especially on its western shoreline, brought a part of their daily catches to Magdala to be processed in the local workshops or factories.

The growth of Magdala as an urban center began in the late second or early first century BCE, which is the period when Galilee fell into the orbit of the Hasmoneans. In this time, economic, political, and cultural inclinations in the region turned from the cities of the Phoenician coast to the south toward Judea (Leibner 2019). The prosperity and the expansion of fishing markets and trade evident in Magdala most probably opened new possibilities not only for the small urban elite, but for the rural population in the region as well. Uzi Leibner has concluded based on his archeological survey that many settlements were established in the lower Galilee at the same time as Magdala was founded at the end of the Hellenistic period. This wave of settlements continued and strengthened in the early Roman period during the reigns of Herod the Great and later his son Herod Antipas. As a result of this development, many new, mostly small unfortified settlements were founded at many rural sites in the eastern lower Galilee.[22] Bonnie's collection of the evidence for excavated houses in Galilee from 100 BCE to 600 CE points in the same direction; this evidence shows that new houses were built in rural lower Galilee especially during the first century BCE, while

that a special social status would have been attached even to larger fish species caught from the Sea of Galilee. I suggest that things on the ground were different from scattered literary references representing values among the elites and that local fishermen did not regard their catches as luxury food but adopted a more mundane and professional attitude.

[21] Aelian, *Nat. An.* 12.43.

[22] Leibner 2009, 329–34; 2019, 269.

the number of new houses decreases slightly in the following centuries (Bonnie 2019, 236).

According to the Gospels, Capernaum was the base for Jesus's activity in Galilee and the home village of some of his fishermen followers. Capernaum remained a minor village with a small population throughout the first centuries of the Hellenistic era. However, the growth of the population in Capernaum took place concurrently with the foundation and development of Magdala in the first century BCE and early first century CE, as Sharon Lea Mattila has concluded based on the conspectus of all pottery sherds found at the site (2015, 244). Unlike in earlier periods and in late antiquity, cooking ware in Jesus's Capernaum was predominantly locally manufactured, most probably in places such as Kefar Hananya, Shikhin, and Yodefat that were established centers of local pottery production.[23] This suggests that the main economic networks of such small village communities as Capernaum were regional. The evidence for pottery kilns and workshops in Kefar Hananya (Adan-Bayevitz 2015, 182–83), pottery kilns, workshops, and loom weights used for spinning and weaving in Yodefat (Aviam 2015, 113–14), stone quarries, pottery workshops, and oil lamp production in Shikhin (Strange 2015, 98–103), or installations related to small-scale textile industry (either production of flax or tanning) in Khirbet Qana (McCullough 2021, 84) clearly indicates that an important segment of rural population was engaged in occupations that required special skills and were not directly related to subsistence farming.

Moreover, the findings in each of these village sites differ from each other, which indicates that there was "an intentional effort at complementarity as these villages moved beyond subsistence agriculture to industrial production" (McCullough 2021, 86). The evidence in the Gospels and the proximity to Magdala suggests that fishermen at Capernaum were a part of the regional economic fabric, whose different segments supplemented each other. This matches the evidence found elsewhere in the Roman world were small towns and villages filled the gaps between larger cities and provided "country-dwellers with an op-

---

[23] See Edwards 2007, 362–368; Mattila 2013, 107. For Kefar Hananya, see Adan-Bayevitz 2015; for Shikhin, Strange 2015; for Yodfat, Aviam 2015.

portunity to sell their surpluses and to obtain basic goods and services from non-agricultural specialists" (de Ligt and Bintliff 2020, 14).

The evidence for various small-scale non-agricultural industries in Galilean villages gives us reasons to re-evaluate the relevance of the urban–rural divide model for the regional economy. Scholars applying static sociological models have often concluded that the incipient urbanization in Galilee exacerbated the plight of the Galilean peasants and divided cities and countryside so that the peasants viewed the former with animosity (Hanson and Oakman 2007, 109). However, it is especially the shifting input from work directly associated with subsistence agriculture to urban and rural non-agricultural labor that has recently been taken as a sign and cause of economic growth in the Roman economy at the turn of the first century (Erdkamp 2020, 52). The above-mentioned findings related to many non-agricultural businesses suggest that first-century Galilee participated in this development. The foundation and development of cities such as Magdala and later from 19 CE onward Tiberias shows that the local economy was able to sustain a higher level of non-essential consumption because urban dwellers in general are less involved than rural dwellers in the direct production of essential agricultural goods (Erdkamp 2015, 18–19). As elsewhere in the Roman world, the beginning of urbanization in Galilee contributed to the constitution of "stable markets for rural and urban products and stimulated investment in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors in their hinterlands" (Erdkamp 2020, 53).

Recent studies have emphasized that capital and investment were not the terrain of the elites only. The non-agricultural industries in Galilee could not have been possible without someone investing in potters' wheels, kilns, workshops, stone quarries, etc. Local craftsmen or traders needed to have and apparently did have original assets to acquire capital goods that were necessary for their businesses (Erdkamp et al. 2020b, 8), which speaks to the developing regional economy.

The evidence for investments in agricultural production in Galilee is seen in olive press installations that reflect the increase in olive oil production in the region.[24] This may reflect a larger trend evident in the

---

[24] Aviam 2013, 13; Mattila 2013, 106–7.

Roman period that was "marked by intensification of vine and olive culture" (Bowman and Wilson 2013, 4–5). Tamara Levit has emphasized that the development of olive presses and techniques associated with them in the Roman world was not uniform but diverse and regional. The local population was active in originating technological changes that suited present social institutions. Skills and innovations necessary for the development of press techniques were developed and made mainly through "artisans' 'tinkering,'" and were passed on "locally, orally, and probably within families and small communities" (Levit 2020, 343). It is likely that the small-scale industries in the various Galilean villages were founded and operated in the same way. Top-down elite or even imperial initiatives do not explain the development of regional economic networks, but these networks should be seen as emerging from the work of various local clusters in small Galilean villages.

35

Smallholders, Artisans, and Tax Farmers in Galilee

Based on some of Jesus's parables (Matthew 20:1–16; Mark 12:1–12 and *par.*) and papyrological evidence mainly from Ptolemaic Egypt, New Testament scholars often conclude that agricultural economy in Galilee was dominated by large estates where local peasants were forced to work. However, there is no archeological evidence of larger isolated farmhouses in eastern lower Galilee. Excavated rural houses, however, are found in small village communities (Bonnie 2019, 246). Typical houses in villages such as Capernaum were arranged around a central courtyard that formed "an important hub in social affairs" involving the extended families who "communally owned the courtyards in such houses, while individual family units occupied the rooms surrounding it" (Bonnie 2019, 244). Rather than working as forced laborers on the larger estates owned by distant landowners, it is more probable that those in villages directly involved in agricultural labor had their own parcels of land to work on.

It has been long customary in New Testament studies to apply theories on peasantry to Galilee and essentially call all members of the local population peasants. However, the use of this term has been criticized

in studies on agriculture in the Roman world. Paul Erdkamp (2005, 57, 61) has argued that the term "peasantry" may "conceal social stratification and economic diversity" and is therefore "an inexact term, due to the partial participation of the peasant household in strategies that are part of a wider economy." A more convenient term also in the Galilean context is "smallholder," which designates "that group within rural society that was involved in direct agricultural production and that was neither servile nor wealthy" (Erdkamp 2005, 57). The rural population was not uniform, but there was "the spectrum of the smallholder" (Erdkamp 2005, 61) with the defining characteristic that they were "owner cultivators" whose basic labor resource was their own family (Garnsey 2020, 34). As the rural population lived in nucleated villages like the small Galilean settlements, co-operation between separate households was common. Even though households resided separately in their own structures and cultivated small, dispersed plots, they could use the same working animals and implements (Erdkamp 2005, 68–69). The smallholders known throughout the Roman world also populate Jesus's parables. Besides working on their plots of land, they regularly kept some sheep and goats for their own livelihood while "possibly selling some of their products, like cheese and wool, on the market" (Erdkamp 2005, 72).

What we know of Jesus before he started his public career as a preacher fits well in the emerging new picture of the multilayered Galilean economy in which many independent lower-level agents participated. Mark recounts how the people in Jesus's hometown Nazareth, after learning of his miracles and wisdom, began to ask: οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τέκτων; (Mark 6:3). While the word τέκτων has traditionally been understood to mean "carpenter," Matthew Robinson (2021, 443) has recently made a good case for understanding the word as referring to a "builder-craftsman," who in a small village like Nazareth "would have likely taken on various jobs, including that of bricklaying and stonemasonry to properly build homes as well as other necessary structures and items." The material elsewhere in the Mediterranean, mainly from Roman Egypt, shows that these kinds of trained artisans could have expected compensation for their work and that in general skilled laborers earned more than their unskilled peers (Bernard 2016, 64).

While Roman writers articulating elite sentiments sometimes expressed scorn for crafts and trade, there is enough literary and epigraphic sources to show that expert workers with special competence were often esteemed for their know-how, technical dexterity, and talent (Tran 2016, 260). Practiced workers received their special knowledge and skills through an apprenticeship that was the source of pride and formed the foundation of their professional self-esteem and identity (Tran 2016, 256). The increasing number of occupational titles in funerary epitaphs and occupational scenes in funerary reliefs in the Roman East shows how various craftsmen saw their occupations as symbolizing a social distinction that they did not acquire by political means (van Nijf 1997, 69).

Tax collectors (τελῶναι) are often portrayed as associating with Jesus in the Gospels. This probably reflects the sociohistorical reality in Jesus's Galilee, even though the Gospel writers may have used the tax collectors for their own narrative reasons. Mark recounts how Levi, son of Alphaeus, is sitting at the custom house and later arranges dinner, which Jesus and his disciples attend with "many tax-farmers and sinners" (Mark 2:14–15). Many models of the Galilean economy implicitly start from the premise that Rome was a "predatory state" that tried to maximize tax revenues from the provinces to secure the privileges of a ruling elite.[25] However, the notion of the predatory state does not necessarily explain the role of taxation or tax collectors in the imperial economy. The auction-based tax systems had led to many abuses during the late Republican era. The imperial hierarchy intended to eliminate the worst abuses and, with the creation of a regular census schedule, to make the assessment of taxes within a given locality more consistent.[26]

A part of this reform was to replace tax farmers with local tax collectors such as Levi and his colleagues mentioned elsewhere in the Gospels.[27] The presence of the custom house (τὸ τελώνιον) in Capernaum sug–gests that Herod Antipas followed the recently instigated imperial fiscal

[37]

---

[25] For the notion of the "predatory state" in the study of Roman economy, see Kehoe 2013, 35.

[26] Kehoe 2013, 35–7; Gutiérrez and Martínez-Esteller 2022, 379.

[27] Matthew 5:46, 9:9–13, 11:19, 21:31; Luke 5:27–32, 7:34, 15:1.

policies by appointing local officials that helped to expand the tax base (Udoh 2014, 380). The head of the custom house, in Latin *uilicus* or in Greek οἰκόνομος, was accompanied by one or more assistants (van Nijf 2009, 288). This most likely explains why tax collectors so often appear as a group in the Gospels. The custom house was not only the place where custom transactions took place; it was also the place where local custom officials resided. The collection of customs helped to create local bureaucracy that was able to use their position as a source of status and social mobility (van Nijf 2009, 288).

The presence of local custom officials among Jesus's adherents supports the claim that those who decided to follow Jesus were not the poorest Galileans living at the subsistence level. As Jesus's words imply, his followers were people who had left their homes, fields, and families (Mark 10:28) and the accompanying social status. We must abandon a simplistic distinction between a small, abundantly wealthy elite and the rest of the population living in destitution. The evidence in Galilee is in line with other evidence from the Roman world that supports the notion of an economic continuum from the narrow elite to steadily broadening "middling" groups as we move down the "resources ladder." The above evidence suggests that Jesus and his early followers belonged to those various lower-level middling groups who enjoyed relative economic security even though their standards of living were far from the more affluent conditions experienced by the Galilean elites living in centers like Tiberias and Magdala. If this is the case, how should we understand Jesus's references to the poor and poverty? To answer this question, we must review how various Jewish and Greco-Roman sources used discourses of poverty as instruments of self-definition and exclusion.
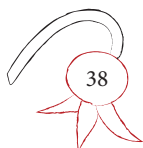
Poverty in Jewish Tradition

It is well-known that various traditions in the Hebrew Bible put a special emphasis on the vulnerable position of the poor, widows, and orphans.[28]

---

[28] For the poor and poverty in the Hebrew Bible, see Unsok Ro 2002; Hoppe 2004; Levin 2013, 281–300; Armitage 2016, 129–56.

What is of interest for the present article is how the language of poverty is used as an expression of self-identity in some postexilic writings, especially in many Psalms, where the poor represent the faithful and the righteous who anticipate their vindication before God.[29] According to a scholarly trajectory, these Psalms represent the emergence of a distinct group that understood poverty as a special privilege in front of God.[30] There is an ongoing discussion of how to describe the socioeconomic situation of this group. Some scholars have claimed that these Psalms represent the "theology of the poor" of an impoverished and oppressed group that used poverty language to affirm a positive identity when threatened by the power elite in Jerusalem (Bremer 2015, 83–95). However, other scholars have argued that the writers of the Psalms used the terminology related to poverty metaphorically. It is noteworthy that some of the Psalms were transmitted as written by the king David, who identifies himself as poor in front of God. Johannes Unsok Ro has made an important point that the production of such high literacy texts as Psalms demanded sophisticated skills that were a special privilege of a well-educated minority. Therefore, it is likely that "the authorial group of the relevant texts was not itself materially poor but belonged to a wealthier class that felt excluded and disenfranchised by those actually in power" (Unsok Ro 2008, 607).

In many late Second Temple period writings, poverty is connected with those regarded as God's elect whereas wealth is seen as a characteristic of their ungodly enemies. Many passages in the wisdom of Sira imply that Ben Sira and his students did not see themselves as belonging to the poor; the rich and the poor are described as identifiable social groups that seem to be distinct from the writer's own immediate group (Sirach 8:1–2; 13:1–4).[31] In some passages, the use of synonymous parallelisms implies that the rich are identified with the wicked and the godly with the poor (Sirach 13:17–21). This kind of use of language shows that Sira is working with traditions that used the rich and the poor as labels to make a distinction between the ungodly

---

[29] Ps. 9:19; 37:14; 40:18; 86:1.

[30] Lohfink 1986, 153–76; Levin 2013, 292–98.

[31] For Ben Sira's teaching about wealth and poverty, see Mathews 2013, 63–79.

and the devout (Mathews 2013, 72). The same phenomenon is attested in various Enochic traditions where the rich and the wealthy become increasingly identified with the sinners and the wicked (Mathews 2013, 44–62).

The Dead Sea Scrolls contain various references to the use of wealth, poverty, and the poor, even though it is beyond the scope of this article to offer a complete overview of these passages. [32] The exact details concerning the emergence and early history of the Qumran movement are not clear, but most scholars agree that the movement had its origins in dissident priestly circles during Hasmonean rule. The origin of the movement in affluent priestly circles indicates that discussions about wealth and poverty do not necessarily reflect the destitution of the writers and their primary audiences. However, these discussions illustrate how groups and people representing various socioeconomic backgrounds could have adopted the language of poverty to construct an affirmative self-image. The two major rule documents, the *Damascus Document* and the *Community Rule*, give different instructions about the use of wealth, but neither of these documents imply that those addressed were actually living in core poverty (Armitage 2016, 167). The *Community Rule* shows that those who join the community are expected to share their wealth with the community (1 QS 1:11–12). Shared wealth becomes a marker that signals the boundary between those who belong to the community and outsiders (Mathews 2013, 103–7).

The *Damascus Document* takes up the expression "the poor ones of the flock" from the book of Zechariah (cf. Zech 11:11) and uses this as a designation of those who revere God and escape the corruption of the present age (CD 19:11). It has sometimes been claimed that the adaption of the term "poor" as a self-designation in the *Damascus Document* was occasioned by some sort of economic oppression from those outside (Murphy 2002). However, the content of the document does not necessarily support this claim because those addressed are described as working and admonished to give their two days' wages each month to the community. The members of the community seemingly

---

[32] Murphy 2002; Unsok Ro 2002, 9–34; Mathews 2013, 80–120; Armitage 2016, 165–71.

had enough means to support the poor and the needy as instructed in the *Damascus Document* (CD 6:21; 14:14). In addition, some of the recipients presumably owned slaves and livestock and were engaged in agricultural trade (CD 12:8–10). Mark Mathews has concluded that the term "poor" in the *Damascus Document* functions as "an identity marker rather than a description of their economic circumstances. The Damascus community took a voluntarily position of marginalization in order to gain a voice in the dominant religious discourse as the faithful remnant of God" (2013, 94).

One of the Psalms that identifies the poor and needy with those who walk upright is Psalm 37, which was reinterpreted by the Qumran movement. In these renderings, the term "the congregation of the poor" (4QpPs 2:10; 3:10) is used to describe the group of God's elect. It is noteworthy that the label "the congregation of the poor" is used together with many other self-identifications like "the congregation of his chosen ones who carry out his will" (4QpPs 2:5) and "those who have returned from the wilderness" (4QpPs 3:1). This indicates that poverty language has become one of the ways to express the distinctiveness of the writer's own group and its perceived faithfulness, humbleness, and righteousness. Upon a careful analysis of poverty discourse in the Pesher Psalms, Jutta Jokiranta concludes that the self-designation "congregation of the poor" was used to strengthen the social identity of the writer and his ingroup, inasmuch as the poor were presented as those who are in the right ethical and spiritual relationship with God and their perceived humiliation was seen as self-chosen and belonging to God's plan (2013, 148).

The above overview is all too brief but shows how the expressions related to wealth and poverty were increasingly used as a means of self-identification in various Second Temple sources. Such positive attributes as "humble," "righteous," or "faithful" are attached to those designated as the "poor," who represent the ideal authorial self-images, whereas those outside are described as the "rich," who are presented in many texts as corrupted by their wealth and as oppressing God's elect.

41
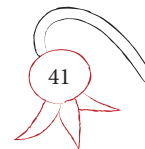
Poverty in Roman traditions

It has sometimes been thought that the positive assessment of poverty and the poor found in Jewish and Christian traditions was in principle foreign to Greco-Roman traditions. Finley's passing remark in *The Ancient Economy* is often cited by New Testament scholars as evidence of this; Finley says that Jesus's phrase "Blessed are the poor" (Luke 6:20; Matthew 5:3) "was not within the Graeco-Roman world of ideas, and its appearance in the Gospels … points to another world and another set of values" (1999, 38). However, recent discussions of poverty in the Roman world suggest that this assessment is simplified. From the late Republican and early imperial period onward, there appear more and more positive evaluations of poverty in various sources. The expansion of the Roman rule brought about profound socioeconomic changes and made the poor as a social group more visible than earlier, even though the voice of the actual poor is seldom heard in the literary sources.
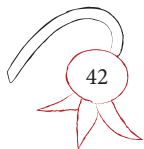
However, the profound transformations in the society changed how issues related to wealth, poverty, and the poor were discussed and theorized. Robin Osborne has remarked that in the Roman context "the poor were more often a topic for thinking with rather than a practical problem to be solved" and "the poor were quite often understood as a social and cultural group rather than an economic group" (Osborne 2006, 16–17). If poverty is considered in social and cultural terms, vulnerability, exclusion, and shame were quite often seen as characteristic of the poor (Morley 2006, 32–36). Juvenal's saying, that "there is nothing in the calamity of poverty that is harder to bear than the fact that it makes men ridiculous," demonstrates how, from an elite point of view, shame and poverty were closely linked.[33] It seems that vulnerability, social exclusion, and shame were sometimes overlapping but not necessarily coextensive categories. However, people who experienced poverty in one of these respects may have soon come to be seen as poor in other respects as well.

Roman tradition proposed an ideal image of the virtuous poor man over time. Many Republican and early imperial Roman sources provide

---

[33] Morley 2006, 35 (with a reference to Juv. *Sat*. 3.153–154).

an idealized portrait of the laboring rural life and evaluate poverty positively as the best defense against a corrupted life in luxury (Osborne 2006, 13). Among those almost legendary figures who were seen to embody values such as the lack of personal ambition, modesty, and willingness for hard work were Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus and later the Elder Cato. These figures are not necessarily presented as destitute but as honoring the laboring life, which enjoys no luxury, and thus they became paradigmatic figures for later positive assessments of poverty.[34] These idealizations of poverty imply that Roman concepts of poverty were often connected to the countryside while urban poverty was often associated with rebellion, crime, and disease (Morley 2006, 35).

While poverty was sometimes romanticized, many elite writers also show a clear bias when they portray indiscriminately the entire non-elite population as poor and connect poverty to idleness (Morley 2006, 36). It is also worth noting that those Latin writers who say something about poverty almost never had anything to do with the actual experiences of those whom we would classify as the Roman poor (Woolf 2006, 92). A case in point is Seneca the Younger, who praised virtuous life in poverty in his many writings even though it is unlikely that he himself had any real experience of poverty. This did not stop Seneca from telling his readers that they should try to live in poverty from time to time.[35] Seneca's views reflect ideas that were quite widespread among Cynics and Stoics, who valued the renunciation of property and the simple life. David Armitage has aptly concluded:

> The active embrace of poverty was thus an option that was seriously advocated in the Greco-Roman world of the first century C.E., particularly in Stoic and Cynic discourse. It was recommended on the grounds that it could prepare one for the possibility of involuntary impoverishment, and more fundamentally that it facilitated the life "according to nature" in which virtue could be most truly manifest. (Armitage 2016, 119–20)

---

[34] Cic. *Sen.* 56; Plut. *Cat. Maj.* 3.1–5.

[35] Sen. *Lucil.* 18.5–6.

A writer who admired poverty perhaps more than any other is the orator Dio Chrysostom (Armitage 2016, 118–220). In his book *Euboicus*, he presents an idealized portrait of rural life. He extols the simple lifestyle of the hunters among whom his first-person narrator is living. According to Dio, life in luxury and wealth leads to moral corruption whereas poverty is in accordance with nature and leads to respectable deeds and actions. Dio's narrator praises the simple lifestyle of the poor hunters that has made them generous and hospitable.

The ideas that were cherished by various Stoic and Cynic writers appear also in the writings of the Alexandrian philosopher Philo (Armitage 2016, 175). Just like Seneca the Younger, Philo advocates voluntary life in poverty as he praises the wealthy, who are willing on occasion to adopt life in simplicity. The ideals of a simple life and the renunciation of poverty are especially prominent in Philo's description of the sect of the Therapeuts in his *De Vita Contemplativa*. Philo praises the members of this sect, who have voluntarily abandoned property and social status in order to dedicate themselves to the contemplative life.

Jesus and the Galilean Poor in the Context of Ancient Representations of Poverty

The above-summarized material shows that, both in Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions, the language related to the poor and poverty was used as a rhetorical means in various negotiations where individuals and groups constructed their identity and defined borders for acceptable and desirable behaviors. Quite often, those who celebrated poverty belonged to the elite and even counted among the wealthiest persons in their societies (Seneca, Philo). The discussion in the first part of this article has suggested that Jesus and his followers were not poor in the sense that they needed to struggle for their daily livelihood even though they did not belong to the wealthiest Galileans. This makes it possible to place Jesus's references to the poor in the context of ancient, often idealized discussions of the renunciation of wealth and the voluntary acceptance of poverty. Jesus and his earliest followers were not

necessarily the poorest of the poor in Galilean society but, like many other ancient groups, they adopted the language of poverty as a means of self-identification. The historical Jesus already laid the foundation that many later Christian thinkers and groups used as a positive subtext when they employed discourses of poverty as a positive part of their self-expression.

Conclusion

In this article, I have challenged the use of static sociological models that have been applied to show that the Galilean economy was stagnant and that most of the local population lived at subsistence level. Scholars supporting the view of a destitute Galilee often present Jesus as giving a voice to the poor Galileans in his teachings. The representatives of this reconstruction continue to ignore increasing archeological evidence that not only relates to the urban elites but also uncovers the agency of many lower-level actors who contributed to the growth of the regional economy. The available evidence shows that these local fishermen, smallholders, artisans, and tax collectors who populate the Gospel stories and Jesus's teachings actively participated in regional economic networks and enjoyed relative economic security. Jesus's teachings are addressed to these people who, like the artisan Jesus himself, had left behind the social status and safety related to their kinship ties and occupational standing for the sake of the coming kingdom of God. The movement that grew around the artisan-turned-preacher and its adoption of the discourses of poverty can be seen as a variation of common cultural negotiations around the globalized Roman world, where various individual writers and groups used the term "poor" as a positive means of self-designation.

I have taken here some first steps toward the integration of recent discussions of the Roman imperial economy into the Galilean context. Much remains to be done so that we could understand better how local and regional economies functioned as a part of the globalized Roman economy. However, any advance in this research trajectory is impossible if part of New Testament scholarship remains fixed on socioeconomic

45

models that have become outdated and continues to reject the relevance of archeological findings in Galilee. I think that much can be gained if New Testament scholars can step out of the localized boundaries of their own field and continue the dialogue with the research dealing with the globalized Roman world.

Bibliography

Adan-Bayevitz, David. 2015. "Kefar Hananya." In *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, Vol. 2: *The Archaeological Record from Cities, Towns, and Villages*, edited by David A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange, 181–85. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Armitage, David J. 2016. *Theories of Poverty in the New Testament World*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Aviam, Mordechai. 2013. "People, Land, Economy, and Belief in First-Century Galilee and Its Origins: A Comprehensive Archaeological Synthesis." In *The Galilean Economy in the Time of Jesus*, edited by David A. Fiensy and Ralph Hawkins, 5–48. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Aviam, Mordechai. 2015. "Yodefat-Jotapata: A Jewish Galilean Town at the End of the Second Temple Period." In *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, Vol. 2: *The Archaeological Record from Cities, Towns, and Villages*, edited by David A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange, 109–26. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Avshalom-Gorni, Dina and Arfan Najar. 2013. "Migdal." *Hadashot Arkheologiyot: Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 125. http://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.aspx?id=2304&mag_id=120 (accessed April 2023).

Batten, Alicia J. 2017. "Fish Tales." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 47, no. 1: 5–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107916682196.

Bauckham, Richard. 2018. "Magdala and the Fishing Industry." In *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period*, edited by Richard Bauckham, 185–267. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Bekker-Nielsen, Tønnes. 2010. "Fishing in the Roman World." In *Ancient Nets and Fishing Gear: Proceedings of the International Workshop on "Nets and Fishing Gear in Classical Antiquity: A First Approach"*, edited by Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen and Dario Bernal Casasola, 187–203. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.

46
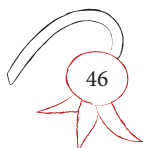
Bernard, Seth G. 2016. "Workers in the Roman Imperial Building Industry." In *Work, Labour, and Professions in the Roman World*, edited by Koenraad Verboven and Christian Laes, 62–86. Leiden: Brill.

Bintliff, John. 2013. "The Hellenistic to Roman Mediterranean: A Proto-Capitalist Revolution?" In *Economic Archaeology: From Structure to Performance in European Archaeology*, edited by Tim Kerig and Andreas Zimmermann, 285–92. Bonn: Habelt.

Bonnie, Rick. 2019. *Being Jewish in Galilee 100–200 CE: An Archaeological Study*. Turnhout: Brepols.

Bonnie, Rick and Julian Richard. 2012. "Building D1 at Magdala Revisited in the Light of Public Fountain Architecture in the Late-Hellenistic East." *Israel Exploration Journal* 6: 71–88. https://www.academia.edu/1239073/Building_D1_at_Magdala_Revisited_in_the_Light_of_Public_Fountain_Architecture_in_the_Late_Hellenistic_East.

Bowman, Alan K. and Andrew Wilson. 2013 "Introduction: Quantifying Roman Agriculture." In *The Roman Agricultural Economy: Organization, Investment, and Production*, edited by Alan K. Bowman and Andrew Wilson, 1–32. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Bowman, Alan K. and Andrew Wilson, eds. 2017. *Trade, Commerce and the State in the Roman World.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bremer, Johannes. 2015. "Jenseits Spirituellem oder materiellem Armutsverständnis der Psalmen: Ein Plädoyer zur bleibenden Dringlichkeit der Rückfrage nach sozio-ökonomischen Verhältnissen." In *Armut: Zur Geschichte und Aktualität eines christlichen Ideals*, edited by Thomas Möllenbeck and Ludger Schulte, 83–95. Münster: Aschendorf.

Callegher, Bruno. 2023. *Coins and Economy in Magdala/Taricheae: From the Hasmoneans to the Umayyad Period*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Crossley, James and Robert J. Myles. 2023. *Jesus: A Life in Class Conflict*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books.

De Luca, Stefano and Anna Lena. 2014. "The Harbor of the City of Magdala/Taricheae on the Shores of the Sea of Galilee, from the Hellenistic to the Byzantine Times. New Discoveries and Preliminary Results." In *Harbors and Harbor Cities in the Eastern Mediterranean from Antiquity to the Byzantine Period: Recent Discoveries and Current Approaches*, edited by Sabine Ladstätter, Felix Pirson, and Thomas Schmidts, 113–63. Istanbul: Ege Yayinlari.

De Luca, Stefano and Anna Lena. 2015. "Magdala/Taricheae." In *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, Vol. 2: *The Archaeological Record*

47
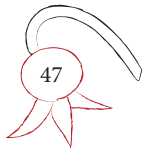
from Cities, Towns, and Villages, edited by David A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange, 280–342. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Edwards, Douglas R. 2007. "Identity and Social Location in Roman Galilean Villages." In *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee: A Region in Transition*, edited by Jürgen Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale B. Martin, 357–74. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck.

Ellis, Steven J. R. 2011. "The Rise and Re-Organization of the Pompeian Salted Fish Industry." In *The Making of Pompeii: Studies in the History and Urban Development of an Ancient Town*, edited by Steven J. R: Ellis, 59–88. Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology.

Erdkamp, Paul 2005. *The Grain Market in the Roman Empire: A Social, Political and Economic Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Erdkamp, Paul. 2015. "Agriculture, Division of Labour, and the Paths to Economic Growth." In *Ownership and Exploitation of Land and Natural Resources in the Roman World*, edited by Paul Erdkamp, Koenraad Verboven, and Arjan Zuiderhoek, 18–39. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Erdkamp, Paul. 2020. "Population, Technology, and Economic Growth in the Roman World." In *Capital, Investment, and Innovation in the Roman World*, edited by Paul Erdkamp, Koenraad Verboven, and Arjan Zuiderhoek, 39–64. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Erdkamp, Paul, Koenraad Verboven, and Arjan Zuiderhoek, eds. 2020a. *Capital, Investment, and Innovation in the Roman World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Erdkamp, Paul, Koenraad Verboven, and Arjan Zuiderhoek. 2020b. "Introduction." In *Capital, Investment, and Innovation in the Roman World*, edited by Paul Erdkamp, Koenraad Verboven, and Arjan Zuiderhoek, 1–31. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Finley, Moses I. 1999. *The Ancient Economy*. Updated edition with a foreword by Ian Morris. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Flohr, Miko. 2014. "Roman Economy." In *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*, edited by Claire Smith, 2338–46. Heidelberg: Springer.

Flohr, Miko and Andrew Wilson. 2016. "Roman Craftsmen and Traders: Towards an Intellectual History." In *Urban Craftsmen and Traders in the Roman World*, edited by Andrew Wilson and Miko Flohr, 23–54. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Garnsey, Peter. 2020. "Non-Slave Labour in the Roman World." In *Non-Slave Labour in the Greco-Roman World*, edited by Peter Garnsey, 34–47. London: Cambridge Philological Society.

48
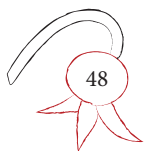
Guijarro, Santiago. 2018. "Magdala and Trade." In *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period*, edited by Richard Bauckham, 161–83. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Gutiérrez, Óscar and Marco Martínez-Esteller. 2022. "Tax Collection in the Roman Empire: A New Institutional Economics Approach." *Constitutional Political Economy* 33: 378–401. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10602-021-09355-5.

Hakola, Raimo. 2017. "The Production and Trade of Fish as Source of Economic Growth in the First Century CE Galilee: Galilean Economy Re-Examined." *Novum Testamentum* 59 no. 2: 111–30. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685365-12341561.

Hakola, Raimo. Forthcoming. "Fishermen and the Production and Marketing of Fish in First-Century Galilee." In *Gender, Social Roles and Occupations in Early Christian World*, edited by Antti Marjanen. Leiden: Brill.

Hall, Jonathan M. 2014. *Artifact and Artifice: Classical Archaeology and the Ancient Historian*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Hanson, K. C. 1997. "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27, no. 3: 99–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/014610799702700304.

Hanson, K. C. and Douglas Oakman. 2007. *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*, 2nd Ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Harland, Philip A. 2009. *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians*. New York: Continuum.

Hoppe, Leslie J. 2004. *There Shall Be No Poor among You: Poverty in the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004.

Horsley, Richard A. 2013. *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Jokiranta, Jutta. 2013. *Social Identity and Sectarianism in the Qumran Movement*. Leiden: Brill.

Keddie, G. Anthony, Michael Flexsenhar III, and Steven J. Friesen, eds. 2021. *The Struggle over Class: Socioeconomic Analysis of Ancient Christian Texts*. Atlanta: SBL Press.

Kehoe, Dennis. 2013. "The State and Production in the Roman Agrarian Economy." In *The Roman Agricultural Economy: Organization, Investment, and Production*, edited by Alan K. Bowman and Andrew Wilson, 33–53. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Leibner, Uzi. 2009. *Settlement and History in Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine Galilee: An Archaeological Survey of the Eastern Galilee*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

49

Leibner, Uzi. 2019. "Material Culture and Ethnic Identity in Hellenistic-Period Galilee: Kh. el-'Eika as a Case Study." In *A Question of Identity: Social, Political, and Historical Aspects of Identity Dynamics in Jewish and Other Contexts*, edited by Divka Rivkin Katz, Noah Hacham, Geoffrey Herman, and Lilach Sagiv, 265–89. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Lena, Anna. 2018. "The Harbor." *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period*, edited by Richard Bauckham, 69–88. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Levin, Christoph. 2013. "The Poor in the Old Testament." In *Re-reading the Scriptures: Essays on the Literary History of the Old Testament*, 281–300. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Levit, Tamara. 2020. "Invention, Tinkering, or Transfer? Innovation in Oil and Wine Presses in the Roman Empire." In *Capital, Investment, and Innovation in the Roman World*, edited by Paul Erdkamp, Koenraad Verboven, and Arjan Zuiderhoek, 307–53. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ligt, Luuk de and John Bintliff. 2020. "Introduction." In *Regional Urban Systems in the Roman World, 150 BCE – 250 CE*, edited by Luuk de Ligt and John Bintliff, 1–34. Leiden: Brill.

Lohfink, Norbert. 1986. "Von der 'Anawim-Partei' zur 'Kirche der Armen.' Die bibelwissenschaftliche Ahnentafel eines Hauptbegriffs der Theologie der Befreiung." *Biblica* 67, no. 2: 153–76. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42611013.

Marzano, Annalisa. 2013. *Harvesting the Sea: The Exploitation of Marine Resources in the Roman Mediterranean*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mathews, Mark D. 2013. *Riches, Poverty and the Faithful: Perspectives on Wealth in the Second Temple Period and the Apocalypse of John*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mattila, Sharon Lea. 2013. "Revisiting Jesus' Capernaum: A Village of Only Subsistence-Level Fishers and Farmers?" In *The Galilean Economy in the Time of Jesus*, edited by David A. Fiensy and Ralph Hawkins, 75–138. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Mattila, Sharon Lea. 2014 "Inner Village Life in Galilee: A Diverse and Complex Phenomenon." In *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, Vol. 1: *Life, Culture, and Society*, edited by David A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange, 312–45. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Mattila, Sharon Lea. 2015. "Capernaum: Village of Nahum, From Hellenistic to Byzantine Times." In *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, Vol. 2: *The Archaeological Record from Cities, Towns, and Villages*, edited by David A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange, 217–57. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
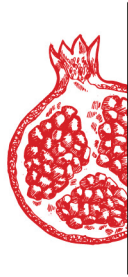
McCullough, Tom. 2021. "The Synagogue at Khirbet Qana in Its Village Context." In *The Synagogue in Ancient Palestine: Current Issues and Emerging Trends*, edited by Rick Bonnie, Raimo Hakola, and Ulla Tervahauta, 81–95. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Morley, Neville. 2006. "The Poor in the City of Rome." In *Poverty in the Roman World*, edited by Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne, 21–39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Murphy, Catherine M. 2002. *Wealth in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Qumran Community*. Leiden: Brill

Myles, Robert J., ed. 2019a. *Class Struggle in the New Testament*. London: Lexington Books.

Myles, Robert J. 2019b. "Fishing for Entrepreneurs in the Sea of Galilee? Unmasking Neoliberal Ideology in Biblical Interpretation." In *Class Struggle in the New Testament*, edited by Robert J. Myles, 115–37. London: Lexington Books.

Nijf, Onno van. 1997. *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East*. Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben.

Nijf, Onno van. 2009. "The Social World of Tax Farmers and Their Personnel." In *The Customs Law of Asia*, edited by Michel Cottier, Michael Crawford, Charles Crowther, Jean-Louis Ferrary, Barbara M. Levick, Olli Salomies, and Michael Wörrle, 279–311. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oakman, Douglas E. 2012. *The Political Aims of Jesus.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Osborne, Robin. 2006. "Introduction: Roman Poverty in Context." In *Poverty in the Roman World*, edited by Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne, 1–20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Overman, J. Andrew. 2014. "Late Second Temple Galilee: A Picture of Relative Economic Health." In *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, Vol. 1: *Life, Culture, and Society*, edited by David A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange, 357–65. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Robinson, Matthew K. 2021 "'Is This Not the Τέκτων?': Revisiting Jesus' Vocation in Mark 6:3." *Neot* 55, no. 2: 431–45. https://doi.org/10.1353/neo.2021.0038.

Ste. Croix, Geoffrey de. 1981. *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Strange, James Riley. 2015. "Kefar Shikhin." In *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Periods*, Vol. 2: *The Archaeological Record from Cities, Towns, and Villages*, edited by David A. Fiensy and James Riley Strange, 88–108. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

51
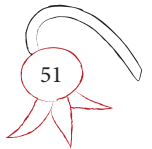
Tran, Nicolas. 2016. "*Ars* and *Doctrina*: The Socioeconomic Identity of Roman Skilled Workers (First Century BC–Third Century AD)." In *Work, Labour, and Professions in the Roman World*, edited by Koenraad Verboven and Christian Laes, 246–61. Leiden: Brill.

Udoh, Fabian. 2014. "Taxation and Other Sources of Government Income in the Galilee of Herod and Antipas." In *The Galilean Economy in the Time of Jesus*, edited by David A. Fiensy and Ralph Hawkins, 5–48. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Unsok Ro, Johannes. 2002. *Die Sogenannte "Armenfrömmigkeit" im nach-exilischen Israel*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Unsok Ro, Johannes. 2008. "Socio-Economic Context of Post-Exilic Community and Literacy." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 120, no. 4: 597–611. https://doi.org/10.1515/ZAW.2008.036.

Verboven, Koenraad and Christian Laes, eds. 2016. *Work, Labour, and Professions in the Roman World*. Leiden: Brill.

Wilson, Andrew and Miko Flohr, eds. 2016. *Urban Craftsmen and Traders in the Roman World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Woolf, Greg. 2006. "Writing Poverty in Rome." In *Poverty in the Roman World*, edited by Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne, 83–99. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zangenberg, Jürgen K. 2019. "Anchoring Ancient Galilee at the Lakeshore: Towards Re-Conceptualizing Ancient Galilee as a Mediterranean Environment." *Early Christianity* 10, no. 3: 265–91. https://doi.org/10.1628/ec-2019-0018.

Zapata-Meza, Marcela. 2018. "Domestic and Mercantile Areas." In *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period*, edited by Richard Bauckham, 89–108. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Zuiderhoek, Arjan. 2013. "Workers of the Ancient World: Analyzing Labour in Classical Antiquity." *Workers of the World: International Journal on Strikes and Social Conflict* 1, no. 3: 32–48. https://workersoftheworld.net/previous-editions/volume-1-number-3/chapter-1/.

Zuiderhoek, Arjan. 2015. "Introduction: Land and Natural Resources in the Roman World in Historiographical and Theoretical Perspective." In *Ownership and Exploitation of Land and Natural Resources in the Roman World*, edited by Paul Erdkamp, Koenraad Verboven, and Arjan Zuiderhoek, 1–17. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

52

DIVINELY SANCTIONED DOMINATION: ACCOMMODATING ROMAN AND NATIVE IDENTITIES IN DIONYSIUS'S *ROMAN ANTIQUITIES* AND JOSEPHUS'S *JEWISH WAR*

Marika Rauhala

Abstract

In the early imperial period, many local people perceived the Roman rule in the eastern Mediterranean as unstable and unjust. Attempts to achieve a positive social identity may have fuelled social competition and hostility towards the Romans. Both Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Flavius Josephus adopted a different strategy of identity building: social mobility. Their accounts of historical events sought to defuse antagonism by embracing hybrid Greco-/Judeo-Roman identities and allowing fluid transitions between their native identities and the overarching Romanness. In doing so, they also promoted perceptions of the legitimacy and stability of Roman rule. Both authors used history to illustrate Roman piety, virtue, and consequent divine favour to justify Roman domination. Dionysius constructed a superordinate idea of idealized Greekness that subsumed the Romans as the torchbearers of ancient Greek values, while Josephus saw a divine hand at work in the Roman military triumph. Since the Romans had earned their divinely sanctioned rule either by adhering to Hellenic traditions or by being part of God's great plan, Dionysius and Josephus managed to retain the positive social identities of Greeks and Jews under the Roman imperial umbrella.

Au début de la période impériale, de nombreuses populations locales estimaient que la domination romaine en Méditerranée orientale était instable et injuste. Les tentatives de construire une identité sociale positive ont peut-être attisé la concurrence sociale et l'hostilité à l'égard des Romains. Denys d'Halicarnasse et Flavius Josèphe ont tous deux adopté une stratégie différente de construction de l'identité : la mobilité sociale. Leurs mises en récit d'événements historiques cherchent à désamorcer la tension. Elles adoptent des identités hybrides Gréco-/Judéo-romaines et en favorisent des transitions fluides entre leurs identités d'origine et la romanité surplombante. Ce faisant, les deux auteurs ont également encouragé l'impression d'une autorité romaine légitime et stable. Ils ont utilisé l'histoire pour illustrer la piété romaine, la vertu et la faveur divine qui en découle, afin de justifier la domination romaine. Denys construit une idée supérieure de l'identité grecque idéalisée qui a absorbé les Romains comme se faisant les passeurs des anciennes valeurs grecques, tandis que Josèphe identifie la main de Dieu agissant dans le triomphe militaire romain. Puisque les Romains ont mérité leur autorité divinement approuvée en adhérant aux traditions helléniques, ou en faisant partie du grand plan de Dieu, Denys et Josèphe réussissent à préserver les identités sociales positives des Grecs et des Juifs tout en les plaçant sous l'égide de l'empire romain.

54

DIVINELY SANCTIONED DOMINATION: ACCOMMODATING ROMAN AND NATIVE IDENTITIES IN DIONYSIUS'S *ROMAN ANTIQUITIES* AND JOSEPHUS'S *JEWISH WAR*

Marika Rauhala

55

History is what the present *thinks* about the past. Note here that I specifically do not say that history is what *happened* in the past; rather I stress that history is what a living society *does* with the past. Events of the past which are not studied and are not thereby incorporated into a culture's vision of itself—most particularly its vision of itself in time and a changing world—are not part of history. They happened, yes, but they are not a part of history until a historian, with a specific purpose which is related to his or her own time and culture, picks up those facts and uses them."[1]

— T. Young 1988, 7

"Writing history, therefore, does not simply mean *recording* the past but *creating* it: it is the historiographer who is in control of which events are remembered and how, and which are passed over in silence and, thus, will never be part of the collective memory of later generations."[2]

— Wiater 2011b, 67

Introduction

In this article, I will explore how two authors writing in the early imperial period harnessed past events to support the positive self-perception of their native cultures as part of the Roman Empire. They picked up certain facts, interpreted them in the light of their agenda, and thus gave the events a meaning and rendered them a part of the historical narrative. The writers that I will discuss are Dionysius of Halicarnassus and his *Roman Antiquities* and Flavius Josephus and his *Jewish War*. Even though nearly a hundred years separates their writings, the stated purposes of their works offer interesting parallels—as well as telling differences—that will shed light on the adjustment of local and global identities in the early imperial Roman East.

Josephus's debt to Dionysius is often discussed with regard to his magnum opus, *Jewish Antiquities*, which parallels the title and literary aim of Dionysius's *Roman Antiquities*. Whereas Dionysius's objective was to demonstrate that Roman culture was superior only insofar as it was genuinely Greek (thus proving the precedence of Hellenicity), in *Jewish Antiquities* Josephus's aim was to establish the primacy of

[2] Cf. Wiater 2011b, 63: "Dionysius' approach to historical writing is oriented towards the present rather than the past: it is not the *factual value* of a narrative that is relevant to him but the *emotional reaction* which it provokes. For Dionysius the access to the past is primarily an emotional one that is based on the readers' interaction with the text and their experience of the past through reading."

Jewish traditions in relation to Roman ones. It is likely that Josephus was aware of Dionysius's work and was even attempting to outdo it.[3] As regards identity politics, however, Josephus's earlier work, *Jewish War*, is worth considering in relation to Dionysius's strategy. Both authors embraced a hybrid Greco-/Judeo-Roman identity—Dionysius being a Carian Greek who adopted Roman values and attitudes, and Josephus being a Hellenistic Jew who praised Roman ideals—and both sought to communicate the advantages of this wider perspective while still appreciating their native cultural heritage. Such negotiated social identities are novel mixtures of cultural values and attitudes, a kind of hybrid identity. Hybrid identities often emerge in pluralistic societies where cultural exchange is commonplace and people move around with ease, and where different social contexts call for different identities and group allegiances. Hybridity blurs the boundaries of sameness and difference, in this case the difference between "us" and the Roman "others."[4] It could be argued that Dionysius and Josephus both adapted their historical narratives to make their message acceptable to dual audiences (see next section) and modified their respective native identities to allow for fluid transitions between local and superordinate identifications.

In the following, I will first sketch the historical context of Dionysius's and Josephus's writings and the apparent problems that these two authors faced in trying to reconcile their native ethnic and cultural identities with Romanness. Second, I will discuss the strategies that, on the one hand, Dionysius employs in order to bridge the inner tensions of being a Greek under Roman rule and, on the other hand, how Josephus

---

[3] The idea of Dionysius's work as the model for *Jewish Antiquities* was already featured in Thackeray 1929; for a recent review of the evidence, see Cowan 2018, which concludes that significant similarities are found in the analogous themes and apologetic motives of the writers. It is notable, however, that whereas Dionysius seeks to mitigate the tensions between the proud, self-respecting Greeks and the ruling Romans, Josephus's elevation of Jewish traditions works for the opposite effect. See also Balch 1982, which argues that Dionysius's *Antiquities* and Josephus's *Against Apion* both follow the skeletal outline for an encomium of a city described by Menander of Laodicea.

[4] For an overview of the development of the concept of hybridity, see R. Young 1994, 1–26; Ackermann 2012, 6–14.

57

chooses to rationalize and justify the Roman victory over the Jews. Third, I will discuss the role of the moral and religious rationales that both historians use in their construction of hybrid identities and in adjusting their native feelings of distinction to accommodate their exhorted loyalty toward the Romans.

Two Historians of Foreign Supremacy

Dionysius of Halicarnassus was a Greek historian of the Augustan period.[5] His exact birth and death year are not known, but assumedly he was born around 60 BCE or shortly after that, and he died sometime after 7 CE. He was born in Caria, in southwestern Asia Minor, which had been part of the Seleucid Kingdom until it passed to Roman control with the Treaty of Apamea in 188 BCE. Even though the Romans had been the effective rulers of the area since the lineage of the client kings of Pergamon came to an end in 133 BCE, their rule had faced a serious challenge just a generation before Dionysius's time. As Roman leaders were occupied with the Social War raging in Italy, King Mithridates VI of Pontus defeated King Nicomedes IV of Bithynia and the remaining Roman legions of Asia in 89 BCE. In the following year, Mithridates devised a mass slaughter of Roman and Italian settlers in various Asian cities, which apparently was welcomed by many locals. As a result, tens of thousands of men, women, and children who were deemed to represent Roman power were killed, and the Roman presence in the area was annihilated. The efficiency and sheer ruthlessness of the massacre—which also entailed many grave violations against the requirements of piety—bespeaks a deep aversion to Roman rule.[6]

---

[5] Dionysius's Augustan literary context has been recently highlighted in the compilation *Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Augustan Rome* (2019); see esp. de Jonge and Hunter 2019. For a similar contextualization of Josephus in Flavian Rome, see, e.g., Edmondson et al. 2005; Sievers and Lembi 2005; Curran 2011.

[6] On the "Asian Vespers," see App. *Bell. Civ.*, 22–23 (cf. 54, 62); Matyszak 2008, 44–47; Mayor 2009, 13–24, 170–75. The ancient estimates of the victims range

In the following decades, Asia Minor became a battlefield between Mithridates and various Roman military leaders, but Roman rule was firmly reinstated by General Sulla, who defeated Mithridates in 85 BCE. Sulla imposed a heavy fine upon the rebellious communities, and carried out a reorganization of the province by establishing fiscal districts that followed the territories of urban settlements. Communities that had proven treacherous were also punished by having their status demoted, and many previously free cities were subjected to the direct control of the provincial governor. The position of Halicarnassus is not certain but the honors that the citizens bestowed on Sulla suggest that it may have been one of the free cities. One major outcome of Sulla's arrangements was that, in order to survive, the local communities had to learn how to establish beneficial relations with the Roman elite.[7] The Mithridatic Wars, however, show that Roman rule over Asia Minor was not unwavering, and that the local population may have still held grudges against their conquerors and the heavy financial burdens they had imposed, even though the chances of changing the regime may have seemed more and more improbable as the century drew on.

For Dionysius, Roman rule appeared to be a cultural constant, and he saw many more opportunities in it than threats. Around 30 BCE, he moved to Rome and spent the following decades teaching rhetoric, learning Latin, studying earlier works on Roman history, and preparing his own multivolume work on early Roman history (*Ant. Rom.* 1.7.2–3). The stated reason for his undertaking was to choose a subject that would be noble and instructive for the readers (*Ant. Rom.* 1.1.2). The unsurpassed achievements of the Roman Empire, including its extent and enduring nature, justified the inquiry into the early phases of Rome—not the least because, according to Dionysius, the previous accounts did not discuss the matter as extensively and accurately as it deserved

---

from 80,000 (Val. Max. *Fact. et Dict. Memor.* 9.2 *ext.* 3; Memnon 22.9 [*FGrHist* 434 F 1]) up to 150,000 (Plut. *Sulla* 24.4).

[7] On the rearrangement of Roman rule in the Asian province, see Santangelo 2007, 107–33; the homage paid to Sulla by the Halicarnassians is recorded in *ILS* 2.2 no. 7881.

(*Ant. Rom.* 1.2.1, 1.3.3–6; cf. 1.31.3).[8] On the other hand, Dionysius explicitly sets out to educate his fellow Greeks on the magnificence of Rome, as many of them falsely assume that Rome had become a world power "not through reverence for the gods and justice and every other virtue, but through some chance and the injustice of Fortune, which inconsiderately showers her greatest favours upon the most undeserving. And indeed the more malicious are wont to rail openly at Fortune for freely bestowing on the basest of barbarians the blessings of the Greeks" (*Ant. Rom.* 1.4.2).[9] Dionysius continues to explain that he has taken upon himself the task of dispelling these false assumptions by telling the truth about Rome's origins, so that the Greeks would not be vexed by their subjugation, considering it a twist of fate. For the eternal law of nature dictates that the stronger will rule the weaker (ἄρχειν ἀεὶ τῶν ἡττόνων τοὺς κρείττονας), and thus the Roman domination over Greece is reasonable (κατὰ τὸ εἰκός). The Greeks would learn from Dionysius's history that "Rome from the very beginning, immediately after its founding, produced infinite examples of virtue in men whose superiors, whether for piety or for justice or for life-long self-control or for warlike valour, no city, either Greek or barbarian, has ever produced" (*Ant. Rom.* 1.5.1–3).[10]

---

[8] On Dionysius's use of earlier historians and his detailed account of early Roman history, see Oakley 2019. Dionysius's extensive retelling is also meant to reflect the significance of this period, which has been previously overlooked and has thus led to the (Greek) misconception that Rome had no past worth mentioning (Wiater 2011a, 189–93; Wiater 2011b, 79). Cf. Jos. *Bell. Jud.* 2.367–387, where King Agrippa II invokes Rome's unparalleled military success.

[9] οὐ δι᾽ εὐσέβειαν δὲ καὶ δικαιοσύνην καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετὴν ἐπὶ τὴν ἁπάντων ἡγεμονίαν σὺν χρόνῳ παρελθούσης, ἀλλὰ δι᾽ αὐτοματισμόν τινα καὶ τύχην ἄδικον εἰκῆ δωρουμένην τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀγαθῶν τοῖς ἀνεπιτηδειοτάτοις· καὶ οἵ γε κακοηθέστεροι κατηγορεῖν εἰώθασι τῆς τύχης κατὰ τὸ φανερὸν ὡς βαρβάρων τοῖς πονηροτάτοις τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων χαριζομένης ἀγαθά. Translations of Dionysius follow Cary 1937–1950.

[10] μυρίας ἤνεγκεν ἀνδρῶν ἀρετὰς εὐθὺς ἐξ ἀρχῆς μετὰ τὸν οἰκισμόν, ὧν οὔτ᾽ εὐσεβεστέρους οὔτε δικαιοτέρους οὔτε σωφροσύνῃ πλείονι παρὰ πάντα τὸν βίον χρησαμένους οὐδέ γε τὰ πολέμια κρείττους ἀγωνιστὰς οὐδεμία πόλις ἤνεγκεν οὔτε Ἑλλὰς οὔτε βάρβαρος" (at 1.5.3).

When we analyze Dionysius's stated reasons for writing *Roman Antiquities*, three things become apparent. First, Dionysius not only wishes to offer useful lessons on Rome's glorious history to sophisticated Roman readership, but also to provide the Greeks with what he considered to be truthful information about their Roman conquerors and the latter's achievements (*Ant. Rom.* 1.5.4; 1.6.4). In other words, Dionysius addresses a dual readership, but he constructs his imagined Greek audience as a unified group, overriding many internal differences, not least in their allegiance to Rome.[11] Second, Dionysius adamantly maintains that Rome had power over Greece deservedly and legitimately, since the Romans excelled in virtuousness, piety, prudence, and military prowess, which made them natural rulers. Therefore, the Greeks had no reason to be resentful about their current subordinate status, but had better accept it and keep an open mind to the lessons of history that Dionysius offers. Third, Dionysius clearly suggests that many Greeks looked nostalgically back on the past greatness of Greece, and considered that the Romans were their inferiors. This haughty attitude had deep roots in Greek thinking, and Dionysius did his part to immortalize the predominance of Greekness by setting it as the paradigm of justified power. But unlike his implied compatriots, Dionysius portrayed the Romans as the upholders, not the barbarian enemies, of this legacy.[12] Dionysius was explicitly aware that his role as a historian was to remodel and represent the past so that it would shape

61

---
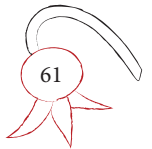
[11] Nino Luraghi (2003, esp. 273–76, 281, 283–84) has argued that Dionysius's long address to his Greek audience is actually part of his construction of an indirect message that would be acceptable to his Roman audience. According to Luraghi, Dionysius's actual message is directed at the contemporary Romans who have strayed from their virtuous beginnings; thus, Dionysius urges them to resume their original Greek identity. Cf. Bowersock 1965, 131. Even though many scholars have also considered that Dionysius primarily wrote for a Greek readership (e.g., Gabba 1991, 79–80), I see no compelling reason to prefer one to the other. See the discussion of Casper de Jonge and Richard Hunter (2019, 31–34) that summarizes earlier scholarship and supports a mixed readership. See also Delcourt 2003a, 133; Delcourt 2003b, 47–48; Wiater 2011a, *passim*; Wiater 2011b, 62 n. 5, 70, 85; Engels 2012, 172–74; Wiater 2018, 211 n. 11.

[12] See also Wiater 2011a, 100–2, 186–87, 220–23; Wiater 2011b, 72–76.

the self-perception of readers by emotionally connecting them with the uplifting achievements of their history (see Wiater 2011b, 63–69). As the alleged condescending attitude of the Greeks would have effectively made it impossible to accept Roman dominance or, indeed, to identify with their rulers, Dionysius took it as his task to resolve this apparent conflict between being positively identified as Greek and being under negatively perceived Roman rulers.[13]

The Romano-Jewish historian Yosef ben Matityahu, better known by his Roman name Titus Flavius Josephus, was born in Jerusalem roughly a century after Dionysius in around 37 CE, and he died around 100 CE. Even though Josephus can be distinguished from Dionysius by the era in which he lived, by his cultural background, and by his personal experiences of Roman rule, as authors, their relationship to Roman dominion exhibits interesting parallels. Josephus was of noble Jewish descent: his paternal ancestors belonged to the priestly elite, and his mother was of royal blood (*Vita* 1–6). His homeland, Judea, had been under Roman rule for over a century when he composed his first work, *Jewish War*. The area had secured a period of relative if not even absolute independence during the Hasmonean Dynasty, until the Roman intervention led by Pompey the Great reduced the kingdom to a client state in 63 BCE, and since 6 CE Judea had been a Roman province.

The Judeans were even more willing to resist Roman rule than the Greeks in Asia Minor, and the personal involvement of Josephus in the rebellion against Rome makes his position very interesting. He had led the Judean rebels of Galilee during the siege of Jotapata in 67 CE. After the town fell, Josephus hid in a cave with 40 other notable Jewish leaders and, after a heated debate following the Roman discovery of their whereabouts, they decided to kill each other. Josephus, however, survived this collective suicide and was taken prisoner.[14] Josephus proph-

---

[13] Cf. Wiater 2018, 211: "Dionysius … invites his Greek readers to follow his own journey (in the literal and metaphorical sense) from Halicarnassus to Rome to adopt a new paradigm of Greekness that is as much indebted to their origins as it requires them to transcend them; he invites them to become Roman Greeks."

[14] Josephus's hiding and escape from death in Jotapata are narrated in *Bell. Jud.* 3.340–391.

esied that Vespasian, who was the commander of the Roman troops at Jotapata, and his son Titus would become emperors, and having thus gained credibility in their eyes, Vespasian and Titus became favorably disposed toward Josephus (*Bell. Jud.* 3.400–408). When Vespasian was proclaimed emperor in 69 CE, he liberated Josephus from captivity (*Bell. Jud.* 4.622–629). In 71 CE, Josephus settled in Rome in Vespasian's previous residence, obtained Roman citizenship and a pension (*Vita* 423), and under Flavian patronage composed his account of the Jewish War.[15]

Josephus's stated purpose for writing his account of the Jewish War was to offer a truthful report of the events, as he had firsthand experience and knowledge, and he succumbs to neither malice nor fawning (*Bell. Jud.* 1.1–3, 7–9; cf. *Vita* 47–50). Like Dionysius, he seems to be addressing a dual readership. We may perceive his efforts as an attempt to make his account acceptable to the Romans while defending the ordinary Jewish people against Roman antipathy. On the other hand, he attempts to vindicate himself in the eyes of those compatriots who considered his surrender to the Romans to be an act of treachery. This is particularly evident in his composition of the aforementioned episode relating to his capture at Jotapata (see Jonquière 2011, esp. 224–25).

In the *Jewish War*, Josephus appears as a Roman historian who has assumed the conventions of historiography (see Mason 2016a, 98–102),[16] and who is an active member of the contemporary literary circles (Mason 2016a, 95–97).[17] His polished and Atticizing Greek, and a literary style that complies with the requirements of rhetorical training, bespeak an erudite readership. The immediate social context for the circulation of his writings was Rome, and he often assumes that his

---

[15] Josephus started writing the history of the Jewish War after he had arrived in Rome, and he probably finished his work before Vespasian's death in 79 CE (see, e.g., Mason 2016b, 14–15), even though some episodes in book 7, or perhaps even the entire text of book 7, may be later additions by Josephus (see Schwartz 2011, 331–44).

[16] For instance, Josephus's distanced references to divine providence in the *Jewish War* are suited to a historian and differ from the approach he assumes in *Jewish Antiquities* (Schwartz 2011, 337–42).

[17] Against the picture of Josephus as a solitary and outside figure painted by Hannah Cotton and Werner Eck (2005).

readers are better informed about events and notable figures in Roman history than about the intricacies of Jewish customs or Judean politics (see Mason 2005).[18] Yet, Josephus never sheds his Judean identity. While making his writings approachable to the Romans, he also engages in discussions with his fellow diaspora Jews (Curran 2011, 76–81).[19] Josephus mentions that he had written an earlier version of his *Jewish War* in his ancestral tongue, which he had then dispatched to the upper barbarians (*Bell. Jud.* 1.3), later specified as the Parthians, Babylonians, Arabs, the Judeans beyond the Euphrates, and the Adiabenians (*Bell. Jud.* 1.6). Even though this work almost certainly was considerably briefer than the Greek text (see, e.g., Mason 2016b, 15–17)—and Josephus undoubtedly embellishes its reach—it nonetheless suggests that Josephus was interested in communicating with a wider audience, including scattered Jewish communities. Josephus asserts that he often faced hostility from the Jews in Rome who were envious of his position (*Vita* 424–425, 428–429), but his writings may have also contributed to the grudge. All in all, Josephus's work can be seen as a contribution to the ongoing debate on the essence and future direction of Judaism after the fall of Judea and the destruction of the Temple. With his self-presentation as a well-learned priest of notable descent and prominent connections, Josephus was building up his credentials as an authority within the Jewish community.[20] Josephus's personal and national apology is inter-

---

[18] Mason, however, does not consider the possibility that Josephus would have also written with the lettered Jewish community in Rome on his mind. The emperors Vespasian and Titus and King Agrippa II certainly featured among Josephus's addressees, but he also mentions having sold books to many of his compatriots (*C. Ap.* 1.50–52 [πολλοῖς δὲ τῶν ἡμετέρων at 51]; *Vita* 361–364).

[19] In particular, Josephus's attempt to rationalize the outcome of the war—as will be discussed below—seems to primarily address the concerns of the Jewish audience. Tessa Rajak (2005) has argued that, besides being involved with the expatriate Judeans in the city of Rome, Josephus probably also maintained active contacts with various Jewish communities in the eastern Mediterranean.

[20] Curran 2011, 75, 81, 84; Tuval 2011, 400, 402–4. As Michael Tuval (2011, 405, 407–8) points out, by laying emphasis on his priestly status, Josephus also seeks prestige in Roman eyes by taking advantage of the positive imagery that the Romans associated with priesthood and expertise in age-old religious traditions.

twined with a message to his compatriots: one can simultaneously be a devoted Jew and a loyal Roman.

The Quest for Positive Distinction in a Subordinate Status

Forging a positive perception of oneself and one's relevant reference group(s) is an important motive for self-representation. Empirical research conducted in social psychology has demonstrated that group-based identifications and the perception of intergroup relations are significant factors in human interactions. These findings led to the formulation of social identity theory, according to which people seek to establish a positive sense of distinction through a group or groups whose membership is salient for them.[21] The sense of belonging to a group (the group with which one identifies is called the ingroup) has cognitive and emotional significance for the individual. The mere knowledge of group membership has been shown to motivate people to differentiate their group positively. This often leads to a phenomenon known as the "ingroup bias," which causes people to favor the ingroup over outgroups, that is, groups with which they do not identify. Ingroup bias operates at several levels, affecting, for example, perceptions, inferences, evaluations, and (discriminatory) behavior. The drive to improve self-perception through one's ingroup(s) also involves evaluative comparisons with relevant outgroups. In order for groups to establish a positively distinctive social identity, they must positively differentiate themselves from outgroups on the available dimensions of comparison.[22]

In the Greco-Roman world, ethnic groups—further divided into subgroups based on residence in certain regions or urban settlements—were an important object of identification. Although sweeping gener-

---

[21] The fundamental studies are Tajfel 1978 and Tajfel and Turner 1979, esp. 40–47.

[22] See, e.g., Abrams and Hogg 1990; Hogg and Abrams 1990; Hogg and McGarty 1990; Abrams and Hogg 2001, 433–37, 442–47; Reicher 2004, 928–30, 933–37; Schneider 2004, 233–45; Abrams and Hogg 2010, 180–86; Reynolds et al. 2011, 55–58.

alizations such as "Greeks" or "Romans" or "Judeans" do not do justice to the plurality of distinct communities often subsumed under generalizing terms, they did exist as meaningful objects of identification. The communality, solidarity, and shared values of each of these groups were evoked in public arenas, and their common ancestral origins and glorious history were recounted in numerous writings. In addition, religious affiliation, including ancestral traditions, religious practices, and worshipping communities, was generally linked to one's culture and place of origin, adding an important component to ethnic identity.[23] Yet, as Dionysius's and Josephus's accounts readily show, ethnic identities are not fixed but are socially constructed and can therefore be adapted to changing social circumstances. Moreover, the Roman Empire offered the unique chance for a conquered people to embrace a wider Roman identity by allowing intergroup boundaries to be permeable, at least to some extent. Nonetheless, in my view, at least during the early imperial period the idea of discarding one's local "provincial" identity completely would have been inconceivable. Therefore, the question of accommodating these two dimensions, the long-standing local identity and the Roman imperial identity, became crucial, especially for the local elites who wished to enjoy the fruits of Roman power to the fullest.

The Asiatic Greeks and the Judeans belonged to subjugated groups who had tested Roman power and been defeated in the recent past; thus, it would have been hard to escape a certain sense of inferiority in comparison to the victorious Romans. Social comparisons raise awareness of the relative position of groups, and the (perceived) low status of the ingroup poses a threat to social identity. However, there are three main strategies for low-status groups to achieve a positive self-perception in relation to groups of higher social standing: social creativity, social competition, and social mobility.[24] When we consider what Dionysius and Josephus relate about their compatriots, social creativity and social

---

[23] For a brief appraisal of the different criteria for ethnic identity, see Hall 1997, 19–29; Hall 2002, 9–19; cf. Farney 2007, 27–34. See also the articles in Derks and Roymans 2009.

[24] On the strategies, see Reynolds and Turner 2001, 166–67; Reicher 2004, 931–32; Brown 2010, 156–57; Reynolds et al. 2017, 55–56.

competition arise as their principal strategies for maintaining a positive self-conception under the Roman yoke. The essence of social creativity is that the status quo is accepted but the negatively perceived features are reinterpreted as positive, or the paradigms of comparison are changed. Therefore, instead of comparing one's own group to the dominant group on those dimensions that reinforce the subordinate status, alternative dimensions that reflect positively on one's own group are raised as points of comparison. For example, the Greeks and Judeans could downplay the merits of political power or military performance, and highlight such dimensions as the antiquity of their traditions, sophistication, learning, and age-old wisdom, which are thus elevated as the measures of true value.

For the Greeks, this was an obvious strategy. When Rome had been just an insignificant village, the Greeks had produced insurmountable works of art and architecture—which their Roman conquerors eagerly looted; they had composed timeless epics and tales that the early imperial Roman poets were still emulating; they had laid the foundations of historiography, drama, and philosophy, after which the Roman writers had modeled themselves; they had honored the gods with glorious gifts and complex myths, and the Romans had gladly assumed many Greek elements as part of their ancestral religion; and they had fought and won epic battles that still served as exemplars of valor. Therefore, the creation of a positively distinctive local identity included, for instance, highlighting the antiquity of one's customs and cultural achievements and celebrating the feats of one's virtuous ancestors, who had enjoyed unparalleled closeness to the gods. Since the appreciation of antiquity was not limited to the Greeks alone, the question of Greece's antecedence also caused unease among the Romans. The development of Roman culture was in many ways indebted to Greek influences, and, in addition, Greek cultural achievements continued to outshine Roman efforts in many respects.[25] As Dionysius complains that many Greeks still think that the Romans are the descendants of barbarians upon whom capricious Fortune had unjustly bestowed world

---

[25] See Rauhala 2018 with further references.

domination,[26] he indicates that this kind of sense of superiority was a common marker of contemporary Greek identity. As Dionysius's remarks show, this strategy could lead to feelings of disdain for the Romans, which could in turn effectively hamper the interplay between Greeks' native identities and their superordinate identification as Romans (*Ant. Rom.* 1.5.2–3).[27]

In many ways, these views also approach the second strategy, social competition. Whereas in the cases of social creativity and social mobility the established social hierarchies largely remain unchallenged, social competition strives for social change. In other words, the status quo is perceived as illegitimate and unstable, and intergroup differences are stressed, which increases the likelihood of prejudice and social antagonism, and motivates attempts to change the social status quo. In the past, the Greeks had certainly challenged the Roman presence in the eastern Mediterranean; however, by Dionysius's time they no longer actively resisted Roman dominance. Self-complacent attitudes aside, the local elites also saw tempting possibilities for social mobility.

As regards Josephus's reference group, the antiquity of Jewish traditions was also a widely recognized feature of their culture, and one of the cornerstones of their distinctive native identity. Indeed, the Israelites had enjoyed their fair share of particularism. The basis of the distinctive Jewish identity was their perceived privileged relationship with the divine, that is, their status as God's chosen people. This fed the sense of uniqueness and superiority, which often led to disparaging representations of other peoples. It also appears that, as a reaction to the cultural melting pot of the Hellenistic world, many Jewish authors started denouncing the previously acceptable practice of exogamy, which underscored their isolationist tendencies.[28] Studies have shown

[26] *Ant. Rom.* 1.4.2 cited in note 9. Dionysius implicitly admits that not all Greeks were equally critical of the Romans, but the emphasis on a unified view fits in with the aims of his work.

[27] See also Miller 1997, 32–33, 214–15, 217, 220–25.

[28] See Gruen 2011, 279–86, cf. 287, 291–92, 296–99. Correspondingly, the surrounding Greco-Roman society largely considered the Jewish community to be inward-looking and reclusive (Gruen 2011, 277–78).

that members of dominant groups are less likely to define themselves in terms of their group membership, whereas members of subordinate groups often perceive themselves in terms of the characteristics that define the group. In other words, the members of subordinate groups, such as Jews living under Hellenistic or Roman rule, tend to place emphasis on their collective identity.[29] Promoting cohesiveness would be one way of positively distinguishing the low-status group from the dominant group.

Another way of achieving positive distinction, in line with the social creativity strategy, is to compare the ingroup with a group that is even lower in the status hierarchy.[30] For example, Philo of Alexandria, who lived in Augustan times, uses this method when he makes disparaging remarks about the Egyptians in his description of the violent hostilities that the Greeks launched against the Jews in Alexandria in 38 CE. At the time, the Romans were the supreme authority in the area, destabilizing the status hierarchy that the Greeks had dominated for three centuries. Philo's passing comments on the godlessness of the Egyptians, their worthless race, in whose souls are mixed the venom and temper of the native crocodiles and asps, and their nature bewitched by malice firmly establish the Jews' higher rung on the social ladder.[31]

Even though the idea of their own distinctiveness did not stop the Jews from seeking and elaborating on connections to other cultures, it primarily served the purpose of highlighting the primacy and superiority of their own traditions. In particular, the authors exploited the

---

[29] See Lorenzi-Cioldi and Clémence 2001, 321–22; see also Hall 1997, 32.

[30] Abrams and Hogg 2010, 181. Studies in Western societies suggest that intergroup bias tends to cumulate, creating consensual ethnic hierarchies. The need to establish positive distinctiveness seems to motivate subordinate groups to maintain the hierarchy. See Hagendoorn 1995.

[31] *Legat.* 163, 166; *Flacc.* 29. The outbreak of Greek violence in a situation where their status had not only been diminished by Roman rule but was also threatened by the relative rise in status of their former subjects, the Jews, supports the contention that it is high-power groups who are likely to react forcefully to any threat to their position, not only because they have the most to lose but also because they have the means to do so (Stephan and Stephan 2017, 135). On the situation in Alexandria, see, e.g., Leon 2016, 43–45.

Greek readiness to associate Jewish teachings with Oriental wisdom by representing the development of Greek philosophy as dependent upon Jewish texts. For instance, *The Letter of Aristeas*, probably written in the second century BCE, represents the Jewish sages summoned from Jerusalem to the court of Ptolemy II Philadelphus as conversing in the manner of Greek philosophers, and their measured and pious words win the uncritical acclaim of the Greek literati.[32] Thus, Jewish traditions and wisdom not only appear as attractive to the Greek elite, but also clearly outshine the Hellenic mode of thinking. Both Aristobulus (second century BCE) and Philo of Alexandria were eager to prove that famed Greek philosophers from Pythagoras and Heraclitus to Plato and Zenon had merely voiced ideas that either could be found earlier in the Jewish scriptures, or were directly borrowed from them.[33] This theme is not prominent in Josephus's *Jewish War*, but in his polemic *Against Apion* (2.168–169, 281–282) he asserts that nearly all Greek philosophers from the Presocratics to the Stoics learned their doctrines on the nature of God from Moses, and that their precepts followed Mosaic Law. These writers represent the pre-eminence of the Jews as a matter of course, and, as a commonplace attitude, it would have been liable to provoke arrogance toward the Gentiles.[34] Patently, the uprising in Judea and surrounding regions—in which Josephus also had played his part—shows that a considerable proportion of the local elite and populace considered the dominant status of the Romans to be both unjustified and unsecure.

---

[32] *Let. Arit.* esp. 200, 235, 295–296. See also the discussion in Gruen 2011, 315–16, 333–37.

[33] Aristobulus cited in Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 1.22 and Euseb. *Praep. Ev.* 9.6.8, 13.12.1–8; see also Philo *Her.* 43.214; *Leg.* 1.33.108; *Aet.* 5.17–19; *Prob.* 8.57; Gruen 2011, 317–20, 331–32.

[34] It is difficult to assess how widespread these views were among the Judeans of the early Roman period. For example, Josephus emphasizes at every turn that some rebellious individuals and their followers fomented the war against the Romans, while the Jewish population at large was peace-loving and in fact the greatest sufferers of the rebels' murderous rage. On the other hand, Josephus's apologetic aim certainly influenced this message.

Now, if we consider the identity strategies that Dionysius lays out in *Roman Antiquities* and Josephus in the *Jewish War*, social mobility is notably featured in their literary agendas. They represent the Roman supremacy as legitimate and stable (Dionysius even underlined its unprecedented permanence), and—as shall be discussed below—moral and religious reasoning plays an essential role in their attempts to persuade their compatriots to accept Roman dominance. Moreover, Dionysius and Josephus perceive social boundaries as permeable, and they themselves eagerly embraced the possibility of being incorporated into the Roman literary elite.[35] As a rule, social mobility entails the adoption of the norms and values of the high-status group, and the concomitant abandonment of the beliefs and precepts of the low-status group. Thus, in keeping with their Roman patrons, both of the historians accommodated their way of presenting things to satisfy the expectations of their Roman audience.[36] However, as will be elaborated below, neither Dionysius nor Josephus suppressed their commitment to their fellow Greeks or Judeans, but rather projected their traditional values onto the Romans, and represented them as the torchbearers of their ancestral principles. Even though the values of the conquered peoples as such are not denigrated, Dionysius's Greeks and Josephus's Judeans often fall short of living up to their own ideals.

71

---

[35] Augustus, as well as the Flavians, appreciated the members of non-Roman elites as mediators of Roman power to their own peoples (see Bowersock 2005).

[36] For instance, Josephus's effort to present himself as a successful military leader and strategist (features that were highly appreciated by the Romans, but less so by the Jews) indicates his willingness to assume Roman values (Rappaport 2007, 77). On the other hand, Dionysius's representation of Rome's civilizing mission echoes contemporary Roman discourses, but the historian's insistence on the Greek basis for civilization (including Roman) gives it a distinctive flavor (Fox 2019, 196).

Dionysius's Romans as the Upholders of Hellenic Piety and Virtue

Dionysius in many ways embraced Roman identity discourses, and he recognized no conflict between being a Greek and being a Roman; he offers his readers an identity that is a mixture of idealized Hellenicity and Roman values and morality. In fact, his main argument is that the Romans are Greeks and, since they have surpassed Greek achievements in many ways, it is only natural that they should rule over the Greek world. Unquestionably, Greek influences had contributed to the development of the nascent Roman culture. At this early stage, it was important for the Romans to show that they belonged to the civilized world, which was all but synonymous with Greek culture. By the third century BCE, the Romans had to some extent adopted the suggestion of some Greek writers that they were the descendants of the legendary Trojans. This supported the growing sense of a distinctive Roman identity, since it incorporated the Romans into the Greek cultural heritage while also offering them a distinctive identity that was independent from any contemporary Greek community (see Gruen 1992, 26–31).[37] The Romans had then conquered Greek territories little by little, starting from the Pyrrhic Wars in South Italy in the early third century and ending with the defeat of the Achaean League in the middle of the second century BCE.

This new configuration of power called for a distinctive Roman identity that would duly emphasize the Romans' superiority while also accommodating their rich cultural borrowings. As a result, the Roman image of Greece as the cradle of outstanding cultural achievements was

---

[37] The myth of Trojan origins was particularly exploited in the propaganda of the Iulii, who claimed to be descended from Aeneas and, through him, from Venus. Because the contemporary preoccupation with the myth dominates our extant sources, including Dionysius, it is difficult to get an accurate picture of the weight given to Rome's Trojan origins during the Republic. See the discussion of Andrew Erskine (2001, 15–43).

supplemented by an image of corrupted contemporary *Graeculi*.[38] The effort to distinguish the Romans positively from the Greeks also led to views that the original Roman customs and institutions were better than those upon which the Greeks prided themselves, and that the Romans had surpassed the Greek accomplishments in many ways and even developed some Greek ideas further.[39] Yet, the Roman authors could still exploit the image of noble Greeks—and the concomitant Greek image of base Asiatics—when it suited them, as Cicero shows in his speech *For Flaccus* (59 BCE). Cicero contrasts the illustrious Athenians, stout Spartans, and well-ordered people of Marseilles to the greedy and untrustworthy people residing in Asia Minor, that is, in Phrygia, Mysia, Caria, and Lydia. As a sweeping reminder of the unreliability of the Asiatic Greeks, Cicero drags up their recent treachery—their banding together with King Mithridates and carrying out the massacre of the Romans.[40] Nearly three decades later, this episode was still gnawing away at the Roman trust in the Eastern Greeks.

73

Now, if we consider Dionysius's views on the coexistence of Greek and Roman identities, he resolves the apparent discrepancy by creating a superordinate idea of idealized Greekness that subsumes the Greeks as well as the Romans. Dionysius's construction of Greekness was essentially about origins and descendance, but was also, at least as importantly, about subscribing to and complying with a set of values interpreted as Hellenic.[41] Dionysius's first task was to fashion the Greek pedigree of the Romans. Greek authors had long been inventive in tracing Roman origins to a variety of Hellenic (or Trojan) founders, and the idea of a Greek Rome was well established by the end of the fourth century BCE; the Hellenistic period had, if anything, added to the appeal of the stories.[42] Dionysius could therefore draw on a long tradition in developing his own version. He accepted the belief about the Romans'

---

[38] Gruen 1992, 52–55, 75–83, 260–65, 270–71; Woolf 1994, 120–21, 132; Rauhala 2018, 133–39.

[39] See, e.g., Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.1–3.

[40] Cicero, *Flac.* 60–66. See also Tahin 2013, 82–85.

[41] On Dionysius's understanding of Greekness, see Delcourt 2003a.

[42] See the discussion in Gruen 1992, 7–21.

Trojan ancestors, but for him they represented only the last of the five subsequent waves of Greek settlers who had laid the foundations of Rome. The first of these were the Aborigines, who descended from a tribe coming from the area known in Dionysius's time as Arcadia. The second wave of Greeks consisted of the Pelasgians, who were originally Argives from the Peloponnesus. Third, under the command of Evander, a group of settlers from the Arcadian town of Pallantium built a village on the hill later known as the Palatine; soon after this, Hercules led an expedition to the area, and some of his men, predominantly Peloponnesians, settled the hill later called the Capitolium. Last but not least, a group of Trojan refugees following Aeneas landed in Italy, and their descendants took an active part in the foundation of the city of Rome.[43] Thus, Dionysius reckons to have proven his point that the Romans "were Greeks and came together from nations not the smallest nor least considerable" (*Ant. Rom.* 1.5.1–2).[44]

74

Dionysius emphasizes repeatedly that the Greek colonists originated from the Peloponnesus, and especially from Arcadia, which he views as the heart of Greece.[45] In Dionysius's classicizing outlook, the Hellenistic kingdoms represent the decay of Greek ideals. In the preface to his *On the Ancient Orators*, Dionysius echoes Cicero's words as he deplores how his eastern Greek home region, embodied in the form of a Mysian, Phrygian, or Carian nuisance, had usurped the throne of the ancient and autochthonous Attic Muse. With this reference, he states his firm support of the Attic rhetorical style as opposed to the

---

[43] Dionysius elaborates the Greek ancestry of the Romans throughout the first book of his *Roman Antiquities*; see esp. 1.11.1; 1.17.1–2; 1.31.1–4; 1.33.4–5; 1.34.1–2; 1.44.2; 1.60.3; 1.89.1–4; 2.1.1–4; 2.2.1–2. He devotes a lengthy piece to a narrative of the Trojans' arrival in Italy and the foundation of Lavinium and Alba Longa (1.45–70), followed by his preferred version of the founding of Rome (1.76–88).

[44] Ἕλληνάς τε αὐτοὺς ὄντας … καὶ οὐκ ἐκ τῶν ἐλαχίστων ἢ φαυλοτάτων ἐθνῶν συνεληλυθότας. Cf. 7.70.1.

[45] Delcourt 2003a, 118–20, 122; accordingly, Dionysius affirms that the Trojans were also of Arcadian origin (*Ant. Rom.* 1.61–62). The contributing Greek settlers are discussed extensively in Delcourt 2003b, 113–47; see also Schultze 2012, 116–20, 125–26.

Asian style, which was especially associated with the Hellenistic cities of Asia Minor. However, much more than eloquence was at stake. At the end of the Republic, referencing Asiatic style had developed into a term of abuse, which was used to tarnish one's opponents not only as loquacious and excessively impassioned but also as morally depraved, thus following a long tradition about the depravities of Oriental barbarism. In the Augustan milieu of Dionysius's time, the decadence and lavishness of Asian style was notably associated with Marcus Antonius and his rule in the eastern part of the Empire. First, by aligning with Atticism, Dionysius attempts to shed the depreciative connotations of his home region and instead associate himself with a lofty vision of an idealized classical Athens that coincided with the Roman ideals of austerity and moderation. Second, Dionysius also declares his loyalty to the Augustan regime, which has enabled the desired resurgence of political, moral, and aesthetic values.[46]

Dionysius's re-creation of a Greek Rome seems to have a personal motivation: whereas the Carian Dionysius might appear as a peripheral upstart, he builds an impeccable pedigree for his adopted Greco-Roman identity.[47] Furthermore, Dionysius made the Romans seem more dependent on their Greek heritage, which offered a balm to the sensibilities of the subjugated Greeks—but might have been hard to accept for many Romans;[48] however, he also made the Greek ancestry of the Romans more ancient and more significant. This was in accordance with Dionysius's objective of demonstrating the legitimacy of Roman power by Greek standards and make it acceptable from the Greek point of view.[49] While Dionysius's fervent endorsement of Atticism shows that he was immersed in contemporary Roman discourses, his promotion of classical Greece as the model for all contemporary Greeks to strive for and to identify with also mediates between the social mobility and social creativity strategies: Greeks from around the Empire could

---

[46] *Ant. Or.* 3. See Spawforth 2012, 20–26; Yunis 2019, 85–88.

[47] Wiater 2011b, 88; cf. Wiater 2018, 232.

[48] Cf. Wiater 2011a, 108, 217–18; Wiater 2011b, 84, 90.

[49] On Dionysius's undertaking to explicate Roman supremacy with respect to Greek requirements, see Wiater 2011a, 169, 189–93.

recognize the best values of the Athenian golden age in the contemporary Augustan Rome and take part in the revival of that heritage as its rightful representatives.

On the one hand, Dionysius's idea of Greekness was thus rooted in bloodlines, but ethnic origins alone did not ensure true Hellenicity. Far away from home, immersed in the riptide of foreign peoples, the Greek immigrants had established in Rome a more durable legacy than a fluctuating gene pool: values and institutions. These steady Greek moral foundations had created the greatness of Rome, and ultimately allowed her to surpass the standards set by Hellas; they were also the primary justification for her current hegemony.[50] Dionysius assures his Greek readers that, since the very beginning, the Romans had embodied the Greek ideals of freedom, piety, justice, self-governance, and martial spirit (*Ant. Rom.* 1.5.3 cited in note 10), and marvels that they have managed to hold on to their Greek traditions despite having taken in so many barbarians (*Ant. Rom.* 1.89.3). "For many others by living among barbarians," Dionysius continues, "have in a short time forgotten all their Greek heritage, so that they neither speak the Greek language nor observe the customs of the Greeks nor acknowledge the same gods nor have the same equitable laws (by which most of all the spirit of the Greeks differs from that of the barbarians) nor agree with them in anything else whatever that relates to the ordinary intercourse of life" (*Ant. Rom.* 1.89.4).[51] Only the Roman pronunciation has deteriorated but, in other respects, they have preserved their Hellenic ways better than any other colonists, and they had always lived a Greek life (βίον Ἕλληνα ζῶντες; *Ant. Rom.* 1.90.1).

Dionysius traces the origins of many Roman institutions to Greek models more eagerly than the Romans did;[52] but, in doing so, Dionysius

---

[50] Cf. Delcourt 2003a, 128–29; Peirano 2010, 42; Wiater 2011a, 189.

[51] ἐπεὶ ἄλλοι γε συχνοὶ ἐν βαρβάροις οἰκοῦντες ὀλίγου χρόνου διελθόντος ἅπαν τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἀπέμαθον, ὡς μήτε φωνὴν Ἑλλάδα φθέγγεσθαι μήτε ἐπιτηδεύμασιν Ἑλλήνων χρῆσθαι, μήτε θεοὺς τοὺς αὐτοὺς νομίζειν, μήτε νόμους τοὺς ἐπιεικεῖς, ᾧ μάλιστα διαλλάσσει φύσις Ἑλλὰς βαρβάρου, μήτε τῶν ἄλλων συμβολαίων μηδ᾽ ὁτιοῦν.

[52] Esp. Cic., *Tusc.* 1.2; see also Wiater 2011a, 182–85, 213–16.

assures the reader that the Romans have chosen the best Greek institutions and customs, rejecting many doubtful features that the Greeks themselves had embraced. For example, he relates that Romulus divided the populace into high-born patricians and common plebeians after the Athenian model, and assigned each group their duties. Then he established the *clientela*, which allowed the plebeians to choose a patrician as their patron. Dionysius traces this institution to the customs of the Athenians and the Thessalians, but emphasizes the superiority of Romulus's system, since the alliance was based on befitting tasks and mutual benevolence, whereas in the Greek antecedents the more powerful abused the disadvantaged, assigning them degrading nominations and treating them in undignified ways (*Ant. Rom.* 2.8.1–2; 2.9.2–3).[53]

Dionysius ascribes a fundamental and lasting role to Romulus's constitution in shaping Rome's future success: it established the decisive Greek virtues as the foundation of distinctive Roman identity.[54] As regards the merits that enabled Rome's rise to prominence, Dionysius expressly praises the Romans' superior hospitality and willingness to extend their citizen rights to different parties. Whereas the Greeks tended to slaughter or enslave the conquered, the Romans established colonies in the seized areas and even granted citizenship to defeated communities, and in doing so the Romans capitalized on their victories to the greatest extent.[55] The Greek approach had been very conceited and short-sighted: because of their vainglorious pride, the Spartans, the Thebans, and ultimately the Athenians had lost their hegemony—and even their freedom—after a single defeat, but the magnanimity of the Romans had enabled them to weather the many catastrophes of

---

[53] On the Greek roots of other Roman institutions, see, e.g., *Ant. Rom.* 2.12.3, 2.14.2 (the Senate); 2.13.4 (the king's guard); 2.23.2–3 (common meals); 5.73.3 (the appointment of dictators); 10.51.5 (legal reform); cf. 2.30.5 (the abduction of women); 3.11.4 (openness); 5.47.2 (the *ovatio*). At 7.70–73, Dionysius elaborates the Greekness of Roman religious practices.

[54] For example, *Ant. Rom.* 2.3.3–4; 2.24.1; see also Wiater 2011a, 172–180, 214, 216.

[55] *Ant. Rom.* 1.6.4, 2.16.1; cf. 1.89.1; 3.11.4–5; 14.6.3. On the ideal of *humanitas* in Roman imperial discourse, see Cic., *Quint. fratr.* 1.1.27; Woolf 1994, 119–20.

the Second Punic War (*Ant. Rom.* 2.17). As a Greek writer in Rome, Dionysius had good reason indeed to celebrate the Roman policy of mostly being lenient toward the conquered and enabling social mobility.

The celebration of Roman customs also brings us to the question of piety, and how Dionysius and Josephus harnessed it to justify Roman dominance. Dionysius claims that in religious matters the Romans had also followed the best Greek customs but had rejected those traditions that were shameful or unworthy. The institution of religious customs also rested with Romulus, who acknowledged that the favor of the gods was crucial for all human efforts. Therefore, the organization of religious life was central to his endeavor to encourage the virtues and piety of the citizens. Dionysius attributes to Romulus not only the Homeric task of specifying and arranging the divine world, but also the concrete establishment of the framework for worship, including sanctuaries, altars, and the composition of the sacred calendar (*Ant. Rom.* 2.18.1–2). In all this, Romulus followed the best Greek customs (τοῖς κρατίστοις τῶν παρ᾽ Ἕλλησι νομίμων [2.18.2]), but "he rejected all the traditional myths concerning the gods that contain blasphemies or calumnies against them, looking upon these as wicked, useless and indecent, and unworthy, not only of the gods, but even of good men" (*Ant. Rom.* 2.18.3).[56] These offensive myths included Greek tales of divine succession and disappearing or enervated gods, and Dionysius equally frowns upon the rituals and festivals that emulated such myths. Fawningly, he claims that, up until his days, the Romans have managed to ward off divine possession and begging on behalf of the gods, Corybantic and Bacchic revelries, secret initiation rituals, nightly orgies where men and women mingle, and all such charades (*Ant. Rom.* 2.19.1–2). The Romans, Dionysius boldly states, show such deep respect to the gods in words and deeds that it outshines the Greeks and the barbarians (*Ant. Rom.* 2.19.2). Furthermore, he emphatically marvels that not even the inflow of countless peoples with their native cults has made the Romans

---

[56] τοὺς δὲ παραδεδομένους περὶ αὐτῶν μύθους, ἐν οἷς βλασφημίαι τινὲς ἔνεισι κατ᾽ αὐτῶν ἢ κακηγορίαι, πονηροὺς καὶ ἀνωφελεῖς καὶ ἀσχήμονας ὑπολαβὼν εἶναι καὶ οὐχ ὅτι θεῶν ἀλλ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ἀνθρώπων ἀγαθῶν ἀξίους, ἅπαντας ἐξέβαλε. See also Beard et al. 1998, 172–73.

adopt foreign customs by public consent; even as they have piously introduced certain sacred rites from abroad, they have observed them according to their own traditions and staved off all nonsense (*Ant. Rom.* 2.19.3).

As a telling example, Dionysius mentions the cult of the Idaean Mother (*Ant. Rom.* 2.19.3–4), which was introduced to Rome at the end of the third century BCE and involved practically all the elements that he claimed the Romans had rejected. However, the historian makes a strict division between the "Phrygian" rituals, whereto all the questionable features are shunted, and the "Roman" cult, which abides by the Roman customs of propriety. Thus, he approvingly claims that none of the native Romans march through the city to the strains of the flute, wearing multicolored robes, begging and celebrating the goddess's Phrygian orgies; furthermore, he notes that in avoiding these "Phrygian" practices they are acting according to the law and the Senate's decree (*Ant. Rom.* 2.19.5).[57] Although many of these "Phrygian" features that the historian mentions rather belong to the Greek cult of the goddess, Dionysius is willing to follow and even strengthen the Roman division, which reinforces the negative connotations of Asia Minor while protecting the pristine image of Roman piety and judiciousness. As a result, the Greeks are not represented as the originators of questionable rituals, even though the Romans have been more prudent in keeping such excessive practices at arm's length.

In elevating piety and high morality as the leading characteristic of the Romans and as the cornerstone of their military success, Dionysius echoed the Roman self-image of the late republican and early imperial periods. Cicero, for example, could acknowledge the superiority of other peoples in other areas of life, but in piety and the proper worship of the gods he thought the Romans were far superior.[58] Dionysius's em-

---

[57] Ῥωμαίων δὲ τῶν αὐθιγενῶν οὔτε μητραγυρτῶν τις οὔτε καταυλούμενος πορεύεται διὰ τῆς πόλεως ποικίλην ἐνδεδυκὼς στολὴν οὔτε ὀργιάζει τὴν θεὸν τοῖς Φρυγίοις ὀργιασμοῖς κατὰ νόμον καὶ ψήφισμα βουλῆς. See also Borgeaud 1993; Beard 1994; Roller 1999, 293–96; Šterbenc Erker 2009, 85–86; Rauhala 2013, 300.

[58] See, e.g., Cic., *Har. Resp.* 19; *Nat. D.* 2.7–9.

phasis on Roman piety also fit in well with Augustus's religious policy and his desire to present himself as a restorer of ancestral practices.[59] Furthermore, Dionysius drew on Roman precedents in distinguishing between Roman and foreign religious elements. The identification of certain religious practices as non-Roman had its origins in the third and second centuries BCE in the need to accentuate the distinctiveness of Roman religion, and thereby the distinctiveness of Roman collective identity.[60] As well as helping to promote early imperial Roman identity, Dionysius also paved the way for Greeks to see themselves in a positive light by emphasizing the ultimate Greekness of Roman virtues.

Dionysius divided the world into two camps, the Greeks and the barbarians, and made a case for incorporating the Romans into the Greeks. Yet, it was precisely the Romans' compliance with the Greek moral code that enabled their elevation as the leaders of the civilized world. According to Dionysius, behavior ultimately established the borderline between the Greeks and the barbarians (*Ant. Rom.* 14.6.5), and while the Romans lived up to ancestral expectations, the Greeks often found themselves on the wrong side of the border. The Romans' magnanimity set them above the once leading Greek states of Athens and Sparta, who sank into barbarism in their ruthless treatment of their kindred peoples (*Ant. Rom.* 14.6.3–4).[61] When the Greek colonists of Tarentum first encountered the Romans, they disparaged the "barbarity" of the ambassador, but their frivolous, insolent, and degenerate behavior, which infringed upon all decencies, bluntly illustrated their own barbarism.[62]

The piety and moral rectitude of the Romans also brought the blessings of divine providence to them,[63] and serves to explain why King Pyrrhus of Epirus was unable to defeat the Romans despite his great abilities as a military leader and his well-trained, experienced, and

---

[59] See, e.g., Beard et al. 1998, 167–68; Galinsky 2007, 73–78; Scheid 2007, 177–92.

[60] Orlin 2010, 24–26.

[61] See also Wiater 2018, 228–29.

[62] *Ant. Rom.* 19.5; Peirano 2010, 43–44.

[63] For example, *Ant. Rom.* 5.54.1; 8.26.3; 7.12.4. See also Engels 2012, 154–55. Dionysius's argument about the well-deserved divine favor counters the accusations of erratic Fortune being the architect of Rome's success.

more numerous troops. The king confessed that waging war against the most pious and just among the Greeks is likely to turn grievous (*Ant. Rom.* 20.6.1).[64] Indeed, Pyrrhus even made the fatal mistake of violating sacred property; his desperate lack of funds led him to plunder the treasury of Persephone's temple in Locri, and this sacrilege brought divine wrath upon him. It was because of this, Dionysius concludes, that the Romans defeated the Greek troops (*Ant. Rom.* 20.9–10).[65]

Romans as the Implementers of God's Will in Josephus

In the preface to his *Jewish Antiquities*, Josephus states that the history of the Jews illustrates that those who follow the will of God will earn immeasurable benefits, while the offenders' efforts will run into the sand (*Ant. Jud.* 1.14). Yet, in the *Jewish War* it is the Romans who realize the fruits of divine benevolence, while the Judeans reap the bitter harvest of their transgressions. Thus, the question of piety and divine providence that rationalizes Rome's dominance in Dionysius's historical account is also a key explanatory factor in Josephus's version of the lost war in Judea. Even though Josephus may well have envisaged Roman rule as a passing divine punishment (Cowan 2018, 485–86), just like Dionysius's *Roman Antiquities* the *Jewish War* reads as a defense of the Roman ascendancy and hyphenated Greco-/Judeo-Roman identity. According to

81

---
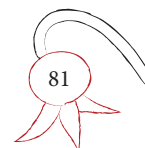
[64] ἀνθρώπους ὁσιωτάτους Ἑλλήνων καὶ δικαιοτάτους.

[65] On Dionysius's description of Pyrrhus, see also Peirano 2010, 47–51. Pyrrhus's troops were also involved in the looting and desecration of the royal tombs in the ancient Macedonian capital of Aegae, but Dionysius does not address this point. One reason may be that the outrage was committed by Pyrrhus's Galatian mercenaries, although other Greek historians chided Pyrrhus for not punishing them properly (Diod. Sic. *Bib. Hist.* 22.12.1; Plut. *Pyrrh.* 26.6–7). Another reason for Dionysius's omission may be that the reference to Aegae might have evoked the utter destruction of the city at the hands of the Roman troops after the Battle of Pydna in 168 BCE—a memory that would not have served Dionysius's argument. In any case, the focus on southern Italy neatly captures the passing of the baton from the Greeks to the Romans.

Josephus, God has sanctioned Roman dominance, and pious Jews can also identify themselves as Romans.

In keeping with Roman self-perception, both historians paint a picture of the Romans' superior piety and unwavering respect for religious principles, which grants them divine favor. Even though Josephus does not attempt to merge the Jewish and Roman identities in the same fashion as Dionysius did with the Greeks, he repeatedly emphasizes that to succumb to Roman rule is not only in the best interest of the Judeans but also a pious thing to do, since the unparalleled Roman achievements show that God is on their side. Josephus emphasizes the leniency of the Romans: they were reluctant to wage war against the Judeans and took pity on the suffering of the people. Further, Josephus stresses that the greatest atrocities his people suffered were because of domestic tyrants and internal seditions, and that the Roman aggression that put an end to the rabble-rousers ultimately came as a blessing.[66] Josephus admits that there had been many Roman provocations before the outbreak of the rebellion, but he puts the blame on corrupt procurators, who wanted to incite a revolt to serve their personal ambitions.[67] In doing so, Josephus asserts that the misconduct does not represent the Roman regime as a whole, thus mitigating the boundary between the Judeans and Romans as a people. Instead, he claims that the Judean rebel leaders and those susceptible to their agitation consistently committed massacres, impieties, and other immeasurable outrages. It was they who destroyed Jerusalem—the Romans merely implemented the divine revenge.

As noted above, the pursuit of a positive social identity often gives rise to ingroup bias that, among other things, leads one to evaluate ingroup members more favorably than outgroup members. However, because ingroup members are expected to excel on those dimensions that are perceived as positively differentiating the group, a failure to live up to these expectations leads one to judge the poor performance of an ingroup member even more harshly than comparable performance

---

[66] For example, *Bell. Jud.* 1.10; 1.27; 5.255–257; 5.443–444.

[67] *Bell. Jud.* 2.272–276 (on Lucceius Albinus; cf. *Ant. Jud.* 20.9.3, 5), 2.277–283; 292 –308; 318–320; 326–333 (on Gessius Florus; cf. *Ant. Jud.* 20.11.1).

by outgroup members. This so-called "black sheep effect" is particularly severe for ingroup members who deviate from the defining group norms, because they are seen as jeopardizing the positive distinctiveness of the group.[68] This is also evident in Josephus's assessment of those who are to blame for the degradation of Judea. Since the idea of an exclusive covenant with God was a key component of the positively distinct Jewish identity, Josephus lashes out most severely at those Judeans who had violated crucial moral and religious norms and whom he held responsible for divine punishment—more severely than at the Romans.

In Josephus's interpretation of historical causality, the Judeans' road to perdition was paved with their own failure to observe religious laws. Since Josephus sought to represent the majority of the Jews as devout, virtuous, and peace-loving, the Jewish rebels and their sacrilegious behavior had to be the real reason behind the defeat. Josephus lists countless massacres of fellow Jews that the rebels had committed throughout the uprising, but many of their violations also had a religious dimension, which in Josephus's view brought divine vengeance upon the Jews.[69] To begin with, waging war necessarily led to violations of religious rules, such as the observation of the Sabbath.[70] Second, Josephus relates that the Zealots violated the customary procedure for electing the high priest based on hereditary succession. As a member of the priestly nobility, Josephus expresses his abhorrence at this affront, claiming that the rebels appointed their henchmen to this honorable position so that they could continue their impieties (*Bell. Jud.* 4.147–148, 153–157). The Idumean troops supporting the Zealots even murdered high priests and left their bodies unburied.[71] Josephus emphasizes that the insurgents trampled on human and divine laws alike (*Bell. Jud.* 4.386); yet,

---

[68] See, e.g., Marques 1990; Marques et al. 2001, 407–9; Abrams and Hogg 2010, 185–86.

[69] See also Regev 2011, 280–84.

[70] *Bell. Jud.* 2.391–394, 456, 517. Josephus claims that the rebel leader John of Gischala deliberately neglected ancestral customs and purity regulations, as if he had risen against God (7.263–264).

[71] *Bell. Jud.* 4.315–317; 7.267; cf. 4.381–383 (the Zealots' denial of burial on pain of death); 5.33. In a peculiar episode (*Bell. Jud.* 4.561–563), Josephus also relates how the Galileans preened and dressed up like women and succumbed to

the most fatal offense was the defilement of the Temple. In numerous accounts, Josephus refers to the impurity of the Zealots, who pollute sacred spaces with their blood-stained hands;[72] they do not even hesitate to appropriate sacred property for their bellicose purposes (*Bell. Jud.* 5.8, 36, 562–565). To top it all off, the internecine fighting extended into the Temple itself, and people were killed there, many of them innocent worshippers (*Bell. Jud.* 5.10, 14–19, 102–103). Josephus refers to a prophesy presaging that the city would fall into enemies' hands and fire would consume the Temple if sedition fell upon the sacred precinct and its own people tainted it; thus, Josephus argues that the Zealots became the instruments of doom (*Bell. Jud.* 4.388).

The greatest concern for Josephus—and undoubtedly other Jews—was the destruction of the Temple. The rebellion originated from a dispute over the sacrifices in the Temple, and the burning of the Temple marked the victory of the Romans. Apparently, controversy over the control of the Temple and the sacrificial cult was a central motive for the uprising; while the Zealots strove to purge the cult from any Roman influences, Josephus argues for the opposite side, accusing the Zealots of polluting the Temple (Regev 2011, 288–89).[73] From their point of view, the Roman leaders had a legitimate reason to seek the destruction of the Temple and with it the sacrificial cult that was central to Jewish social identity and anti-Roman social competition. For example, James Rives has argued for a conscious Vespasianic policy that aimed at suppressing the Jewish Temple cult following the capture of Jerusalem.[74] The Temple spoils were prominently displayed in Vespasian and Titus's triumph in 71 CE (*Bell. Jud.* 7.148–150) and the triumphal arch, and some of these items were placed in Vespasian's Temple of Peace (*Bell.*

---

lasciviousness and illicit pleasures while still carrying on their ruthless violence and murders.

[72] For example, *Bell. Jud.* 2.242; 4.150, 159, 163, 171, 183, 242; 5.100, 380–381; 6.95, 122. The rebels also shed their own blood in the Temple, not concerning themselves with whether they should die there (4.201, 215).

[73] On Josephus's tendency to downplay and distort religious and ideological motives for the uprising, see Mader 2000, 10–17 and *passim*.

[74] See Rives 2005, 152–54, 161–65.

Jud. 7.161–162), which shows that the containment of the Temple cult was represented as important to the Roman victory. Furthermore, Vespasian's decisions, first to redirect the tax that all Jews had paid to the Temple to the Capitoline cult (*Bell. Jud.* 7.218) and second to close the Jewish temple of Onias in Egypt (*Bell. Jud.* 7.421), suggest a determined effort to suppress the Temple cult for good. The sacrificial cult that centered on the Jerusalem Temple brought together Jews across regional borders and served as the focal point of their ethno-religious identity. From the Roman perspective, as long as the Temple cult was allowed to continue, it would form a competing basis of allegiance and remain as a potential source of future unrest.

Yet, Josephus toils to exonerate the Romans and, in doing so, puts the blame on the Jewish rebels. Besides attesting to Josephus's attempt to kowtow to his Roman patrons, it also opens up a twofold strategy for constructing a positive Jewish identity under the Roman yoke. On the one hand, Josephus associates the Romans' values with those of the Jews, thus opening up a path to social mobility: Judeans may also identify themselves as Romans without compromising the beliefs and practices at the core of their distinctive identity as Jews. On the other hand, by castigating the wickedness of the rebels and downplaying the offenses of the Romans, Josephus works to ensure that his idea of Jewishness will remain intact despite the challenge from within.[75] Like Dionysius before him, Josephus purports that the success of the Roman Empire resulted from divine providence. He emphasizes the Romans' respect for Jewish customs and laws, which they heeded better than the rebels did.[76] Even though Roman soldiers admittedly burned down and

---

[75] Assuming that the rebels criticized the observance of religious customs by the priestly authorities, this would have questioned the basis of positive distinctiveness that the Judean ruling elite advocated (cf. *Bell. Jud.* 7.255); since Josephus belonged to this establishment and aimed at its rehabilitation after the war, his fervent reaction against the rebels is unsurprising.

[76] *Bell. Jud.* 2.391; 4.182–184; 5.362–363, 368, 402; 6.101–102, 122–128; cf. 4.262 and 6.333–336 where Titus blames the rebel leaders for taking advantage of Roman permissiveness. In his account of Pompey's capture of Jerusalem (*Bell. Jud.* 1.148–153), Josephus stresses Pompey's admiration for the priests' strict observance of religious practices even when their lives were at stake. Albeit

plundered the Temple during the siege of Jerusalem, Josephus portrays them as mere instruments of divine will. God had long ago condemned the Temple to the fire (κατεψήφιστο μὲν τὸ πῦρ ὁ θεὸς πάλαι; *Bell. Jud.* 6.250; cf. 4.323–324), and a certain Roman soldier, experiencing a divine impulse (δαιμονίῳ ὁρμῇ τινι χρώμενος), set the building ablaze (*Bell. Jud.* 6.252). According to Josephus, Titus Flavius, who led the Roman troops in the last phase of the war, did everything in his power to save the Temple, even against the advice of other Roman commanders, but his efforts failed.[77]

In general, Josephus portrays the atrocities of the insurgents as heralding upcoming divine punishment (e.g., *Bell. Jud.* 2.455, 5.377–378, 401–403), and he then represents the Romans as accomplishing the will of God by implementing his retribution (*Bell. Jud.* 5.395–398, 408–412). The Romans will purge the seditious pollution with fire, the historian declares (*Bell. Jud.* 5.19). Throughout his narrative, Josephus draws attention to the divine hand that can be seen directing the course of the war. On several occasions, Josephus relates how God uses the Romans to realize His plan, and aids their marching onward to capture cities (e.g., *Bell. Jud.* 3.292–293, 4.76–77, 5.39). God even turned arrows away from the future emperor Titus as he inspected the walls of Jerusalem (*Bell. Jud.* 5.60–61). Divine will is also the justification that Josephus offers for allying himself with the Romans. He purports that God aided his survival in Jotapata, and that his wish to carry out God's will

---

admitting that Pompey had entered the forbidden innermost part of the Temple, Josephus underlines that he did not touch any of the sacred objects or money kept there. See, however, *Bell. Jud.* 2.50. Similarly, in *Jewish Antiquities* Josephus represents Alexander the Great as a mythical king and conqueror who honors the god of the Jews and whose authority emanates from this recognition (Johnson 2005, 75–76).

[77] *Bell. Jud.* 6.236–242, 254–256, 262–266; cf. 6.328, 346–347 where Josephus's Titus blames the rebels for ruining the Temple. As Miriam Pucci Ben Zeʾev (2011, 58–63; cf. Rives 2005, 148–50) points out, the number of fires lit by the Romans, together with the looting of the Temple and the final order to raze it to the ground (*Bell. Jud.* 7.1), imply that Titus annihilated the Temple more purposefully than Josephus suggests.

made him shun the collective suicide orchestrated by his companions.[78] Josephus asserts that it was his duty to pass on the divine message he had received about the future emperorships of Vespasian and Titus. In this way, Josephus declared himself as a mediator between the Jews and the Romans, and took it as his mission to show that one can be a devout Jew as well as a loyal Roman citizen.[79]

The words that Josephus addresses directly to his readers seem to summarize his views: God has always helped the Jewish people subdue foreign invaders and avenge the wrongs committed on them. However, the Jewish factions had violated the laws of God and polluted the holy Temple. Since the Romans had shown greater respect for Jewish traditions than the bloodthirsty rebels, God had chosen them as the instruments of his greater design (*Bell. Jud.* 5.376–378). To fight the Romans is the same as fighting against God himself, whereas following Jewish customs and being a loyal Roman subject are reconcilable.

87
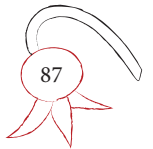
Conclusion

At the time when Dionysius and Josephus were writing their histories, their home countries had been under Roman rule for over a century. However, Roman power was not yet so embedded that it could not be challenged—Josephus had even been a prominent leader during the recent revolution. Thus, in the eastern Mediterranean, local identities were probably more salient than any concept of overarching Romanness, and the Romans could be perceived as conquerors and occupiers rather than as objects of identification. Consequently, the Romans would have mainly been perceived as a high-status group that held political and military power, whereas the local population would have appeared as

---

[78] For example, *Bell Jud.* 3.361; cf. Rappaport 2007, 75.

[79] Josephus's retelling of the story of the Tobiads in *Jewish Antiquities* (12.154–236) also equates obedience to a foreign ruler with piety and loyalty to the Jewish community: the Tobiads work together with the Ptolemies to further the well-being of their fellow Jews, while the protestors only pursue their self-centered interests (Johnson 2005, 87–88).

a low-status group in comparison to the Romans. In order to achieve a positive social identity as Greeks or Carians, as Jews or Judeans, one solution was social creativity, which emphasized those qualities and cultural achievements that set those groups above the Romans. These kinds of comparisons might also fuel social competition that questioned the justification of Roman rule. On the other hand, both Dionysius and Josephus exploited the possibilities that the permeability of intergroup boundaries in the Roman Empire offered—that is, social mobility.

Dionysius and Josephus aligned themselves with the Romans and, while retaining their native identities, they also embraced Roman imperial discourses. Dionysius even denied that there would or should be any conflict between Greek and Roman identities, since Romans were among the most ancient and virtuous Greeks. The creation of hybrid identities was deliberate, aimed at reinforcing the positive social identities of Greeks and Jews, respectively, but it also served the interests of the Roman regime. If the conquered peoples were to identify themselves more and more as (also) Romans, the salience of lower-level local identities would diminish, and so would ingroup bias.[80] Moreover, Dionysius and Josephus not only mediated Roman knowledge practices to Greek and Jewish audiences, but also promoted perceptions of the legitimacy of Roman imperial rule and the stability of the existing status hierarchy, which was likely to discourage social competition and antagonism. As a result, a key theme in Dionysius's *Roman Antiquities* and in Josephus's *Jewish War* is the justification of Roman dominance. According to system justification theory, people are motivated to perceive the current social order as fair and legitimate. Although the benefits of maintaining and justifying the status quo through various strategies and institutional structures are obvious to high-status groups, low-status groups are also seen as supporting the stability of the system that produces their disadvantaged position. The need to present the group in power as deserving

---

[80] It has been found that self-categorization at a higher level (that is, a higher level of inclusiveness, such as being a Greek as opposed to being a Halicarnassian) makes identities at a lower level (relatively) less salient, as the comparative identity becomes either low or negative. This also affects the level of ingroup favoritism. See Ros et al. 2000.

of its dominance is particularly pressing when the subordinate group is unable to change the social hierarchy.[81] Accordingly, both historians try to convince their readers that the unforeseen success of the Romans is a sign of divine support. The Romans implement divine will, either because of their superior virtues and piety, or because God uses them to punish impious deeds.

Nevertheless, the acceptance of Roman domination did not prevent Dionysius and Josephus from using strategies to create positive social identities. Both Dionysius and Josephus argue for the compatibility of their native identities and the imperial Roman identity, using history as evidence to support their cases. For Dionysius, Greekness is not just about ethnic origins but, more crucially, about adhering to Hellenic values and customs. Therefore, the mixture of foreign peoples with the Greek stock in Rome did not dilute their Hellenicity as long as they kept to their ancestral Greek practices. Dionysius's message for his Roman readers, thus, entailed an exhortation to nurture their Greek heritage, lest they lose the foundations of their power and civilization and sink into barbarism.[82] In doing so, Dionysius also illustrates the Romans' continuing dependence on Hellenic tradition, which further ameliorated the Greeks' *amour propre*.[83] While the Greeks themselves had failed to follow their age-old principles, the Romans had carried on the classical legacy and eventually surpassed it. Therefore, Dionysius's Romans were the rightful leaders of the Greek world, just as Josephus's Romans were by the will of God the justified rulers of Judea.

History is a powerful tool for identity formation. Certain historical events become the focal points of society's collective memory; they are reproduced in writings, monuments, and rituals, and they are interpreted and exploited in a way that renders them meaningful in a given time. This transmitted and construed knowledge of the past forms the

---

[81] See Fiske and Russell 2001, 122 and the general discussion in Jost et al. 2004.

[82] See esp. Delcourt 2003a, 133; Luraghi 2003; Peirano 2010, 51–52; Wiater 2011a, 201–4; Wiater 2011b, 82–83.

[83] Wiater 2011b, 84–85, 89–90; cf. Wiater 2011a, 217–23.

basis of cultural identity.[84] Josephus picked out events from the recent past that had proven momentous for the Jews residing in Palestine, and with his chosen vantage point he made a case for a Roman Jewish identity that rose above the damaging internal factionalism. Dionysius, in his turn, chose events from a distant past that the Romans had already long retold, and reproduced them as a part of their collective identity. However, the leading argument of Dionysius is that these events should also form part of the cultural identity of his fellow Greeks. The Greeks could thus embrace the achievements of the Romans as their own, and they could declare themselves as Romans by virtue of their Greekness. Josephus, on the other hand, reassured his fellow Jews that the lessons of history showed that the Romans were part of God's great plan, and therefore there was no conflict in adopting both Jewish and Roman identities.

90

Bibliography

Abrams, Dominic and Michael A. Hogg. 1990. "An Introduction to the Social Identity Approach." In *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, edited by Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg, 1–9. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Abrams, Dominic and Michael A. Hogg. 2001. "Collective Identity: Group Membership and Self-Conception." In *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes*, edited by Michael A. Hogg and R. Scott Tindale, 425–60. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Abrams, Dominic and Michael A. Hogg. 2010. "Social Identity and Self-Categorization." In *The SAGE Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination*, edited by John F. Dovidio, Miles Hewstone, Peter Glick, and Victoria M. Esses, 179–93. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Ackermann, Andreas. 2012. "Cultural Hybridity: Between Metaphor and Empiricism." In *Conceptualizing Cultural Hybridization: A Transdisciplinary Approach*, edited by Philipp W. Stockhammer, 5–25. Berlin: Springer.

---

[84] That is, the awareness of the unity and distinctiveness of a certain group. See, e.g., Assmann 1995; Steinbock 2013, 2–3, 7–18.

Assmann, Jan. 1995. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." Translated by John Czaplicka. *New German Critique* 65: 125–33. https://doi.org/10.2307/488538.

Balch, David L. 1982. "Two Apologetic Encomia: Dionysius on Rome and Josephus on the Jews." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 13, no. 1–2: 102–22. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24658012.

Beard, Mary. 1994. "The Roman and the Foreign: The Cult of the 'Great Mother' in Imperial Rome." In *Shamanism, History, and the State*, edited by Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey, 164–90. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Beard, Mary, John North, and Simon Price. 1998. *Religions of Rome*, Vol. 1: *A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berlin, Andrea M. 2011. "Identity Politics in Early Roman Galilee." In *The Jewish Revolt against Rome: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Mladen Popović, 69–106. Leiden: Brill.

Borgeaud, Philippe. 1993. "Quelques remarques sur la mythologie divine à Rome, à propos de Denys d'Halicarnasse (*Ant. Rom.* 2.18–20)." In *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft*: *Das Paradigma Roms*, edited by Fritz Graf, 175–87. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Bowersock, Glen Warren. 1965. *Augustus and the Greek World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bowersock, Glen Warren. 2005. "Foreign Elites at Rome." In *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, edited by Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives, 53–62. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brown, Rupert. 2010. *Prejudice: Its Social Psychology*, 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.

Cotton, Hannah M. and Werner Eck. 2005. "Josephus' Roman Audience: Josephus and the Roman Elites." In *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, edited by Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives, 37–52. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cowan, J. Andrew. 2018. "A Tale of Two Antiquities: A Fresh Evaluation of the Relationship between the Ancient Histories of T. Flavius Josephus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 49, no. 4–5: 475–97. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700631-12493228.

Curran, John. 2011. "Flavius Josephus in Rome." In *Flavius Josephus: Interpretation and History*, edited by Menahem Mor, Jack Pastor, and Pnina Stern, 65–86. Leiden: Brill.

Delcourt, Anouk. 2003a. "Denys d'Halicarnasse, historien de la Grèce? Réflections sur l'horizon grec des *Antiquités Romaines*." *Revue belge de*

91
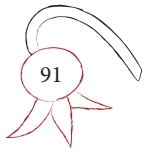
philologie et d'histoire 81, no. 1: 117–35. https://www.persee.fr/doc/rbph_0035-0818_2003_num_81_1_4717.

Delcourt, Anouk. 2003b. "Un historien entre deux mondes: lecture des 'Antiquités romaines' de Denys d'Halicarnasse." PhD diss., Université Catholique de Louvain. http://hdl.handle.net/2078.1/4879.

Derks, Ton and Nico Roymans, eds. 2009. *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity: The Role of Power and Tradition*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Edmondson, Jonathan, Steve Mason, and James Rives, eds. 2005. *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Engels, David. 2012. "Dionysius of Halicarnassus on Roman Religion, Divination and Prodigies." In *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, Vol. 16, edited by Carl Deroux, 151–75. Brussels: Latomus.

Erskine, Andrew. 2001. *Troy between Greece and Rome: Local Tradition and Imperial Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Farney, Gary D. 2007. *Ethnic Identity and Aristocratic Competition in Republican Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fiske, Susan T. and Ann Marie Russell. 2010. "Cognitive Processes." In *The SAGE Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination*, edited by John F. Dovidio, Miles Hewstone, Peter Glick, and Victoria M. Esses, 115–30. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Fox, Matthew. 2019. "The Prehistory of the Roman *Polis* in Dionysius." In *Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Augustan Rome: Rhetoric, Criticism and Historiography*, edited by Richard Hunter and Casper C. De Jonge, 180–200. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gabba, Emilio. 1991. *Dionysius and the History of Archaic Rome*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Galinsky, Karl. 2007. "Continuity and Change: Religion in the Augustan Semi-Century." In *A Companion to Roman Religion*, edited by Jörg Rüpke, 71–82. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.

Gruen, Erich S. 1992. *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome*. London: Duckworth.

Gruen, Erich S. 2011. *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hagendoorn, Louk. 1995. "Intergroup Biases in Multiple Group Systems: The Perception of Ethnic Hierarchies." *European Review of Social Psychology* 6, no. 1: 199–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/14792779443000058.

Hall, Jonathan M. 1997. *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

92

Hall, Jonathan M. 2002. *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hogg, Michael A. and Dominic Abrams. 1990. "Social Motivation, Self-Esteem and Social Identity." In *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, edited by Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg, 28–47. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Hogg, Michael A. and Craig McGarty. 1990. "Self-Categorization and Social Identity." In *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, edited by Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg, 10–27. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Johnson, Sara Raup. 2005. *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity: Third Maccabees in Its Cultural Context*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jonge, Casper C. de and Richard Hunter. 2019. "Introduction." In *Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Augustan Rome: Rhetoric, Criticism and Historiography*, edited by Richard Hunter and Casper C. de Jonge, 1–33. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jonquière, Tessel M. 2011. "Josephus at Jotapata: Why Josephus Wrote What He Wrote." In *Flavius Josephus: Interpretation and History*, edited by Menahem Mor, Jack Pastor, and Pnina Stern, 217–25. Leiden: Brill.

Jost, John T., Mahzarin R. Banaji, and Brian A. Nosek. 2004. "A Decade of System Justification Theory: Accumulated Evidence of Conscious and Unconscious Bolstering of the Status Quo." *Political Psychology* 25, no. 6: 881–919. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00402.x.

Leon, Daniel W. 2016. "The Face of the Emperor in Philo's 'Embassy to Gaius.'" *The Classical World* 110, no. 1: 43–60. https://doi.org/10.1353/clw.2016.0068.

Lorenzi-Cioldi, Fabio and Alain Clémence. 2001. "Group Processes and the Construction of Social Representations." In *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes*, edited by Michael A. Hogg and R. Scott Tindale, 311–33. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Luraghi, Nino. 2003. "Dionysios von Halikarnassos zwischen Griechen und Römern." In *Formen römischer Geschichtsschreibung von den Anfängen bis Livius: Gattungen – Autoren – Kontexte*, edited by Ulrich Eigler, Ulrich Götter, Nino Luraghi, and Uwe Walter, 268–86. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

Mader, Gottfried. 2000. *Josephus and the Politics of Historiography: Apologetic and Impression Management in* Bellum Judaicum. Leiden: Brill.

93

Marques, José M. 1990. "The Black-Sheep Effect: Out-Group Homogeneity in Social Comparison Settings." In *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, edited by Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg, 131–51. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Marques, José M., Dominic Abrams, Dario Páez, and Michael A. Hogg. 2001. "Social Categorization, Social Identification, and Rejection of Deviant Group Members." In *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes*, edited by Michael A. Hogg and R. Scott Tindale, 400–24. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Mason, Steve. 2005. "Of Audience and Meaning: Reading Josephus' *Bellum Judaicum* in the Context of a Flavian Audience." In *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond*, edited by Joseph Sievers and Gaia Lembi, 71–100. Leiden: Brill.

Mason, Steve. 2016a. "Josephus as a Roman Historian." In *A Companion to Josephus*, edited by Honora Howell Chapman and Zuleika Rodgers, 89–107. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons.

Mason, Steve. 2016b. "Josephus's *Judean War*." In *A Companion to Josephus*, edited by Honora Howell Chapman and Zuleika Rodgers, 14–35. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons.

Matyszak, Philip. 2008. *Mithridates the Great: Rome's Indomitable Enemy*. Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military.

Mayor, Adrienne. 2009. *The Poison King: The Life and Legend of Mithridates, Rome's Deadliest Enemy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Miller, William Ian. 1997. *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Oakley, S. P. 2019. "The Expansive Scale of the *Roman Antiquities*." In *Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Augustan Rome: Rhetoric, Criticism and Historiography*, edited by Richard Hunter and Casper C. de Jonge, 127–60. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Orlin, Eric M. 2010. *Foreign Cults in Rome: Creating a Roman Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Peirano, Irene. 2010. "Hellenized Romans and Barbarized Greeks: Reading the End of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae*." *Journal of Roman Studies* 100: 32–53. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0075435810000079.

Pucci Ben Ze'ev, Miriam. 2011. "Between Fact and Fiction: Josephus' Account of the Destruction of the Temple." In *Flavius Josephus: Interpretation and History*, edited by Menahem Mor, Jack Pastor, and Pnina Stern, 53–63. Leiden: Brill.

94

Rajak, Tessa. 2005. "Josephus in Diaspora." In *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, edited by Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives, 79–97. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rappaport, Uriel. 2007. "Josephus' Personality and the Credibility of His Narrative." In *Making History: Josephus and Historical Method*, edited by Zuleika Rodgers, 68–81. Leiden: Brill.

Rauhala, Marika. 2013. "Danger and Delusion: Ancient Literary Images of Religious Prejudices." In *Others and the Construction of Early Christian Identities*, edited by Raimo Hakola, Nina Nikki, and Ulla Tervahauta, 283–312. Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society.

Rauhala, Marika. 2018. "*Graecia capta, Roma rapta*? Hellenisation and Roman Identity in the Expanding Empire." In *Transcultural Encounters 2: Understanding Humans in Change*, edited by Kari Alenius, Matti Enbuske, Olavi K. Fält, Maija Kallinen, Kuisma Korhonen, Pekka Kuusisto, and Henry Oinas-Kukkonen, 131–49. Rovaniemi: The Historical Association of Northern Finland.

Regev, Eyal. 2011. "Josephus, the Temple, and the Jewish War." In *Flavius Josephus: Interpretation and History*, edited by Menahem Mor, Jack Pastor, and Pnina Stern, 279–93. Leiden: Brill.

Reicher, Steven. 2004. "The Context of Social Identity: Domination, Resistance, and Change." *Political Psychology* 25, no. 6: 921–45. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00403.x.

Reynolds, Katherine J., S. Alexander Haslam, and John C. Turner. 2011. "Prejudice, Social Identity and Social Change: Resolving the Allportian Problem." In *Beyond Prejudice*, edited by John Dixon and Mark Levin, 48–69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reynolds, Katherine J., Emina Subasic, Luisa Batalha, and Benjamin M. Jones. 2017. "From Prejudice to Social Change: A Social Identity Perspective." In *The Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Prejudice*, edited by Chris G. Sibley and Fiona Kate Barlow, 47–64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reynolds, Katherine J. and John C. Turner. 2001. "Prejudice as a Group Process: The Role of Social Identity." In *Understanding Prejudice, Racism, and Social Conflict*, edited by Martha Augoustinos and Katherine Jane Reynolds, 159–78. London: SAGE.

Rives, James. 2005. "Flavian Religious Policy and the Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple." In *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, edited by Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives, 145–66. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
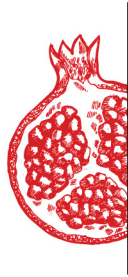
95

Roller, Lynn E. 1999. *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ros, María, Carmen Huici, and Angel Gómez. 2000. "Comparative Identity, Category Salience and Intergroup Relations." In *Social Identity Processes: Trends in Theory and Research*, edited by Dora Capozza and Rupert Brown, 81–95. London: SAGE.

Santangelo, Federico. 2007. *Sulla, the Elites and the Empire: A Study of Roman Policies in Italy and the Greek East*. Leiden: Brill.

Scheid, John. 2007. "Augustus and Roman Religion: Continuity, Conservatism, and Innovation." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, edited by Karl Galinsky, 175–93. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schneider, David J. 2004. *The Psychology of Stereotyping*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Schultze, Clemence. 2012. "Negotiating the Plupast: Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Roman Self-Definition." In *Time and Narrative in Ancient Historiography: The "Plupast" from Herodotus to Appian*, edited by Christopher B. Krebs and Jonas Grethlein, 113–38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schwartz, Daniel R. 2011. "Josephus, Catullus, Divine Providence, and the Date of the *Judean War*." In *Flavius Josephus: Interpretation and History*, edited by Menahem Mor, Jack Pastor, and Pnina Stern, 331–52. Leiden: Brill.

Sievers, Joseph and Gaia Lembi, eds. 2005. *Josephus and Jewish History in Flavian Rome and Beyond*. Leiden: Brill.

Spawforth, Antony. 2012. *Greece and the Augustan Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Steinbock, Bernd. 2013. *Social Memory in Athenian Public Discourse: Uses and Meanings of the Past*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Stephan, Walter G. and Cookie White Stephan. 2017. "Intergroup Threats." In *The Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Prejudice*, edited by Chris G. Sibley and Fiona Kate Barlow, 131–48. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Šterbenc Erker, Darja. 2009. "Religiöse Universalität und lokale Tradition: Rom und das Römische Reich." In *Die Religion des Imperium Romanum: Koine und Konfrontationen*, edited by Hubert Cancik and Jörg Rüpke, 75–97. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.

Tahin, Gábor. 2013. *Heuristic Strategies in the Speeches of Cicero*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Tajfel, Henri. 1978. "Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparison." In *Differentiation between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by Henri Tajfel, 61–76. London: Academic Press.

96

Tajfel, Henri and John Turner. 1979. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict." In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel, 33–47. Monterey: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Thackeray, Henry St. John. 1929. *Josephus: The Man and the Historian*. New York: Jewish Institute of Religion.

Tuval, Michael. 2011. "A Jewish Priest in Rome." In *Flavius Josephus: Interpretation and History*, edited by Menahem Mor, Jack Pastor, and Pnina Stern, 397–411. Leiden: Brill.

Wiater, Nicolas. 2011a. *The Ideology of Classicism: Language, History, and Identity in Dionysius of Halicarnassus*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Wiater, Nicolas. 2011b. "Writing Roman History—Shaping Greek Identity: The Ideology of Historiography in Dionysius of Halicarnassus." In *The Struggle for Identity: Greeks and Their Past in the First Century BCE*, edited by Thomas A. Schmitz and Nicolas Wiater, 61–91. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.

Wiater, Nicolas. 2018. "Getting over Athens: Re-Writing Hellenicity in the *Early Roman History* of Dionysius of Halicarnassus." In *The Hellenistic Reception of Classical Athenian Democracy and Political Thought*, edited by Mirko Canevaro and Benjamin Gray, 209–35. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Woolf, Greg. 1994. "Becoming Roman, Staying Greek: Culture, Identity and the Civilizing Process in the Roman East." *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 40: 116–43. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068673500001875.

Young, Robert J. C. 1994. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London: Routledge.

Young, T. Cuyler, Jr. 1988. "Since Herodotus, Has History Been a Valid Concept?" *American Antiquity* 53, no. 1: 7–12. https://doi.org/10.2307/281150.

Yunis, Harvey. 2019. "Dionysius' Demosthenes and Augustan Atticism." In *Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Augustan Rome: Rhetoric, Criticism and Historiography*, edited by Richard Hunter and Casper C. De Jonge, 83–105. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

97

A MULTICULTURAL PAUL IN THE GLOBALIZED ROMAN EMPIRE

Nina Nikki

Abstract

This article looks at Paul as a multicultural individual in the globalized Roman Empire. Following theorists such as Verónica Benet-Martínez, Ying-yi Hong, Mark Khei, and Seth Schwartz, multiculturalism is defined here as a person's access to more than one knowledge system. The mutual adjustment of these systems, acculturation, is understood as a group phenomenon sensitive to minority and majority positions, often taking place on the abstract level of identity discourse and accessible through the concept of social identity. The article argues that while Jewishness represents for Paul a robust heritage culture, it does not rule out Paul's access to other cultural knowledge systems. Paul sometimes distances himself from his Jewish identity in favor of an identity "in Christ," which Paul portrays as a knowledge system, even though this system was not very developed. At times, Paul also identifies with Romanness (*Romanitas*), signs of which are scarce but potentially visible in his stereotypical criticism of Jews. The article argues that anti-imperial readings of Paul are exegetically one-sided and need reassessment in the light of the new theoretical developments in the study of the Roman Empire as a globalized environment that is not best understood through dichotomies.

Cet article s'intéresse à Paul comme personne multiculturelle dans l'Empire romain mondialisé. En reprenant les approches de Verónica Benet-Martínez, Ying-yi Hong, Mark Khei et Seth Schwartz, le multiculturalisme est défini ici comme l'accès d'un individu à plus d'un système de connaissances. L'ajustement mutuel de ces systèmes, l'acculturation, est compris comme un phénomène de groupe adaptable aux positions de la minorité et de la majorité, phénomène qui se produit souvent au niveau abstrait du discours sur l'identité et qui est accessible par le biais du concept d'identité sociale. Cette contribution explique que, si la judéité représente pour Paul une culture patrimoniale solide, elle n'exclut pas l'accès de Paul à d'autres systèmes culturels de connaissances. Paul peut se distancier de son identité juive en faveur d'une identité « en Christ », qu'il présente comme un système de connaissances, même si ce système n'est pas très développé. Parfois, Paul s'identifie également à la romanité (*Romanitas*), dont les signes, bien que rares, peuvent potentiellement se donner à voir dans sa critique stéréotypée des Juifs. L'article soutient que les interprétations anti-impériales de Paul sont unilatérales d'un point de vue exégétique et doivent être réévaluées à la lumière de nouveaux développements théoriques dans l'étude de l'Empire romain en tant qu'environnement mondialisé, qui ne s'explique pas au mieux par des dichotomies.

A MULTICULTURAL PAUL IN THE GLOBALIZED ROMAN EMPIRE

Nina Nikki
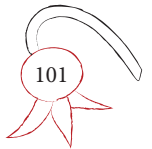
Introduction

This article looks at Paul as a multicultural individual in the Roman Empire and pays special attention to his alleged criticism of the Empire, which is a rising trend in Pauline scholarship. The article begins with a brief overview of how recent studies of the Roman Empire have progressed from the so-called "Romanization paradigm" to viewing Rome from the perspective of globalization—a move that complicates simple anti- or pro-imperial readings of Paul and clears room for viewing him as a multicultural person. Next, the article lays out a theoretical framework for discussing multicultural identity through the social identity approach. Following theorists such as Verónica Benet-Martínez, Ying-yi Hong, Mark Khei, and Seth Schwartz, it defines multiculturalism as a person's access to more than one knowledge system. It understands the mutual adjustment of these systems, acculturation, as a group phenomenon sensitive to minority and majority positions, often taking place on the abstract level of identity discourse. Taking his robust Jewishness as a

starting point, it discusses Paul's multiple knowledge systems and their dynamics, arguing that Paul's Jewishness does not rule out his access to other cultural knowledge systems, even though they can be challenging to detect. Paul sometimes distances himself from his Jewish identity aggressively, but such actions reveal the vital role it played in his life. At times, the distancing is done in favor of an identity "in Christ," which Paul portrays as a knowledge system, even though this system was not highly developed. The last section of the article discusses Paul's identification with Romanness (*Romanitas*), signs of which are scarce but potentially visible in his stereotypical criticism of Jews. Finally, the article suggests that anti-imperial readings of Paul are exegetically dubious and need reassessment in the light of the new theoretical developments in the study of the Roman Empire.

102

From Romanization to Globalization

The Roman Empire forms a central historical context for studying Paul and his cultural identifications. For a long time, research on the Empire was handicapped by a one-sided interest in the role of the state[1] and the economy,[2] adherence to provincial divisions,[3] and a dichotomy between center and periphery (or Italy and the provinces), as well as a simplistic distinction between native and Roman. The much debated

---

[1] Pieterse (2015, 234) notes that the state-centric view is boosted by the fact that archeological data tends toward monuments ("monumental bias"). According to Mattingly (2011, 16), many views of Rome are "metrocentric," that is, they explain the expansion of Rome as motivated by the greed and power lust of the metropolitan centers (rather than as a reaction to happenings in the periphery). The distinction between metrocentric, pericentric, and systemic explanations comes from Doyle 1986.

[2] Especially the so-called "world systems" approach begun by Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System* (1974–1989); see Pitts and Versluys 2014, 13.

[3] Martin Pitts and Miguel Versluys link together "Area Studies" and a "methodological nationalism" that dominated historical and archeological studies from the birth of the nation-state in the nineteenth century (2014, 7, 22).

and criticized concept of Romanization is closely linked to these issues.[4] This paradigm views the power of Rome mainly as bringing civilization to backward people—especially in the Roman West (Erskine 2010, 58), with Roman civilization offered as a reward for compliance (Mattingly 2011, 38). According to David Mattingly, this "false paradigm … still haunts us today" (2011, 22).

Recent research has suggested that the Roman Empire in particular, and Greco-Roman society in general, should rather be viewed from the perspective of postcolonialism or globalization.[5] The two perspectives are related and indebted to each other,[6] but the former has also been criticized for bolstering a dichotomy between native and Roman.[7] Globalization is commonly understood to denote various forms of "connectivity and de-territorialisation" (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 11), a "trend of growing worldwide interconnectedness" (Pieterse 2015, 235), and even the idea of limitlessness, which chimes well with Virgil's idea of Rome as *imperium sine fine* (*Aeneid* 1.278–79).[8] While the term "globalization" was invented to describe a modern situation, a growing number of scholars believe that the phenomenon itself is not restricted to modernity (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 17, 21). According to Jan Nederveen Pieterse, widening the perspective of globalization to include the Roman Empire is helpful for both historical research and globalization studies. Viewing globalization from a deep, historical perspective helps to dismantle presentist and Eurocenteric views on

---
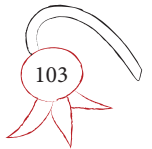
[4] Pitts and Versluys 2014, 5–6, 21–22. Mattingly summarizes the problems, among others the fact that the concept "implies that cultural change was unilateral and unilinear (with the flow from advanced civilization to less advanced communities)" and "de-emphasizes elements suggesting continuing traditions of indigenous society" (2011, 38–39). Andrew Gardner emphasizes the fact the concept reflects the modern imperial context of its adoption into scholarly discourse (2013, 2).

[5] A major change toward a globalization perspective took place with A. G. Hopkins's 2002 volume *Globalization in World History*.

[6] On the relationship between the perspectives, see Gikandi 2000.

[7] Gardner 2013, 4. For postcolonialist perspectives in general, see the "Introduction" to this special issue; for those on Paul, see the section *A Roman or Anti-Imperial Paul?* below.

[8] See Mattingly 2011, 15.

world history. Globalization perspectives also complement the way Roman cultural and archeological studies have for a long time already recognized "mobility, connectivity and mélange" in the Roman world (Pieterse 2015, 226–365).

The perspective of globalization deconstructs dichotomies by stressing the plurality of identity, interconnectedness between different areas and people, a multicentric perspective,[9] networks, and the importance of cultural transmission alongside the economy and politics.[10] As for the interest in the state, Pieterse summarizes the difference: "In state-centric accounts it is structures and institutions that unify the Mediterranean world, while in globalisation perspectives connectivity, mobility, objects, and knowledge networks do" (2015, 229).[11] In addition to these, and importantly for the following discussion on Paul, Greco-Roman culture represents subjective cosmopolitanism and a world consciousness.[12]

The Roman Empire and Roman culture were thus inherently pluralistic. This means that Romanness (or *Romanitas*) denotes multiple cultural influences, and the inhabitants of the Roman Empire represented multiple identities. According to Pieterse, "the trope of multiple identities and 'multiple sources of the self' that is often viewed as characteristic of postmodern times, we find in antiquity as well" (2015, 232). Pieterse uses Herod the Great as an example. He was the king of Judea, a Jew, and an Idumean by birth, but he was also a Roman who

---

[9] "Roman culture was an artifact of the provinces as much as it was of the metropolitan center" (Mattingly 2011, 40).

[10] It has been emphasized that cultural globalization does not denote homogenization but rather the variation created by incorporation of global trends into local cultures (Pitts and Versluys 2014, 14).

[11] Similarly, Erskine (2010, 61): "Rather than simple imitation or even two-way traffic as subjects influence Rome in turn, it may be that influence goes in many different directions, following lines of communication between provinces and around the Mediterranean. In this we might see a parallel with the empire's road system, in which the roads, in contrast to many other empires, not only radiated out from the centre but also connected its various parts."

[12] Beautifully illustrated by Polybius (*Histories* 1.3), who claims the world became interconnected in an unprecedented way after the Second Punic War (taken up by Pitts and Versluys 2014, 18). See also Pieterse 2015, 231.

received a Greek education (2015, 232). David Mattingly joins those who criticize the top-down understanding of influences and the homogenizing effect of the Romanization paradigm, claiming that the model of "singular identity affiliation" both in terms of ethnicity and social identity in general is the product of modern nationalism (2011, 206–7, 214). Mattingly believes that both individual and group identities were in Roman times complex and dynamic, and that instead of a one-directional, once experienced Romanization, there were "multiple attempts at defining and redefining identity" (2011, 213–14). In the following section, I will combine this historical background with the study of multicultural identity in order to form a more comprehensive framework for investigating Paul's multicultural identifications.

Multiculturalism, Acculturation, and the Social Identity Approach
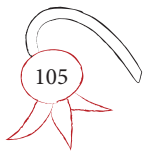
Verónica Benet-Martínez and Ying-yi Hong explain the topicality of the 2014 *Oxford Handbook of Multicultural Identity* by stating that "more people from different cultural backgrounds are connecting together, and at the same time, more people are being exposed to multiple cultures." The editors see today's world as culturally varied and note that multicultural experiences have become common in peoples' lives. Cases of cultural conflicts and blending alike, they claim, make it particularly important to understand how national, cultural, ethnic, and racial group memberships are developed and experienced (2014, 1–3). As we saw above, historians have identified a cultural diversity similar to that which Benet-Martínez and Hong attribute to modern society in the globalized Roman Empire as well.

The term "multiculturalism" can mean two things: first, it refers to a political stance toward different cultural groups,[13] and second, it denotes individuals with more than one cultural affiliation. The latter is

---

[13] The term entered common parlance in the 1980s–1990s when acculturation shifted from the assimilation-centered "melting pot" metaphor to a "salad bowl" ideology (Schwartz et al. 2014, 59).

105

the focus of Ying-yi Hong and Michael Khei's 2014 article "Dynamic Multiculturalism: The Interplay of Socio-Cognitive, Neural, and Genetic Mechanisms." It is also of special interest for this article, where the person of Paul is the focus. Hong and Khei (2014, 13) follow Fredrik Barth (2002) in defining culture as a knowledge system, where norms, beliefs, and practices are shared by a group of individuals tied to each other by race, ethnicity, nationality, or in some other way. The idea of shared cultural knowledge systems breaks with the essentialist understanding of cultures by positing that "the link between shared cultural knowledge and a certain (racial, ethnic, religious, gender) group is probabilistic and should not be conceptualized as a deep core essence of the group" (Hong and Khei 2014, 15).[14] Multicultural individuals, on the other hand, are defined loosely as people having a multiracial background, immigrant or residential status in another country, or simply exposure to more than one cultural tradition (2014, 12). From these definitions, it follows that multiculturalism denotes access to more than one knowledge system (2014, 16).

Acculturation denotes the adjustments that individuals with different heritage cultures make in order to receive another culture. For a long time, acculturation models were unidimensional and stressed assimilation to the receiving culture and rejection of the heritage culture as the ideal situation.[15] Today, however, the models tend to be bidimensional/bicultural, meaning that they stress *integration*—desiring contact with the receiving culture while retaining one's heritage culture—as the most adaptive model (Schwartz et al. 2014, 59). Research has also advanced from studying solely the behavior of individuals to understanding how multiculturalism manifests itself in different domains: practices, values, and identifications (Schwartz et al. 2014, 61). While acculturation processes have traditionally been viewed from the perspective of individuals, intergroup processes have recently been emphasized. Seth Schwartz

---

[14] "Because the core of culture—shared cultural knowledge system—is not a core essence, it is possible for individuals to acquire and internalize multiple shared cultural knowledge systems associated with multiple groups" (Hong and Khei 2014, 16).

[15] A view represented by Gordon 1964, for example.

106

et al. in fact stress that acculturation situations are always intergroup situations and seek to bring new light to these relations through the social identity approach (2014, 58). They discuss how both majority and minority groups react in situations of perceived identity threats (2014, 67–85). Threats to identity are understood as different from realistic threats, such as competition for jobs, housing, or other material resources. They are threats to an individual's or a group's "feelings of self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, meaning, belonging, and efficacy" (2014, 74).

From the perspective of the majority group, Schwartz et al. posit that minorities can be viewed as posing a threat to the majority group's core beliefs and values (2014, 68). They note that intercultural situations do not always follow the prediction of the social identity approach that similar groups feel most threatened by each other. According to this prediction, dissimilar minority groups could even be understood as affirming the positive distinctiveness of the majority group. Studies have shown, however, that majority group members feel especially threatened by groups that are different from their own, which leads to demands for assimilation. Schwartz et al. explain this phenomenon through a perceived common national identity – and especially the motivation to protect its continuity – which results in viewing minority group members as "black sheep" within the national community (2014, 69–79). An essentialist understanding of national identity and a strong identification with it ("high identifiers") have been shown to enhance prejudice (2014, 71–72).

Minority groups are often disadvantaged both materially (realistic threat) as well as symbolically (identity threat). Individuals may attempt to improve their status by shifting to the majority group. These "individual mobility" measures are not, however, available to everyone. While visible minority groups (such as Hispanics or Asians in the current United States) will be viewed as "perpetual foreigners," others may be able to break the boundaries and assimilate (e.g., "passing as white"). Demands to assimilate can, however, lead to counterreactions, where minority groups heighten identification with their group ("reactive ethnicity")—which has been proven to produce enhanced well-being within the group (Schwartz et al. 2014, 75–77). The role of leaders as

107

entreprenuers of identity is significant here for both minority and majority groups, as they can mobilize both opinions and actions.[16]

When individual mobility is impossible, the disadvantaged groups are more likely to engage in group-based strategies, such as social creativity or social competition measures. The first denotes the various means by which the lower status group ensures a sense of positive distinctiveness and continuity despite its inability to actually challenge the higher status group. The group can, for example, compare itself to other groups that are even lower in status in order to feel positive about itself, or isolate itself from other groups into enclaves in order to avoid comparison altogether. Social competition, on the other hand, tends to be more difficult, although examples of collective action that have led to an improvement in social status can be named from modern as well as ancient times (Schwartz et al. 2014, 76–77). Bicultural integration—that is, maintaining the heritage culture while adopting the receiving culture—is today considered the ideal type of acculturation. However, this state can be challenging to achieve for two reasons. First, the majority group may not accept the minority group member ("perpetual foreigner syndrome"). Second, a separatist minority group may look at the integrating individual as a deviant or traitor who undermines the heritage group's distinctive identity (Schwartz 2014, 78).

Since culture is a knowledge system and the multicultural individual acquires and navigates through more than one system, it becomes important to understand how the cultural shifts take place. Hong and Khei posit a mechanism of cultural *frame switching* where different internalized cultural knowledge systems activate depending on the contexts, bringing forth different—even conflicting—affects, thoughts, and behaviors. The available knowledge systems are activated through *priming*, that is, through "prompting the culture imperceptibly by exposing individuals to the respective cultural icons." System activation is not automatic, but dependent on the applicability of the framework in a

---

[16] "Just as leaders within the majority community may attempt to sway public opinion by portraying migrants as a threat to the larger society, leaders within the migrant community may also seek to gain favorable social position by portraying the majority ethnic group as the enemy" (Schwartz et al. 2014, 77).

given situation. The existence of an intergroup dimension in a situation facilitates activation (Hong and Khei 2014, 17–18).

Hong and Khei do not only discuss this cognitive aspect of multiculturalism, they also take up what they call the "multicultural self," which for them denotes the different emotional aspects of the multicultural experience. A significant question has to do with the felt (in)security of one's place in the given culture. According to Hong and Khei,[17] the situation is analogous to parent–child attachment, in that a person can be either securely or insecurely attached to a culture. Studies have shown that the attachment of immigrants to their host cultures can be particularly challenging. Attachment security affects the individual's ability to cope with stress, and insecure attachment is linked to discrimination and reduced well-being (2014, 24). Another factor that has been proven to affect the well-being of individuals with multicultural identity can be analyzed with the help of Verónica Benet-Martínez and Jana Haritatos's (2005) model of *bicultural identity integration*. The model measures the experienced blendedness and harmony between the different identities. Felt harmony between the two (or more) cultural streams has been linked to easier and more purposeful cultural frame-switching as well as higher self-esteem and well-being (see Schwartz et al. 2014, 79–80).
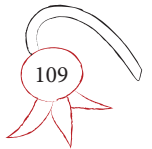
The Complexity of Paul's Heritage Identity as a Jew

We turn now to discuss Paul's identity as a Jew and as a non-Jew. This starting point can, however, already be problematized, as there is extensive discussion on what exactly constituted Jewishness at the turn of the Common Era. The last half-century of scholarship has witnessed a lively debate about the nature of Second Temple Judaism (or Judaisms),[18] inspired, for example, by such newly discovered sources as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The question of correct terminology has also been visited lately. Many have suggested that we should not speak of "Jews" in this

---

[17] Drawing on Hong et al. 2006.

[18] For an overview of recent changes and advancements in the study of Judaism in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, see Jokiranta et al. 2017.

time period but rather use the term "Judeans," which emphasizes the role of ethnicity.[19] These discussions cannot be tackled here in full, but hopefully the arguments below will contribute to them in a fruitful way. Also, this article does not advance from a strict definition of what constitutes Judaism and where the boundaries of Judaism lay in the first centuries CE. Paul is, I argue, a good example of why such boundaries are impossible to delineate precisely.

With Paul as a Jew, I focus particularly on his post-calling life, as there is no real debate on Paul's Jewish upbringing and background: Paul discusses these plainly on several occasions (Gal 2:15; 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:4–6; Rom 9:3, 11:1). Judaism is clearly Paul's heritage culture. While it is intuitive to consider this identity as immutable and irreversible,[20] scholars have vigorously debated the extent and nature of Paul's Jewishness during his life as a Christ-follower (Ehrensperger 2013, 116). While older scholarship tended to see a discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity already in Paul's time, the emphasis has in recent years shifted toward a continued, strong Jewish self-identification by Paul. At its most extreme, this has sometimes been coupled with attributing to Paul a soteriology that allows Jews to be saved as Jews, with Christ being the savior of the gentiles only.[21] It is not within the scope of the current

---
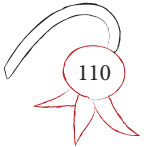
[19] See Mason 2007; Esler 2003; Holmberg 2008; Reinhartz 2014 for further discussion on the terms "Jew," "Jewish," and "Judean." Johnson Hodge (2007, 15) states the need for a singular term which is "multivalent, complex, context-dependent and it should include various facets of self-understanding: religious practices, geographic homeland, shared history, ethical codes, common ancestry, stories of origin, theological positions." She opts for the transliteration *Ioudaioi*, since no such term is available.

[20] Johnson Hodge 2007, 57: "Although ethnic boundaries can be crossed in some ways, the Jewish identity of Paul and his colleagues is a 'natural' one. I doubt Paul considered his birth as a Jew mutable."

[21] For example, Gaston 1987, 32: "The Gentile counterpart to living in the covenant community of Torah is being 'in Christ.'" This is a "covenant and commandment relationship to God which is different from but parallel to that of Sinai." Gaston believes that Paul was falsely accused of teaching Jews to give up parts of the law, although suspicions of doing so were the reason he was opposed by some Jews. Similarly, Gager 2000, 59: "Paul never speaks of Israel's ultimate redemption

article to repeat this gargantuan discussion in full.[22] My aim is simply to demonstrate the continued robustness of Paul's Jewish identity and look for instances where other cultural identifications or knowledge systems surface—making Paul's identity bi- or multicultural.

I will do the first part largely in critical discussion with Caroline Johnson Hodge's work *If Sons, Then Heirs* (2007), whose emphasis on the role of ethnicity is relevant to the current argument. The discussion of Paul's Jewishness sets the stage for investigating the other aspects of Paul's multicultural identity. I argue that, despite the dominant role of his Jewishness, Paul at times distances himself from it in an act of *cultural frame-switching*. In 1 Corinthians 9:21, for example, Paul famously claims that he can identify with non-Jews: he "became as one outside the law" to "those outside the law." The next chapter will therefore focus on what we can find out about Paul's other cultural identifications: What knowledge systems besides Judaism did Paul have access to? How did these knowledge systems inform Paul's multicultural identity? Finally, I briefly discuss the possibility of viewing the social identification of "being in Christ" as a cultural knowledge system in the making.

According to Johnson Hodge, Pauline scholarship has long viewed Paul's soteriological ideas from a universalistic perspective and downplayed the role of ethnicity in his thinking.[23] It has been claimed that Paul offered a *universal religion* to all who followed Christ regardless of their ethnicity, thus representing a corrective to Jewish ethnic particularity. Johnson Hodge claims that "both traditional and new perspective interpretations of Paul tend to downplay Paul's ethnic language, to mask it as something else, or to juxtapose ethnic particularity with a universal faith in Christ" (2007, 44). The universalist approach has

111

as a conversion to Christ." There are "two paths to salvation–through Christ for Gentiles, through the Law for Israel." Gager, however, emphasizes that finally the two become one people of God, which is "not identical with Israel and certainly not with any Christian church" (2000, 61).

[22] See, e.g., Ehrensperger 2013, 118f. on central points of contest. A good overview up until a decade ago is offered by Zetterholm 2009.

[23] The universalist stance is also criticized by Campbell (2008) and Tucker (2010, 2011). See Nikki 2021 for a critical evaluation of their arguments.

also led to juxtaposing "ethnically neutral 'gentile Christians' with ethnically specific 'Jewish Christians'" in early Christ-following communities (2007, 47).

Johnson Hodge counters these ideas, claiming that Paul never gave up ethnic particularity in favor of a universalist outlook, but rather kept arguing from a markedly Jewish ethnic and kinship perspective. For Johnson Hodge's Paul, "gentiles are alienated from the God of Israel. And it is in these terms that Paul presents the solution: baptism into Christ makes gentiles descendants of Abraham" (2007, 4). For this Paul, gentiles are "the ethnic and religious 'other'" for whom Paul makes room in the story of Israel through kinship creation. Importantly, in her view Paul does not conflate Christ-following gentiles and Jews into one group: "Gentiles-in-Christ and Jews are separate but related lineages of Abraham" (2007, 5). Declining the universalist, non-ethnic option is essential for the assumption by Johnson Hodge and other representatives of the "Paul within Judaism/radical new perspective," according to which Jews (and to some extent gentiles) did not, in Paul's view, need to change or give up their ethnic identity in order to be saved (2007, 8–9). Following the terminology of multiculturalism studies, it may be said that Johnson Hodge and colleagues do not wish to take Paul as promoting cultural assimilation but rather something akin to bicultural integration.

It is easy to agree with Johnson Hodge that it is much due to Paul that later Christians also adhere to "the story of this particular ethnic people, the God of their homeland, their myths about creation and the ordering of the cosmos, and the morals inscribed in their sacred scripture" (2007, 4).[24] According to Johnson Hodge, Paul's Jewishness is also clear from the way Paul sees the world as divided into Jews[25] and gentiles/

---

[24] Similarly, Ehrensperger 2013, 132: "He asserts his Jewish identity again and again, and the symbolic and social universe he is embedded in, and within which he operates, is primarily Jewish."

[25] Ehrensperger notes that with his use of the term *genos* (of the Jews), Paul implies "special bonds between those who are part of this *genos* in terms of shared origin, and descent, that is, kinship ties" (2013, 117).

Greeks (*ethnē*/*Hellēnes*):[26] "The term *ethne* stands not for a particular people per se, but a whole conglomerate of those who are not *Ioudaioi*" and clearly "makes sense only in an ethnically specific Jewish context" (2007, 47). The Jewish ingroup is viewed with more specificity than the outgroups, which are thus conflated into a single, faceless crowd.[27] Paul never speaks of the specific ancestries or customs of the gentiles but continually treats them as one non-Jewish group and relates their past through the lens of the highly denigrative genealogical account in Genesis (Rom 1:18–32) (Johnson Hodge 2007, 50–51).[28] This is well in line with the social identity approach's "ingroup heterogeneity/outgroup homogeneity" prediction (Judd et al. 1991).

In addition to *ethnē*, Paul also uses the term "Greek" of non-Jews, especially when pairing "Jew" with another term (e.g., Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:22–24). Johnson Hodge (2007) offers several explanations for Paul's occasional use of "Greek" instead of "gentile." For her, the term may reveal Paul's (inadvertent) participation in the hegemony of Greek culture in the Roman East, as it may metonymically describe all non-Jews. The choice may also reflect Paul's awareness of the self-identification of (some of) his audience as Greeks (no-one self-identified as a "gentile"). Certainly, Paul at least expected them to know the Greek language (2007, 59–60). It is worth mentioning that Paul's ingroup viewpoint slants his worldview toward a juxtaposition of Jews with a much larger and more powerful outgroup—as if the two were equal.[29]

113

---

[26] *Akrobustia* ("foreskin") is also used of non-Jews; see Johnson Hodge 2007, 60–64; Ehrensperger 2013, 121.

[27] Ehrensperger 2013, 106–7, similarly to Johnson Hodge 2007.

[28] Johnson Hodge 2007, 50–51. Ehrensperger (2013, 122) reminds us that *ethnē* is plural and that Romans in using this term showed their awareness of diversity in the subject peoples. She suggests that we should not rule out similar awareness by Paul despite the absence of evidence. Ehrensperger notes that Paul knows at times to differentiate between Greeks and barbarians and mentions the various locations he sends letters to. To my mind, these mentions are still quite stereotypical and superficial.

[29] Ehrensperger 2013, 116: "The centre of [Paul's world] is neither Rome nor Athens, but Jerusalem (Rom 15.16)."

Paul uses the word *ethnē* of those non-Jews who do not follow Christ (1 Cor 5:1, 12:2; 1 Thess 4:3–5), but also of those who do (Rom 1:5–6; 11:13). This speaks in favor of a distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish groups *among Christ-believers*. The division in Paul's heritage culture into insiders (Jews) and outsiders (everyone else) thus persists. A good example is found in Paul's words to Peter in Galatians 2:14–15, where he clearly distinguishes a group of Christ-believers, including himself and Peter (2:14, *Ioudaios hyparchōn*), as Jewish "by origin/birth/nature"—in distinction to those who are not (2:15, *hēmeis fysei Ioudaioi kai ouk ex ethnōn hamartōloi*, "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not gentile sinners", NRSV).

It has been suggested by, for example, J. Brian Tucker and William S. Campbell that Paul not only retained Jewish particularity in Christ, but also to some extent a gentile particularity as well. Tucker and Campbell claim that Paul believed in "the retention of one's particularity in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile" (Campbell 2008, 156) and considered "diversity … a central value" (Tucker 2010, 66). The way in which Paul identifies some Christ-believers as gentiles, however, only repeats Paul's Jewish emic and stereotypical view of a humanity divided into Jews and non-Jews and allows very little nuance to the various heritage cultures of the gentiles, who certainly had many existing ethnic, kinship, and other ties. Johnson Hodge's suggestion is that for Paul the gentiles become, through Abrahamic kinship, subsumed into the Jewish narrative and offered a new past and history in replacement of their particular background, leaving little diversity for gentiles, who, as she states, "must give up their gods and religious practices in order to proclaim loyalty of the God of Israel" and "accept Israel's messiah, scriptures, stories of origin, ethical standards, and even ancestry" (2007, 131).[30] The readings of Paul as tolerant of existing gentile identities unfortunately ignore, on the one hand, the pressure Paul places on gentile believers to assimilate and, on the other, the extent to which he continuously sees them as "perpetual foreigners."

---

[30] In fact, despite their explicit claim to the contrary, Campbell and Tucker also end up stressing various changes that Paul insists on for gentile converts (see Nikki 2021).

It is clear to modern scholarship that Paul did not cease to be a Jew upon his calling to Christ. His letters do not testify to a clear-cut break with Judaism later in life either. Paul's continued division of people into Jews and gentiles is proof of this. However, the suggestion by Johnson Hodge and others that Paul's Jewishness remained entirely unproblematic, static, and intact for the rest of his life is a simplification. The question is strongly related to whether Judaism at the turn of the Common Era is viewed as an ethnic or a religious system. Shaye Cohen, for example, sees the birth of a culturally and religiously determined *Jewish* identity already in the Maccabean era, alongside a supposedly immutable, ethnic *Judean* identity.[31] Johnson Hodge challenges Cohen's distinction between the two different Jewish identifications, arguing that Judaism at the turn of the Common Era was not a religion but an ethnic/kinship identity. Rightly, however, she views all ethnicities and kinship relations as constructed and mutable (2007, 15–16, 54),[32] which essentially makes

---

[31] According to Cohen (1999, 109–10), before the second century BCE "'Iudaean-ness' was a function of birth and geography," but "in the century following the Hasmonean rebellion two new meanings of 'Iudaeans' emerge: Judaeans are all those, of whatever ethnic or geographic origins, who worship the God whose temple is in Jerusalem (a religious definition), or who have become citizens of the state established by the Judaeans (a political definition)." For Cohen, ethnic identity is immutable, whereas religious and political identifications brought about fluidity in the boundaries between the two.

[32] See the work of Campbell and Tucker, who agree with Johnson Hodge on the question of continued ethnic particularism in Christ but view ethnicity as less constructed (Campbell 2008, 4–5; Tucker 2010, 65, 78; Tucker 2011, 51–57). An important work on the constructed nature of ethnicity in antiquity is Hall 1997. Jonathan Hall criticizes both primordial and instrumentalist views of ethnicity and stresses instead that while "ethnic identity is a cultural construct perpetually renewed and renegotiated through discourse and social praxis" it still needs to be recognized that "the ethnic group does possess its own realm of reality" (1997, 19). Hall considers "a connection with a specific territory and the common myth of descent" to be among the main characteristics that distinguish ethnic groups from other social groups (1997, 25). It is clear for him, however, that "any quest for an objective definition of an ethnic group is doomed to failure simply because the defining criteria of group membership are socially constructed and renegotiated primarily through written and spoken discourse" (1997, 24).

them cultural knowledge systems. Despite this emphasis by Johnson Hodge, it is hard to escape the impression that the idea of Judaism as an ethnic identity is somehow meant in the overall argument to ensure its immutability in Paul. Constructedness is an important requirement for Johnson Hodge's claim that Paul was able to shape a new identity for gentiles as descendants of Abraham. It opens the door, however, for the possibility that Paul's Jewishness was also malleable—even discardable. Johnson Hodge, however, seems unwilling to consider this side of the coin seriously: for her, and for other proponents of the "Paul within Judaism" perspective, Paul's Jewish identity—unlike the gentile Christ-followers' heritage identities—must remain rather static.

The "Other Sides" of Paul

While there is no denying that Paul is continuously indebted to the Jewish symbolic universe (quite diverse in itself), it is worthwhile to try and sift from his letters instances that illustrate his other cultural knowledge systems. This discussion has traditionally centered on juxtaposing Jewish and Hellenistic influences in Paul. Hellenism has been understood as a "fusion (*Verschmelzung*) of Greek and local oriental cultures across the Hellenistic world" (Jokiranta et al. 2017, 4). The concept itself is a modern one, dating from the works of the nineteenth-century German historian J. G. Droysen. It aimed originally at creating a trajectory from Greek civilization to Christianity—with Judaism distanced from the two as degenerate.[33] At a later phase, especially due to Martin Hengel's work, Judaism was understood to participate in the Hellenistic mix. Hengel (1969), however, still viewed the Maccabean Revolt as a counterreaction to Hellenization, which eventually led to a self-segregated Rabbinic Judaism. More recently, the ideas of Hellenism as a fusion of cultures and Judaism as inherently in conflict with Hellenism have fallen under severe criticism. Kathy Ehrensperger,

---

[33] See Ehrensperger 2007, 20–21. As Ehrensperger puts it: "The role of Judaism in this process is confined to its function in the preparation of Christianity in which the spirit would come to itself" (2007, 23).

for example, stresses that the concept of Hellenism should be replaced with an appreciation of the diversity—not fusion—of cultures and ethnicities in the Greco-Roman world (2013, 26–7).[34]

Ehrensperger discusses biculturalism in Paul as a paradigm for understanding the *translation process* between Paul's fully Jewish identity and other cultures in the Greco-Roman world (2013, 133).[35] The analysis below, however, is informed by the social identity approach and multicultural studies, which allow Paul to engage more deeply in cultural frame-switching between his Jewish knowledge system and the other ones he has to some extent internalized. This, I believe, corresponds better with what Paul himself in 1 Corinthians 9:20–23 claims to be doing when he says: "To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law."[36]

One way to clear space for other identifications is to look at instances where Paul distances himself from central aspects of ethnic Jewishness. First, Johnson Hodge's (2007) view of Paul as constantly arguing through Abrahamic kinship needs to be corrected. It is evident that Paul did not always approach his gentile audience with the offer of Abrahamic ancestry. This reduces Paul's dependence on the Jewish knowledge system on at least some occasions. Johnson Hodge arrives at her solution because she focuses her argument on Paul's letters to the Galatians and Romans. The argumentation in these letters, however, is born out of Paul's encounters with those Christ-followers who promoted Torah observance and circumcision for gentiles and did this on the very premise that the latter created kinship with Abraham. In social identity approach terms, Paul enters into social competition over Abrahamic kinship as a positive identifier and claims it for the gentile

117

---

[34] Jokiranta et al. 2017, 5: "More recent studies on the interaction between Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures show greater caution regarding the use of the term 'Hellenism' and more awareness of varieties of cultural interaction." For the history of the term and further criticism, see Jokiranta et al. 2017, 3–5. See also Collins 2005.

[35] For a brief synopsis of Ehrensperger's multicultural (bilingual/multilingual) interpretation of Paul, see also Ehrensperger 2019, 143–46.

[36] See Nikki 2013, 77–81 on the problems of reading this passage as referring to mere mimicry or rhetorical adaptation by Paul.

Christ-followers on the basis of faith alone (Gal 3:6–9). Paul's argument is thus reactive, not constitutive.[37] His letters to the Thessalonian and Philippian believers, on the other hand, bear no mention of Abrahamic kinship and do not convey the impression that the communities' identity rested on it.[38] I have previously suggested that Paul may in these cases have approached the gentile groups with a message more focused on apocalyptic future events (Nikki 2016). Further research should be done to determine whether this, admittedly Jewish, apocalyptic framework resonated more easily with the recipients' previous knowledge systems. Other rationalizations Paul uses to approach gentiles are the notions of election (1 Thess 1:4) and sanctification (1 Thess 3:13; 4:3), which also build on Jewish ideology but may be more understandable and persuasive even outside a Jewish knowledge system.

A degree of distance from some central tenets of Judaism is also found in the instances where Paul treats circumcision either with indifference (e.g., 1 Cor 7:18–19) or outright hostility (Gal 3–4; Phil 3:2–3), speaks of his "earlier life in Judaism" (Gal 1:13–14), denies being currently "under the law," and can speak of becoming "as a Jew" when needed (1 Cor 9:20–21). These examples may be understood as instances of *cultural frame-switching primed by social contexts*.[39] Proponents of the

---

[37] Paul's argument seems secondary also on the basis that it is quite forced and does not reflect the story of Genesis 17 as well as the alleged claim of the opponents (Nikki 2016, 246–47).

[38] Tucker discusses Johnson Hodge's views on Abrahamic kinship positively but notes that "the way this works in 1 Corinthians is unclear" (2010, 87 n. 121). 1 Corinthians makes no mention of Abraham, and 2 Corinthians mentions him only in 11:22.

[39] There is some difference here to Ehrensperger's theory of Paul's project as cultural translation. Ehrensperger (2013, 4–5) understands translation as a process wider and more profound than language and texts. It is for her highly contextual, a meeting of "universes of discourse." She insists, however, on the absolute primacy and continuity of Paul's Jewish identity. For her, "Paul sees himself as commissioned to transmit a message not only from the divine realm to that of humans but also from the Jewish social and symbolic universe to the world of the nations" (2013, 139). His mission is to deliver a message "from within a Jewish symbolic and social universe into the world of the nations" (2013, 3).

"Paul within Judaism" perspective usually read the these types of passages as addressed to gentile Christ-believers alone and as not involving Paul himself or other Jewish Christ-followers.[40] These readings, however, tend to be strained.[41] I have elsewhere suggested that both the neutral and the hostile passages represent Paul's contextual and flexible social identifications and his attempts to identify as a prototypical leader of the gentile or mixed communities in question.[42] In 1 Corinthians 7 and 9, for example, Paul demonstrates through his own example that the Corinthian believers should also view a Christ-identity as the most salient one and treat both gentile and Jewish identifications as subcategories, thus relativizing their role.[43] I will discuss below to what extent this "Christ-identity" can be viewed as a distinct cultural identification or knowledge system.

In Philippians 3, Paul speaks to a fully gentile audience and seeks to portray himself as its prototypical leader. This impels him to discard his Jewish pedigree in a shocking manner.[44] Paul outright slanders his own past, calling it "dung/excrement" (3:8, *skubalon*). The passage has proven problematic for scholars: some have opted to relativize its harshness by insisting, for example, that it is "a comparative, not an absolute statement" (Ehrensperger 2013, 119); others have claimed it refers only to Paul's specific Jewish identity as a Pharisee (Betz 2015, 55–59). But the first mitigation does not take the harshness of the passage seriously enough and the second is not supported by the text. Paul also goes further than slandering his own past. He derides circumcision (calling it "mutilation," 3:2) and Jewish dietary regulations (calling those who follow them "worshippers of the belly," 3:19). This is not to claim that

---
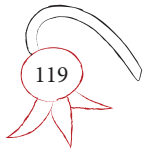
[40] This "hermeneutical key" (Zetterholm 2015, 45, 48) is attributed historically to Lloyd Gaston (1987).

[41] Räisänen 2001, 94: "forced to give many Pauline passages a twisted exegesis"; Räisänen 2010, 258. See also Nikki 2022, 199.

[42] Nikki 2013; Nikki 2019, 170–79. Ehrensperger (2013, 116) claims that a lack of differentiation between Paul's and his followers' identities has led to confusion. At times, Paul does indeed make a distinction between himself and his audience (e.g., Gal 2:14–15). At times, however, he attempts the opposite.

[43] Nikki 2013, 86–87; Nikki 2019, 176–77.

[44] See Nikki 2016, 254.

the maneuver was an unproblematic one. For Paul himself, Jewishness represents a *chronic identification*.[45] Members of the Greco-Roman receiving cultures may have viewed Jews—Paul among them—as "perpetual foreigners." Consequently, Paul must resort to *approval-seeking outgroup violation* in order to legitimize this unnatural move (Nikki 2019, 177–78). What motivates Paul's reaction in Philippians 3 (and the same logic goes for Galatians) is a perceived threat to the identity of the gentile Christ-followers.[46] In an expression of outgroup homogeneity (Judd and Park 1988),[47] Paul lumps together those Christ-followers who demand law observance of the gentiles with other Jews. This majority group is then portrayed as threatening the unique identity of the gentile Christ-believers by enticing them to solve their disadvantaged position by moving to the majority group.[48] Paul's response can also be understood as a case of "reactive ethnicity," where the alleged demand of assimilation by Jews / Jewish Christians is countered with heightened boundary-drawing. In a similar situation in Galatians, Paul suggests that individuals who integrate with the majority are deviants or traitors who undermine the distinctive identity of the ingroup (esp. Gal 5). It is important here to remember that identity discourse does not always faithfully reflect historical reality, but more often represents attempts to move it in a desired direction.

---
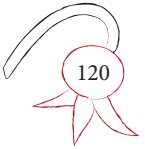
[45] See Sherman et al. 1999, 92–93 for the concept of chronic identity, and Hakola 2007, 272–73 for the chronic versus contextual identifications of Second Temple Jewish groups.

[46] In light of the contextuality of social identifications, however, it is not problematic that in 2 Corinthians 11:22 the same pedigree is considered valid and valuable.

[47] In intergroup situations, both the ingroup and outgroup are perceptually homogenized, but the outgroup is more so (Judd and Park 1988). Minorities may view themselves as more homogenous than outgroups (Simon and Brown 1987).

[48] See Esler 1998. The historical position of Paul's "opponents" in Galatians is a famous exegetical puzzle that may never be satisfactorily solved (for my solution, see Nikki 2019, 120–30). The way Paul presents the problem in the letter, however, fits the reactions to perceived identity threats by both majority groups (Jewish / Jewish Christian opponents) and minority groups (Paul's group) as described by Schwartz et al. (2014).

The specific content of the non-Jewish identities of the gentile communities that Paul attempts to identify with is difficult to decipher, as Paul's depictions of non-Jews are consistently stereotypical and reveal little awareness of the local heritage cultures of the addressees.[49] The gentile converts' past is depicted in broad strokes as one of idolatry and ignorance of God (1 Thess 1:9; Gal 4:8), or, as in the case in Philippians, left completely unmentioned (Nikki 2016, 252–53). It remains quite unclear which parts of the gentiles' heritage cultures survived when mixed with a Christ-identity. It is tempting to think that Paul manages at times to move from Jewishness to "non-Jewishness," but this is where the road ends. It seems that even in these cases Jewishness acts as the self-evident foundation ("chronic identification") against which new experiences and identifications are perpetually mirrored.

It is nonetheless important to also ask if there was something in Paul's past and upbringing that warrants positing another cultural framework for him besides Judaism. The main feature that stands out from Paul's letters is his use of the Greek language. This does not, however, automatically denote a knowledge system different from Judaism. In Paul's time, there was already an established Jewish tradition in Greek, including scriptural translations. Paul's use of Greek scriptural terminology and his knowledge of the Septuagint strongly suggest that the language of his Jewish education was Greek. There are only a few signs in Paul's letters that may point to his knowledge of Aramaic and/or Hebrew. First, Pharisaic education (Phil 3:5) was only available in Jerusalem, which Ehrensperger suggests makes it possible that he spent an extended period of time there receiving some form of education, most likely in Aramaic and/or Hebrew (2013, 136). E. P. Sanders is more skeptical of Paul's Palestinian Pharisaism: Paul's own claim to be a Pharisee (Phil 3:5) "probably means only that he believed in the resurrection and in some specific nonbiblical traditions" (2009, 77–78). Second, Paul uses some Aramaic terms (e.g., *Kephas*) but does not seem

121

---

49 Ehrensperger 2013, 137: "As for his familiarity with the cultural traditions of the *ethne*, the indications in his letters are less evident."

to use Hebrew scriptures or to translate them to Greek.[50] Sanders notes that "[i]f Paul had a Pharisaic education, he would have memorized the Bible in Hebrew" (2009, 79). The reference to his background as a "Hebrew from Hebrews" (Phil 3:5) is vague. If it points to language, it may signify only a symbolic connection.[51] The connotation may also be geographical (Ehrensperger 2013, 149). If Paul was bi- or multilingual, Greek was either his first or early second language (with Aramaic as the first).[52] This means that Paul's heritage culture was Greco-Jewish. For the current argument, it is significant that Paul received his basic education in this Greco-Jewish form and not, for example, within the Greco-Roman education system (Ehrensperger 2013, 133–34). Paul's awareness of Greco-Roman rhetorical and philosophical traditions is popular in nature, meaning that it was probably acquired "in the marketplace" instead of at school (Ehrensperger 2013, 137).[53] A particular route, like an elite one, is not a prerequisite for the formation of a knowledge system.

Some additional insight into Paul's cultural identity is offered by Stanley Stowers (2011), who applies the point of view of the Bourdieusian "field," meaning "a space of norms and practices."[54] The concept is not incompatible with the notion of social identity or cultural knowledge

---

[50] In scriptural quotations, wordings closer to the Masoretic text than the Septuagint are sometimes understood as Paul's translations from Hebrew. It is more likely, however, that he follows in these cases Hebraizing revisions of Greek texts. See Kujanpää 2019, 6–7.

[51] According to Ehrensperger (2013, 58), the reference "may or may not refer to his knowledge or fluency in this language but certainly refers to the ongoing significance of the language to his sense of belonging." Hebrew was not a spoken language at the time and could only refer to literary tradition.

[52] Ehrensperger (2013, 137) takes Paul as bilingual with this qualification.

[53] According to Sanders, Paul had "probably not much instruction in classical Greek literature." As for Paul's educational background, Sanders tentatively suggests "a Jewish school that taught in Greek and made extensive use of the Greek translation of the Bible, with very little Greek literature in the curriculum" (2009, 80).

[54] "A game if you will" (Stowers 2011, 113); "a social space that floats free of certain kinds of place" (2011, 115).

systems. Stowers considers the Greco-Roman *paideia*[55] as a "translocal field of knowledge" that had "gained a semiautonomy from kings, patrons, and the economy in general" (2011, 113). For Stowers, Paul is *not* a member of the dominant elite who shared this body of knowledge, but a producer and distributor of an alternative, esoteric, and exotic *paideia* (2011, 116–17). Stowers believes that the minority and mixed ethnic or other statuses of the people receiving Paul's message led to their alienation from the legitimate *paideia*, which in turn attracted them to Paul's alternative version (2011, 116).[56] While Stowers recognizes that Paul was not a legitimate member of the dominant *paideia*, he sees Paul's alternative *paideia* as still recognizable as part of the "broader game of specialized literate learning."[57] Following Jonathan Z. Smith's differentiation between local and translocal traditions (the first denoting the locative religion centered on the land, household, family, and temple), Stowers claims that Paul's message was at points able to challenge the dominant *paideia*, since—due to its literary nature[58]—it was not entirely local either (2011, 111–13).[59] Stowers' reconstruction helps to situate Paul in the wider context of both the Greco-Roman *paideia* as well as various local cultures. From a social identity perspective, it seems that the boundary between the elite *paideia* and Paul's alternative system was impermeable: why else would an alternative system be needed? Paul's message thus represents a measure of *social creativity* with regard to a dominant Greco-Roman cultural knowledge system. However, it also reveals that Paul was aware of the dominant Greco-Roman *paideia* and had some type of access to its knowledge system.

---

[55] Meaning culture, education, rhetoric, sophistry, philosophy, ancient science, etc. widely construed (Stowers 2011, 113 n. 23).

[56] Those interested were "a niche of consumers who found social distinction in acquiring such *paideia*" (2011, 116).

[57] Stowers 2011, 117. See also Ehrensperger (2013, 108): "Paul was not one of 'them.' He was one of those others–ruled, but not really civilized despite speaking Greek."

[58] Importantly, this also leads "towards universalizing knowledge and rhetoric" in his letters. This point of view is thus far missing from the hypotheses of a "particularistic" Paul (Stowers 2011, 115).

[59] Yet it did not carry a powerful background authority (Stowers 2011, 116).

Is "Being in Christ" a Knowledge System?

It is one of the hallmarks of modern Pauline studies that it avoids anachronistically attributing "Christianity" to Paul. Paul did not start (or follow) a new religion, and his message is deeply indebted to some of the central tenets of Judaism, which is Paul's heritage culture. It has been shown above, however, that Paul sometimes distances himself (even violently) from other central aspects of Judaism, although it is not always entirely obvious which knowledge system(s) he then switches to. Paul seems eager to identify with his gentile audience but is also at pains to view them as anything but stereotypical gentile sinners. At times, Paul also juxtaposes "being in Christ" with Jewishness. Sometimes this Christ-identity is portrayed as a superordinate category subsuming Jewishness (see discussion on 1 Corinthians above). In Philippians 3, Paul relates to his gentile audience that he has discarded his Jewish past and credentials "in order that [he] may gain Christ and be found in him" (3:8–9). This sounds as if the two are contrasted, and "being in Christ" is portrayed as a cultural framework to which one can switch. While it is probably a stretch to call "being in Christ" a knowledge system, I believe Paul does rhetorically suggest that it forms one. A modern scholar may say that this new system looks so much like Judaism that it remains subsumed in it. Pressed for a dispassionate answer, Paul might say the same. But from time to time, depending on the context, he points outward.

A Roman or Anti-Imperial Paul?

We now finally turn to viewing Paul more specifically in relation to *Romanitas* and the Roman Empire. As Ehrensperger notes: "Paul appears on the scene of history at a time and in a geographical area where the Roman Principate was firmly established, as was the claim of Roman rule around the entire Mediterranean basin" (2013, 107). In the light of Rome's relevance as a context for Paul's life and work, Ehrensperger then finds it "stunning" that this entity does not appear explicitly in Paul's letters (2013, 107). This silence has led many to

seek covert references to the Empire in Paul. A pioneer of this view is Richard Horsley, whose anti-imperial/postcolonial reading of Paul builds on James C. Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), where Scott argues for the existence in society of a *public transcript* by the dominant elite and various *hidden transcripts* by the subordinate people.[60] Horsley views Paul as "spearheading an international movement of political resistance," albeit one that refrained from direct acts of revolt.[61] It is noteworthy that the anti-imperial readings of Paul are often married to a "Paul within Judaism" hermeneutic, the logic being that since Paul cannot find fault with Judaism, he must find it in the Roman Empire.[62] Ehrensperger for one considers Horsley's view to be exaggerated but still allows for "traces of implicit and at times coded interaction with Roman ideology" throughout Paul's letters (2013, 107). A natural, although not necessary, assumption behind an empire-critical Paul is that he does not have a strong Roman identity himself. Does the evidence support this notion?

125

We may approach this question first by discussing Paul's alleged Roman citizenship. The question is tightly bound to the historical reliability of Acts, as no mention of citizenship is made in Paul's own

---

[60] The *public transcript* denotes the discourse controlled by the elite and visible to all. It is "the self-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen." The reactions of the subordinates, on the other hand, take many forms. First, the less fortunate can exploit the public image of the dominant to their own advantage, for example by appealing to the *alleged* goodwill of those in power. At the other extreme lies open defiance, which ruptures "the political *cordon sanitaire* between the hidden and the public transcript." Between these then is the vast field of *hidden transcripts*, which are "a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors." According to Scott, "rumor, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, and euphemisms—a good part of the folk culture of subordinate groups—fit this description" (1990, 2, 18–19).

[61] Horsley 2004b, 23. See also Horsley 2000, 2004a, 2008. Other proponents of the anti-imperial Paul include scholars such as Neil Elliott (1995), William S. Campbell (2008), and J. Brian Tucker (2010, 2011).

[62] Horsley 2004a, 3: "Instead of being opposed to Judaism, Paul's gospel of Christ was opposed to the Roman Empire."

letters. The Paul of Acts claims Roman citizenship in Acts 16:37–38 and 22:25–28. The latter reference is highly relevant to the rest of Paul's story in Acts: because his citizenship is revealed, Paul avoids torture and sentencing in Caesarea and is sent to Rome.[63] Roman citizenship was acquired in essentially three ways: paternally through birth, in connection with manumission, or by special concession from the authorities (e.g., because of achievement in military service).[64] Paul claims in Acts to have inherited his citizenship, which raises the question of Paul's family history. If Luke's story is taken as historical, Paul's forefathers must have gained Roman citizenship either through their manumission, social status, or achievements.[65] The matter of Paul's Roman citizenship needs, however, to be evaluated critically in light of our first-hand witness—Paul himself—who never mentions it. This is not merely an argument *e silentio*, since there are instances where Paul could be expected to mention his citizenship if he had one.[66] The author of Acts, on the other hand, with his emphasis on the harmonious relationship between Christ-followers and the state, has very good reasons to either fabricate the position or believe his mistaken sources about it. It is thus unlikely that Paul possessed Roman citizenship.

126

---

[63] Adams is correct in stating that "the entire final sequence of Acts, namely Paul's appeal, protection and travel to Rome, hinges entirely on Paul's Roman citizenship" (2008, 315). He is incorrect, however, to infer from this that the claim of citizenship is historically correct.

[64] Adams 2008, 309–10. Initially, citizenship was offered only to inhabitants of Rome, but between 70 and 28 BCE the number of citizens increased significantly. Finally, in 212 CE Caracalla made all free men citizens of Rome with the aim of acquiring more taxpayers and possible members of the military (Adams 2008, 309–15). As Roman citizenship became more available, the significance of social class increased (Tucker 2010, 104).

[65] Adams (2008, 320) suggests that Paul's family may have represented the upper class of Tarsus and would therefore have been offered citizenship when Pompey captured the city. This is, of course, complete conjecture.

[66] I think here especially of the letter to the Philippians, which Paul writes imprisoned by the Romans and to an audience in a Roman colony whom he seeks to impress with connections to the Roman imperial guard (Phil 1:13).

While explicit references to Roman citizenship are clearly missing in Paul's letters, the question of whether he displays Roman ideas or ideology in a wider sense leaves much more room for interpretation. Paul certainly makes no reference to Roman law or mythology, nor does he emphasize a close connection to *Romanitas* by writing anything in Latin.[67] There are, however, situations where Paul identifies with some Roman values, namely Roman prejudices against the Jews. When Paul attacks those who demand physical circumcision of the Gentile Christ-followers (esp. Gal 5:12; Phil 3:2), he represents circumcision through Roman eyes as an act of ridiculous and barbaric castration.[68] In Philippians, this may have been part of Paul's attempt to identify with the audience and prime the Roman values of these inhabitants of a Roman colony. To be sure, we cannot know how well this procedure resonated with the audience. Paul's Roman derogatory stereotype of Jews is based on his stereotypical understanding of Romans—which again may signal distance from it.

According to J. Brian Tucker, concrete Roman identity markers are embedded in a "broader status-oriented cultural ethos of the Mediterranean basin" comprising the ideology of honor/shame and the systems of patronage and kinship.[69] These are, of course, abundantly reflected in Paul, but do not aid in detecting specifically Roman influences or a Roman sense of identity. The language and ideology of power can be counted within this wider ethos. While many have stressed

127

---

[67] Tucker summarizes the "concrete social identity markers" as "the toga, citizenship, Latin, and the law" (2010, 105). Romans had a special appreciation of Latin and expected Roman citizens to know it. From the Roman point of view, Greek was an official language, but clearly the second-best option, especially in public settings. The point may be mitigated by the fact that Greek was predominant in the Roman East, which means that Roman attitudes towards it may have been different there. See Ehrensperger 2013, 64–72.

[68] See Nikki 2018, 164. For the Roman phallic culture, see Crossan and Reed 2004, 257–69, and for Roman vilification of Jewish circumcision, see Smallwood 1981, 124.

[69] Tucker 2010, 105–17 (talking about these "ordering principles").

the difference between Rome and Judaism or Paul in this respect,[70] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has remarked that Paul seeks in his texts "to maintain his own authority by engaging the rhetorics of othering, censure, vituperation, exclusion, vilification, and even violence toward the community" with the result that "Paul's politics of meaning often seems not very different from the hegemonic discourses of domination and empire."[71] The protagonists may change, but not the "kyriarchal" ideology (Schüssler Fiorenza 2000, 50). This, of course, does not reveal that Paul identified with Rome, only that he does not oppose its ideology on this level.

One passage reveals Paul's attitude toward Roman authorities in a particularly straightforward manner. The text is Romans 13:1–7, which begins: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God (13:1)." This passage is particularly important, as it is the only one where Paul explicitly discusses the issue of political authorities (Huttunen 2020, 105). This text has generated much discussion in New Testament scholarship because of its seemingly unproblematic call to obey political authorities (Huttunen 2020, 102). Niko Huttunen shows that the various attempts to mitigate the text (including anti-imperialist readings) lack a basis. He argues that the text does not represent a historically situational discourse[72] but a universal rule. It is not designed to convey irony, nor does it denote

---

[70] According to Ehrensperger, Jews readily applied cultural influences from various sources—but only to stress the distinct identity of their own group "in the context of subjugation by dominating powers" (2013, 114).

[71] Schüssler Fiorenza 2000, 49. Schüssler Fiorenza calls for a true ideological criticism of Paul, and especially of the "scholarly rhetorics that foster a hermeneutics of identification with Paul" (2000, 50). Ehrensperger, reading Paul compliantly, offers but a weak counterargument: "Whether the use of a language of power inherently replicates structures of domination and subordination" is in her view "a matter of debate" (2019, 140).

[72] A good example of this line of argumentation is Elliott, who considers the passage "a foreign body" and believes that Paul encourages submission to authorities, particularly in the Roman setting, "for now" in order "to safeguard the most vulnerable around and among the Roman Christians, those Jews struggling

heavenly authorities instead of worldly ones. Moreover, the passage does not qualify the authorities in any way or suggest that they are bound by a higher law.[73] The power of the authorities is not limited to an earthly regimen in Lutheran style. The text simply suggests that rulers are to be obeyed without qualification (Huttunen 2020, 106–15). The statement is unconditional and absolute.[74]

Huttunen considers Paul's argument for obeying the authorities to arise from the Greco-Roman idea of the *law of the stronger*, for which Huttunen offers several examples from contemporary literature (2020, 113–19). He also argues that the law of the stronger was not completely arbitrary concerning the ethical requirements of the powerful, who were "not without obligations for the good of the weaker." He sees this as operating behind Paul's statement on the authorities working "for your good" (Rom 13:4) (2020, 124–25).

Huttunen accepts that Paul clearly places the one God of Israel above earthly rulers. He does not, however, consider this to be a sign of subversiveness (2020, 108). According to Huttunen, Paul simply participates in the Jewish tradition of submitting to the imperial power without abandoning monotheism. Importantly, this tradition was recognized and accepted by the Romans. For Paul, this "Jewish imperial theology was a means to legitimately avoid the Roman gods" (Huttunen 2020, 118). In Huttunen's solution, Paul speaks and acts from the weaker position of a minority, and his submission to earthly authorities is coupled with a parallel reality and "fantasy" regarding the kingdom of God. The belief that this kingdom would eventually conquer all served as a politically safe way to cope with reality, but it was not a hidden or covert wish.[75]

---

to rebuild their shattered community in the wake of imperial violence" (1997, 203).

[73] The idea of earthly authorities being bound by a law that stands higher than them is a later, emphatically Western development (Huttunen 2020, 109–10).

[74] Huttunen (2020, 102, 105) still admits that Paul has occasional critical remarks on the authorities as well (e.g., 1 Cor 15:24).

[75] Huttunen (2020, 136–37) emphasizes that some of the ideals of the imaginary world eventually became reality through the general influence of Christianity.

The social identity approach recognizes that subordinate groups apply different strategies in relation to dominant groups—from direct competition to various forms of social creativity—depending on their cognitive belief systems and their understanding of the legitimacy of the situation (Hogg and Abrams 1988). Huttunen's view of Romans 13 translates well to the social identity and multicultural perspectives. From this theoretical framework, revolution and subversion amount to *social competition* with a group of higher status. As was indicated above, a blatant challenge to the superior group is not a common occurrence with lower-status minority groups. By creating a spiritual alternative (thus, an alternative level of comparison), Paul engages in *social creativity* and not social competition. Social creativity is based on the cognitive conviction that the boundaries between the lower and higher groups are impermeable and that the lower group cannot openly challenge the higher group. Furthermore, it considers the existing power relations as legitimate (hence, "the law of the stronger"). This is a more typical reaction by minorities and is essentially what differentiates this reaction from the "hidden transcript" hypothesis, which views dissatisfaction with the dominant group as the main motivator. Social creativity measures are mainly intended to boost the ingroup's self-esteem through creative measures meant for "internal consumption." Importantly, Paul also fosters harmony and secure attachment between the ingroup and the Empire by stressing that the authorities are "God's servant for your good" (Rom 13:4). Despite his accepting attitude toward Rome, Paul is clearly not identifying with the Romans here (although he may do it elsewhere at times). He is not, however, being subversive either. Indeed, Paul never formulates a this-worldly legal or administrative system that would contest the Empire (Schröter 2017).

It is tempting to suggest that Romans 13, as a uniquely straightforward and informative statement regarding Paul's attitude toward the Empire, should inform the interpretation of less explicit references as well.[76] This would certainly be a more legitimate starting point than advancing from hidden meanings in vaguer texts and then attempting to

---

[76] On the hierarchy between clear and implicit texts in mirror-reading Paul's texts, see Nikki 2019, 28–31, 44.

fit the single explicit text into that narrative. However, a serious caveat is included in the very idea of Paul's multicultural and flexible identity, which makes it genuinely possible that at times he may have engaged in criticism of the Empire as well. In this, Pauline studies could benefit from a multicultural perspective that takes Paul's access to many cultural knowledge systems seriously.

Conclusion

This article looked at the ways Paul represents multiple cultural identifications in his letters. Two theoretical frameworks enabled the recognition of this multiplicity. First, the recent advances in viewing the Roman Empire from the perspective of globalization were used to problematize a monolithic and state-centered view of Romanness and to replace it with a more realistic view of multiple centers, identities, and networks in Rome. This perspective, along with purely exegetical observations, was applied to complicate the currently popular theory of Paul as highly critical of the Roman Empire. Second, the perspective of multiculturalism was applied to account for Paul's various knowledge systems, between which he, as a member of the globalized Roman Empire, could switch according to the varying contexts and intergroup situations he found himself in. What emerged was an image of a multifaceted individual. Paul is robustly and "chronically" a Jewish man, but he sometimes emphatically and expressly denies central aspects of Judaism. He is not a citizen of Rome, but sometimes takes a stereotypically Roman point of view when deriding Jews. He attempts to create an alternative *paideia* but reveals in the process his dependence on and knowledge of the Greco-Roman elite *paideia* (Stowers 2011). Lastly, he does not establish a new people or religion, yet suggests that "being in Christ" might fill the requirements of a new cultural knowledge system.

131

Bibliography

Adams, Sean A. 2008. "Paul The Roman Citizen: Roman Citizenship in the Ancient World and Its Importance for Understanding Acts 22:22–29." In *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman*, edited by Stanley E. Porter, 309–326. Leiden: Brill.

Benet-Martínez, Verónica, and Jana Haritatos. 2005. "Bicultural Identity Integration (BII): Components and Psychosocial Antecedents." *Journal of Personality* 73, no. 4: 1015–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2005.00337.x.

Benet-Martínez, Verónica, and Ying-yi Hong. 2014. "Introduction: The Psychology of Multicultural Identity and Experiences." In *The Oxford Handbook of Multicultural Identity*, edited by Verónica Benet-Martínez and Ying-yi Hong, 1–8. New York: Oxford University Press.

Betz, Hans Dieter. 2015. *Studies in Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Campbell, William S. 2008. *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*. London: T & T Clark.

Cohen, Shaye. 1999. *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Collins, John J. 2005. "Hellenistic Judaism in Recent Scholarship." In *Jewish Cult and Hellenistic Culture: Essays on the Jewish Encounter with Hellenism and Roman Rule*, 1–20. Leiden: Brill.

Crossan, Dominic, and Jonathan L. Reed. 2004. *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom*. New York: HarperOne.

Doyle, Michael. 1986. *Empires*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Ehrensperger, Kathy. 2013. *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures: Theologizing in the Space Between*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark.

Ehrensperger, Kathy. 2019. *Searching Paul: Conversations with the Jewish Apostle to the Nations. Collected Essays*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Elliott, Neil. 1995. *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Elliott, Neil. 1997. "Romans 13:1–7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda." In *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, edited by Richard S. Horsley, 184–204. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International.

Erskine, Andrew. 2010. *Roman Imperialism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Esler, Philip F. 1998. *Galatians*. London & New York: Routledge.

Esler, Philip F. 2003. *Identity and Conflict in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Gager, John. 2000. *Reinventing Paul*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gardner, Andrew. 2013. "Thinking about Roman Imperialism: Postcolonialism, Globalisation and Beyond?" *Britannia* 44: 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068113X13000172.

Gaston, Lloyd. 1987. *Paul and the Torah*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers.

Gikandi, Simon. 2000. "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 3: 627–58. http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/00382876-100-3-627.

Gordon, Milton M. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hakola, Raimo. 2007. "Social Identities and Group Phenomena in Second Temple Judaism." In *Explaining Christian Origins and Early Judaism: Contributions from Cognitive and Social Science*, edited by Petri Luomanen, Ilkka Pyysiäinen, and Risto Uro, 259–76. Leiden: Brill.

Hall, Jonathan M. 1997. *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hengel, Martin. 1969. *Judentum und Hellenismus: Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2. Jh. v. Chr.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Hogg, Michael A., and Dominic Abrams. 1988. *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes*. London: Routledge.

Holmberg, Bengt. 2008. "Understanding the First Hundred Years of Christian Identity." In *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, edited by Bengt Holmberg, 1–32. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Hong, Ying-yi, Roisman, G. I., & Chen, J. 2006. A Model of Cultural Attachment: A New Approach for Studying Bicultural Experience. In Acculturation and parent-child relationships: Measurement and development, edited by M. H. Bornstein & L. R. Cote, 135–70. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Hong, Ying-yi, and Mark Khei. 2014. "Dynamic Multiculturalism: The Interplay of Socio-Cognitive, Neural, and Genetic Mechanisms." In *The Oxford Handbook of Multicultural Identity*, edited by Verónica Benet-Martínez and Ying-yi Hong, 11–34. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hopkins, A. G., ed. 2002. *Globalization in World History*. London: Pimlico.

Horsley, Richard A. 2004a. *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.

133

Horsley Richard A. 2004b. "Introduction: Jesus, Paul, and the 'Arts of Resistance: Leaves from the Notebook of James C. Scott." *Hidden Transcripts and the Arts of Resistance: Applying the Work of James C. Scott to Jesus and Paul*, edited by Richard S. Horsley, 1–28. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Horsley, Richard A., ed. 2008. *In the Shadow of Empire: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Huttunen, Niko. 2002. *Early Christians Adapting to the Roman Empire: Mutual Recognition*. Leiden: Brill.

Johnson Hodge, Caroline. 2007. *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jokiranta, Jutta, Katri Antin, Rick Bonnie, Raimo Hakola, Hanna Tervanotko, Elisa Uusimäki, and Sami Yli-Karjanmaa. 2017. "Changes in Research on Judaism in the Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods: An Invitation to Interdisciplinarity." *Studia Theologica: Nordic Journal of Theology* 72, no. 1: 3–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/0039338X.2017.1402370.

Judd, Charles M., and Bernadette Park. 1988. "Outgroup Homogeneity: Judgments of Variability at the Individual and Group Levels." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 54, no. 5: 778–88. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.5.778.

Judd, Charles M., Carey S. Ryan, and Bernadette Park. 1991. "Accuracy in the Judgment of In-Group and Out-Group Variability." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61, no. 3: 366–79. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-3514.61.3.366.

Mattingly, David. 2011. *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kujanpää, Katja. 2019. *The Rhetorical Functions of Scriptural Quotations in Romans: Paul's Argumentation by Quotations*. Boston: Brill.

Mason, Steve. 2007. "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History." *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38, no. 4–5: 457–512. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156851507X193108.

Nikki, Nina. 2013. "The Flexible Apostle: Paul's Varied Social Identifications in 1 Corinthians 9 and Philippians 3." In *"Others" and the Construction of Early Christian Identities*, edited by Raimo Hakola, Nina Nikki, and Ulla Tervahauta, 75–101. Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society.

Nikki, Nina 2016. "Contesting the Past, Competing over the Future: Why Is Paul Past Oriented in Galatians and Romans, but Future Oriented in Philippians?" In *Social Memory and Social Identity in the Study of Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, edited by Samuel Byrskog, Raimo Hakola, and Jutta Jokiranta, 241–56. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

134

Nikki, Nina. 2019. *Opponents and Identity in Philippians.* Leiden: Brill.

Nikki, Nina. 2021. "Was Paul Tolerant? An Assessment of William S. Campbell's and J. Brian Tucker's 'Particularistic' Paul." In *Tolerance, Intolerance, and Recognition in Early Christianity and Early Judaism*, edited by Outi Lehtipuu and Michael Labahn, 113–37. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Nikki, Nina. 2022. "Challenges in the Study of the Historical Paul." In *Common Ground and Diversity in Early Christian Thought and Study: Essays in Memory of Heikki Räisänen*, edited by Raimo Hakola, Outi Lehtipuu, and Nina Nikki, 185–209. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. 2015. "Ancient Rome and Globalisation: Decentring Rome." In *Globalisation and the Roman World: World History, Connectivity and Material Culture*, edited by Martin Pitts and Miguel John Versluys, 225–39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pitts, Martin, and Miguel John Versluys. 2014. "Globalisation and the Roman World: Perspectives and Opportunities." In *Globalisation and the Roman World: World History, Connectivity and Material Culture*, edited by Martin Pitts and Miguel John Versluys, 1–31. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Räisänen, Heikki. 2001. "Interpreting Paul." In *Challenges to Biblical Interpretation: Collected Essays 1991–2001*, 85–100. Leiden: Brill.

Räisänen, Heikki. 2010. *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Reinhartz, Adele. 2014. "The Vanishing Jews of Antiquity." *Marginalia: A Review of Books in History, Theology and Religion*, June 24. https://the marginaliareview.com/vanishing-jews-antiquity-adele-reinhartz/.

Sanders, E. P. 2009. "Paul between Judaism and Hellenism." In *St. Paul among the Philosophers,* edited by John D. Caputo and Linda Martín Alcoff, 74–90. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Schröter, Jens. 2017 "God's Righteousness and Human Law: A New Testament Perspective on Law and Theology." *Journal of Law and Religion* 32, no. 1: 9–16. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2017.21.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. 2000. "Paul and the Politics of Interpretation." In *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*, edited by Richard A. Horsley, 40–57. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.

Schwartz, Seth J., Vivian L. Vignoles, William Brown, and Hanna Zagefka. 2014. "The Identity Dynamics of Acculturation and Multiculturalism: Situating Acculturation in Context." In *The Oxford Handbook of Multicultural Identity*, edited by Verónica Benet-Martínez and Ying-yi Hong, 57–94. New York: Oxford University Press.

135

Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Sherman, Steven J., David L. Hamilton, and Amy C. Lewis. 1999. "Perceived Entitativity and the Social Identity Value of Group Membership." In *Social Identity and Social Cognition*, edited by Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg, 80–110. Oxford: Blackwell.

Simon, Bernd, and Rupert J. Brown. 1987. "Perceived Intragroup Homogeneity in Minority–Majority Contexts." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53, no. 4: 703–11. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-3514.53.4.703.

Smallwood, E. Mary. 1981. *Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian. A Study in Political Relations.* 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill.

Stowers, Stanley. 2011. "Kinds of Myth, Meals, and Power: Paul and the Corinthians." In *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians*, edited by Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller, 105–50. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Tucker, J. Brian. 2010. *You Belong to Christ: Paul and the Formation of Social Identity in 1 Corinthians 1–4.* Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.

Tucker, J. Brian. 2011. *Remain in Your Calling: Paul and the Continuation of Social Identities in 1 Corinthians.* Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.

Wallerstein, Immanuel M. 1974. *The Modern World System, Vol. I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century.* New York: Academic Press.

Wallerstein, Immanuel M. 1980. *The Modern World System, Vol. II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World Economy.* New York: Academic Press.

Wallerstein, Immanuel M. 1989. *The Modern World System, Vol. III: The Second Great Expansion of the Capitalist World Economy, 1730–1840.* New York: Academic Press.

Zetterholm, Magnus. 2009. *Approaches to Paul: A Student's Guide to Recent Scholarship.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Zetterholm, Magnus. 2015. "Paul within Judaism: The State of the Questions." In *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, edited by Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, 31–51. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

136

LOCAL AND GLOBAL NARRATIVES AT PALMYRA

Eivind Heldaas Seland

Abstract

While early scholarship aimed to uncover the Eastern and Western elements of Palmyrene identity, recent research appreciates that Palmyra was first and foremost at the center of its own world. At the same time, Palmyra was deeply embedded in networks spanning the length of Eurasia and far into the Indian Ocean. The Palmyrenes seem to have moved easily along and between these trajectories while maintaining group cohesion and orientation toward their common homeland. Here, they adopted and adapted the impulses encountered abroad in order to use them for their own purposes. In this article, I explore how Palmyrene iconographic, epigraphic, and architectural records might be interpreted as speech acts—performative statements—by which local elites inscribed themselves in a range of narratives that communicated on different scales. The Palmyrene cityscape thus integrated local, regional, imperial, and global representations in manners that signify integration, accommodation, and, in some cases, arguably also rejection.

Während die frühe Forschung darauf abzielte, die östlichen und westlichen Elemente der palmyrenischen Identität aufzudecken, geht die neuere Forschung davon aus, dass Palmyra in erster Linie das Zentrum seiner eigenen Welt war. Gleichzeitig war Palmyra tief in Netzwerke eingebettet, die sich über die gesamte Länge Eurasiens und bis weit in den Indischen Ozean erstreckten. Die Palmyrener scheinen sich problemlos entlang und zwischen diesen Trajektorien bewegt zu haben und dabei den Gruppenzusammenhalt und die Orientierung an ihrem gemeinsamen Heimatland bewahrt zu haben. Dabei haben sie die Impulse aus dem Ausland aufgegriffen und adaptiert, um sie für ihre eigenen Zwecke zu nutzen. In diesem Artikel untersuche ich, wie ikonografische, epigraphische und architektonische Aufzeichnungen aus Palmyrene als „Speech-acts", d.h. performative Aussagen, interpretiert werden könnten, mit denen sich lokale Eliten in eine Reihe von Erzählungen einschrieben, die auf unterschiedlichen Ebenen kommunizierten. Das Stadtbild von Palmyra integrierte somit lokale, regionale, imperiale und globale Repräsentationen auf eine Art und Weise, die sowohl Integration als auch Anpassung und in einigen Fällen wohl auch Ablehnung bedeutete.

LOCAL AND GLOBAL NARRATIVES AT PALMYRA

Eivind Heldaas Seland

139

The Onion of the Desert

In the final act of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's widely performed *Peer Gynt*, the protagonist is trying to find out who he really is at the core. "I'm going to peel you like an onion," he says to himself, only to find out that an onion has no core; you remove layer after layer, until you are left with nothing but swathes in your hand.

Since the rediscovery of the ancient city in the late seventeenth century, Palmyra has been at the center of a struggle for heritage and identity. To modern observers, however, Palmyra resembles Ibsen's protagonist. Scholars keep peeling off layers, but there is no kernel in sight, and the identity of the inhabitants of the ancient city remains elusive. What is at stake is arguably nothing short of ownership of the past. To the first visitors, European merchants living as expatriates in Aleppo and carrying on trade between India, the Levant, and Europe, the Palmyrenes were bewildering: These people were ancients—Greek, Roman, and Oriental at the same time. They were venerable for their

architecture, art, learning, and general prowess, but sadly mistaken in their polytheism. They were wealthy to the degree of opulence and with connections to the biblical past.

However, they were also curiously like their discoverers.[1] This idea was not without justifications. These early commentators were observing Palmyra from the vantage point of a premodern world. They were personally engaged in the operation of long-distance trade, relying on camels for transport, much like the Palmyrenes had been. Although they were as ethnocentric as most people, they were living in a time before ideas of Western supremacy had been formulated, and when the perceived hierarchy in value and quality between expressions from different parts of antiquity had not yet been established. This was rapidly changing, however, and the process of detaching Palmyra from its regional roots and recasting it as a product of classical civilization would soon be underway. Robert Wood's *The Ruins of Palmyra* (1753) made the city famous across Europe and North America. Jen Baird and Zena Kamash (2019), in their study of the notes and sketches that formed the basis of Wood's book, demonstrate how Wood and his companions carefully curated their report of the site to fit contemporary ideals of classical architecture, playing down elements of Palmyrene heritage that did not fit this narrative, including the settlement's Semitic name, Tadmor.

Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars also wanted to cast Palmyra as a part of a Western tradition. Thus, the trading city in the Syrian Desert (Fig. 1) was seen as ruled by a merchant aristocracy, not unlike European cities of the medieval and early modern periods.[2] The idea of a connection between ancient Palmyra and later European history is still very much alive in book titles like Ernst Will's *La Venise des sables* [*Venice of the Sands*] (1992), and was also a subtext of much of the media coverage and some of the scholarly literature provoked by the destruction of Palmyrene monuments during the Islamic State occupation in 2015–2017.[3]

---

[1] Halifax and Conder 1890 (1695); Seller 1696: 12–13.

[2] Mommsen 1904: 428–29; Rostovtzeff 1932a; Seland 2020.

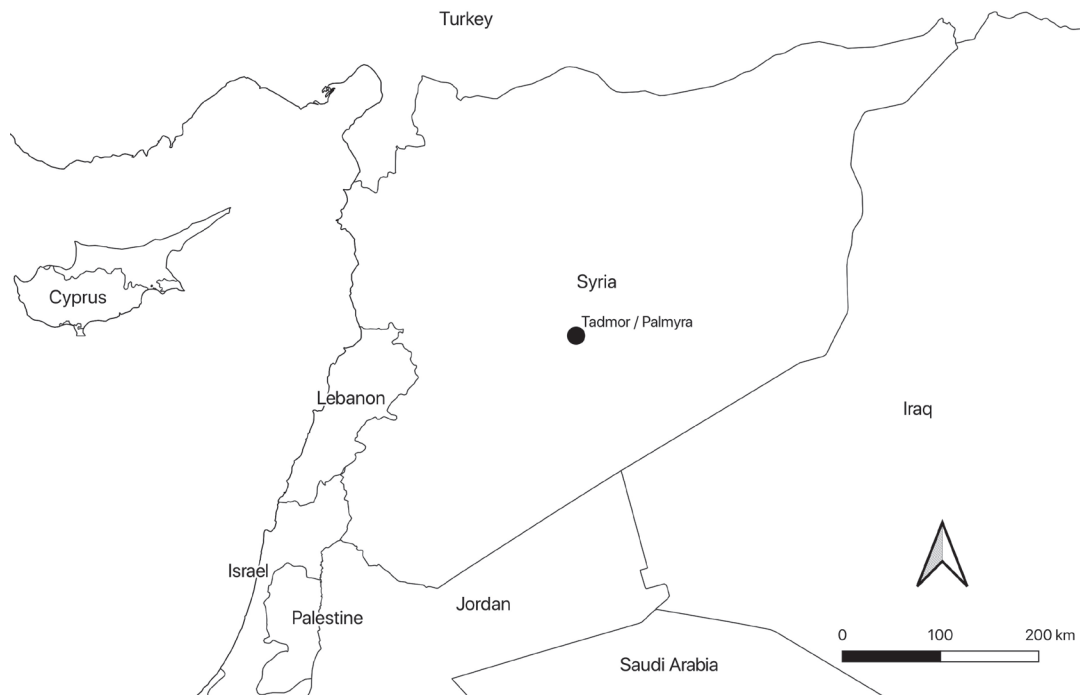[3] McInnes-Gibbons 2016–2017; Nitschke 2020.
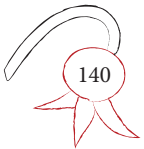
Figure 1. Situation of Palmyra. Eivind Heldaas Seland.

Quite apart from the popular and scholarly reception of Palmyra as part of the *glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome* that had been tragically lost to the encroaching forces of the desert, sober and careful arguments have also been put forth for Palmyra being an ordinary city of the Roman East.[4] Other scholars, however, see Palmyra as a child of the Orient, a place where Eastern traditions were shaped into a Western form, albeit imperfectly so according to early commentators,[5] and where the rich epigraphic and architectural heritage could offer insight into local and regional traditions preceding and in competition with the imperial (Hellenistic and Roman) traditions. These competing narratives of Palmyrene identity have to some degree converged—but arguably still coexist, with different emphases having been placed on imperial Roman, Hellenistic, Eastern, and local/regional aspects—since the emergence of the Roman Near East as a distinct historiographical category in the 1990s.[6]

---

[4] Seyrig 1932; Sartre 1996.

[5] Seyrig 1950; Richmond 1963.

[6] Millar 1994; Yon 2002; Butcher 2003; Sartre 2005; Andrade 2013; Smith 2013; Ball 2016; Sommer 2018.

The observation that scholarship on Palmyra has been influenced by modernizing, classicizing, Orientalizing, colonial, and postcolonial trends, often by the same scholars and within the same works, entails no accusation of hidden motives on the parts of past or present scholars of Palmyra. It is clear, however, that these traditions, although founded on careful and disinterested scholarship, cannot be seen independent of British, French, and Russian imperial ambitions unfolding in the Near East in the same period, or of Syrian and Arab nationalism and the process of decolonization. Moreover, all these narratives arguably find support in the iconographic, literary, epigraphic, and architectural records of Palmyra, but despite, or even because of this, they tell just one side of the story, and it is this polyphony and diversity in the material from Palmyra that makes the city such a fruitful object of study. While this polyphony is present across the Near East, Palmyra is one of the places where it comes to the forefront. This also makes Palmyra an interesting case for the study of processes relating to those we would today call processes of "globalization."

In a previous study, I argued that Palmyra is a case in point of how such processes played out in the ancient world, and how the main temple of Bel, the *necropoleis*, the colonnaded main street, the civic center around the agora, and the Roman amphitheater, if there indeed was one, epitomize arenas for the representation of different facets of Palmyrene identity that are visible in the urban plan of the city (Seland 2021). Below, I aim to expand on this argument along different lines in looking at how the Palmyrenes inscribed themselves into local and global narratives through the epigraphic and iconographic records that have come down to us.

Narratives and Self-Representation

The argument builds on the theoretical premise that no kind of source material from the past, whether historical, archeological, iconographic, or other by itself informs us about the past (Fletcher 2004). Rather they become meaningful because they belong in discursive contexts on which we depend to interpret them, while at the same time our data

142

feeds back to our understanding of these contexts. The example of the very different reconstructions of Palmyra as an either typical Greek or a typical Oriental community underlines how our interpretation is shaped by the discourses within which we are operating. The interpretation of Palmyra as a globalized community is also a product of such dialogues between past and present. One way to investigate such discursive contexts is to approach them as historical narratives, as stories that people create so that their situation fits in with their overarching ideas about how the world works.[7] In Palmyra, we find narratives, produced by the Palmyrenes themselves rather than by modern scholars, that communicated on various levels, from the small-scale and local, to the large-scale, and global.

There are at least three approaches to ancient globalization represented in recent scholarly literature, all of which are shaped by conceptions of what the global and globalization are in the contemporary world. One group of scholars has been interested in the establishment of communication and the development of economic and political hierarchies and interdependence, tracing such processes back to the Middle Bronze Age.[8] A second body of work emphasizes cultural contact and change, accompanied by the standardization and/or hybridization of cultural expressions (Hingley 2005). A third strand of investigation has studied self-conception, arguing, for example, that the successive Iranian empires and, more often, the Roman Empire were globalized in the sense that they claimed universal authority and that they perceived their empire writ large, *their* world, as being identical with *the* world (Pitts and Versluys 2014). Palmyra, positioned between two empires each making a claim to world power and acting as a hub in economic as well as cultural transfers between them is a case study of obvious interest within all these paradigms.

---

[7] Ricoeur 1990; Rüsen 2005.

[8] Gills and Frank 2003; LaBianca and Scham 2006; Seland 2008.

Figure 2. Funerary towers in the so-called "Valley of Tombs" northwest of Palmyra. Destroyed by the Islamic State in 2015. Photo: Jørgen Christian Meyer.

Ancient Evidence as Utterances

One set of materials that allows us to identify and reconstruct how the inhabitants of Palmyra wanted to appear to the world is the inscriptional record from Palmyra. The city was to a large degree subject to what Ramsay MacMullen (1982) described as the "epigraphic habit." We have a preserved corpus of approximately 3,200 texts, most of them in Aramaic, more than 550 in Greek, many of them bilingual, and a small handful in Latin.[9] Fergus Millar described Palmyra as "the only publicly bilingual city of the Roman Near East."[10] Surely, this is significant, and it has indeed recently been addressed by Ted Kaizer (2018) in a study of how the Palmyrenes identified themselves on coins, and in inscriptions, sculptures, and works of art.

---

[9] Hillers and Cussini 1996; Yon 2012.

[10] Millar 1993, 470; Kaizer 2018, 76.

Each of the inscriptions can be interpreted as a speech act, that is as a performative statement. By such statements, the Palmyrenes and others who left inscriptions in the city consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly, subscribed to overarching narratives, some local, some, regional, and some global.[11] The interpretation of inscriptions as speech acts is relatively straightforward and presumably uncontroversial. Other utterances might also be interpreted in the same manner, including iconographic and architectural ones. Arguably, such data can be seen as statements and as parts of narratives that might bring us closer to appreciating how the Palmyrenes wanted to represent themselves. Perhaps this is a more fruitful approach than asking questions about Palmyrene identity, to which our chances of finding an answer are close to those Peer Gynt had of finding the kernel of an onion. Instead of asking where the Palmyrenes picked up this or that element of their material and epigraphic culture, we might ask what they were trying to express about themselves by using these elements. In this way, we may better cast the Palmyrenes as agents in their own life. Likely, the Palmyrenes told all kinds of stories about themselves, many of which we are not able to discern today. Nevertheless, a set of narratives may be identified that relate to scale. They range from stories relating to the very local—the family—to stories relating to lineage, tribe, city, region, empire, and the world.
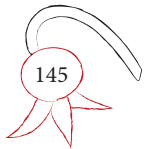
Funerary Spaces

Starting on the local level, this is very much where the funerary spaces of the Palmyrenes belong. Over time, the dominant funerary custom changed from tower tombs (Fig. 2) by way of underground *hypogea*, to so-called "temple" or "house tombs."[12] More than 150 monuments are known. The largest have more than 400 *loculi*, or shelves, for individual burials, which were each sealed with a portrait depicting the deceased, in some cases with spouse and dead children or a servant, but more

---

[11] Searle 1969, esp. 14–19; Ober 1996, 10–11, 33.

[12] Gawlikowski 1970; Schmidt-Colinet 1992.

145

Figure 3. Funerary relief of Shalmat and Atenatan, mid second century CE, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek I.N. 1028.
Photo: Eivind Heldaas Seland.

Figure 4. Banqueting relief depicting a priest and his family.
Palmyra Museum A910. Photo: Jørgen Christian Meyer.

often alone (Fig. 3). This material has recently been studied in detail by the Palmyra Portrait Project, which has identified more than 3,700 surviving funerary portraits (Raja 2018). Despite this impressive number, unparalleled elsewhere in the archeological record of the Roman world outside Rome itself, it is clear that only a minority of Palmyra's inhabitants over three centuries were buried in this fashion. The funerary monuments thus signify the self-representation of the Palmyrene elite, which one could access based on genealogical descent.

These monuments were neither private nor public, or perhaps they were both at the same time. The tombs seem to have been owned by individuals or small groups of named individuals, as foundational inscriptions document, and they were transferred as parts of inheritance and on occasion sold (Gawlikowski 1970, 184–219). Also, monuments celebrating the owner of the grave, sometimes depicted with his nuclear family in the background, survive. Nevertheless, it is clear that the tombs were used by larger groups than nuclear families. The funerary inscriptions are with some very few exceptions all in Palmyrene Aramaic. Except for the foundation inscriptions, they are brief and formulaic, giving names, family relation (son of, more rarely daughter of, wife of, brother of, sister of), and a brief "alas" (*ḥbl*). Most inscriptions give three generations of names, many five, some even more, a clear indication of the importance of patrilinear descent (Brughmans et al. 2021).

In many cases, the earliest ancestor given is clearly not an actual grandfather or great-grandfather, but the eponymous founder of the lineage. Details of the social organization of Palmyra are not clear, but commentators distinguish between families, clans/lineages, and tribes based primarily on the number of individuals belonging to the (often undoubtedly perceived) kinship networks described in the inscriptions.[13] Larger funerary monuments contain the burials of multiple nuclear families over several generations (Sadurska and Bounni 1994), and arguably they serve as celebrations both of the family and the lineage as well as the deceased individual. Despite claims to the opposite, we have very little information about the lives of the deceased documented

---
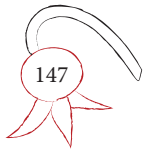
[13] Piersimoni 1995, 530–31; Smith 2013, 33–54.

Figure 5. So-called funerary temple (TP 301).
Photo Jørgen Christian Meyer.

in portraits and inscriptions, the dominant profession visible being, as Rubina Raja's (e.g., 2017) work demonstrates, that of the priest, easily recognizable because of the characteristic hats (Fig. 4).

The stories told by the Palmyrenes in their funerary spaces play out on a very local scale. They communicate almost exclusively in Aramaic, so no advertisement is made to the official wider world of the Roman East, where most inscriptions were in Greek, although the many Aramaic speakers in the region would be able to understand to the extent that they were literate. Many genealogies, in some cases likely fictitious, in others, actual, go back to the urban beginning of Palmyra around the start of the common era. As Palmira Piersimoni points out, some genealogies are accompanied by the ethnonym *tdmryʾ*, meaning "from Tadmor," perhaps separating themselves from newcomers and latecomers to the city (2015, 551). The funerary world of Palmyra is not, however, a completely closed one. There are many family graves. A few eponymous founders have names indicating Roman, Greek, and Iranian origins or freedman status (cf. Piersimoni 1995, 515). While

148

the Roman names in some cases clearly belong to Palmyrenes who had earned citizenship, some of these graves might have belonged to families originating outside Palmyra that had managed to become part of the local elite. A handful of inscriptions also detail the ceding of parts of a tomb to other families (Gawlikowski 1970, 204–19). Nevertheless, it is clear that this was a world with restricted access. The vast majority of people dying in Palmyra were not buried in these monumental tombs, and as of now we do not know what happened to them. However, the way into this world of the dead was not foremost through wealth, but through belonging to a group with traditional status and authority, something that had to be accumulated over time and that could only be faked or bought with effort and difficulty.

Starting with the mid-second century CE, a new type of tomb appears, the so-called "house" or "temple tombs" (Fig. 5). The tower tombs disappear, while new *hypogea* continue to be constructed. Michał Gawlikowski (1970, 129–47) and Andreas Schmidt-Colinet (1995, 30–52) both see this as Western/Roman imperial influence on Palmyra. The adoption of an architectural form common in other parts of the Empire, however, also entails Palmyrene agency. People who invested
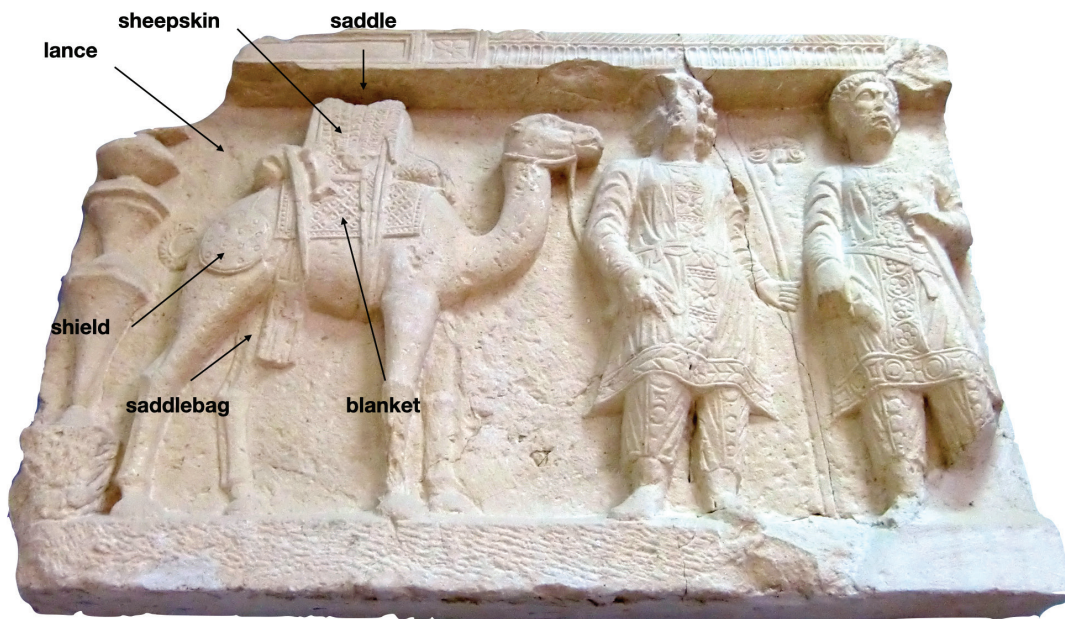
149

Figure 6. Palmyra Museum Inventory Number: 2093/7431.
Photo: Jørgen Christian Meyer.

vast sums, comparable to the price of a ship or the annual pay of a military detachment, in a monument seem by this time to have wanted to tell a different story about themselves. By building funerary monuments in line with what was common elsewhere in the Roman Empire, they arguably wanted to represent themselves as other rich people in the Roman world rather than as clan leaders in the desert (Seland 2020). By doing this, they were inscribing themselves in a global narrative, to the degree that we are willing to accept the Romans' own view of their empire as a world-system of its own.[14]

Public Spaces
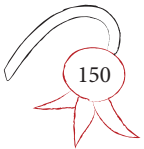
A third narrative told at Palmyra was that of the city. As was the case with the social organization, there is much that remains obscure about Palmyrene civic organization. From inscriptions displayed in the streets, squares, and sanctuaries of Palmyra, we have evidence both for the tribal structures visible also in the funerary inscriptions *and* for civic institutions such as "the people," "the council," and at least a limited range of magistrates including standard Greek offices such as the *strategos* ("military commander") and the *agoranomos* ("market overseer"). There is also evidence of offices elsewhere unattested, such as the *synodiarches* ("caravan leader") and the *archemporos* ("head merchant"). Some commentators propose that a full transformation from a system of governance based on traditional, tribal authority, to a civic model had taken place by the first century CE, and that the tribes encountered after that time are civic tribes analogue to those found, for example, in Athens and Rome (Sartre 1996). Others have held that the civic system was more or less a veneer over traditional power structures, where people held office and assemblies met, but where other ties—for example, of a tribal nature—ultimately decided matters (Ball 2016, 79–81). A third group advocates a hybrid model where the Palmyrene elite needed to navigate both Hellenistic-style city politics and traditional power structures.[15]

---

14 Hingley 2005; Pitts and Versluys 2014.

15 Yon 2002; Andrade 2013; Smith 2013; Sommer 2018.

Figure 7. Parthian aristocrat, bronze statue in the National Museum of Iran, Tehran. Photo: Eivind Heldaas Seland.

Based on the stories that the people who dedicated the inscriptions were conveying about themselves, this appears quite unambiguous. By referring to decisions made in the council and the people's assembly, and by referring to holders of civic office, the Palmyrenes clearly inscribed themselves in the regional narrative of civic life in the Roman Near East. The Palmyrenes seem to be saying that they were no different from people in Antioch, Jerash, or Apamea. The question is thus whether we should believe them.

Judging from iconographic material from funerary settings as well as from certain elements of religious iconography, a tentative answer might be "no." A relief found in the Diocletian camp, but originally part of a monumental base, might serve as an example (Fig. 6). The relief depicts a camel and two men. The men have been interpreted as a pair of Palmyrene merchants (Smith 2013, 74–75) or as a caravan leader and a cameleer.[16] However, the camel is clearly a riding animal, and the men are soldiers, as should be evident from the lance, the sword, the shield, and the riding saddle with a sheepskin on it (Seland 2017, 107–8). In line with this, the motive has been described as that of a *méhariste* (Will 1992, 99–106). But this was the term used by the French for their locally recruited camel cavalry soldiers in the Sahara and the Levant in the early twentieth century, and an explicit example of an anachronistic colonial narrative of Palmyra (Sommer 2016). That does not mean that those depicted in these reliefs were not members of a regular military force; they might have been, as we know that the Romans recruited auxiliary soldiers in Palmyra (Edwell 2008, 52–53). The model for these depictions, however, were not Roman cavalry, but Parthian aristocracy (Fig. 7). Trousers for riding and the exquisite patterns on the clothes also find parallels in the region to the east of Palmyra (Will 1992, 99–106). This has of course long been noted and counted among the Parthian or Eastern elements in Palmyrene art (Colledge 1976, 76, 216–17).

This will have been evident also to the Palmyrenes commissioning, making, and viewing such monuments, but there is also a different story here. The camel, the lance, and the riding clothes arguably tell us that this man wanted to come across as part of the nomadic, aristocratic tradition of the Syrian Desert (Schlumberger 1951, 126–28). He is primarily part of a regional narrative that would probably not make sense in the Mediterranean West, but which would also resonate to the east, in the Parthian and Sasanian worlds, and south, toward Arabia. The same narrative is found in reliefs from the northern hinterlands of Palmyra and from certain urban sanctuaries, where mounted gods, on horses and camels, often appearing in pairs, were popular (Fig. 8).[17]

---

[16] Schmidt-Colinet 1995, 80; Sartre-Fauriat and Sartre 2008, 84.

[17] Rostovtzeff 1932b; Seyrig and Starcky 1949; Schlumberger 1951.

In the historiography, these are sometimes called "caravan gods," but while members of caravans obviously had religious needs, any explicit connection with trade is lacking (Seland 2019, 183–85).

Identity, Narrative, and Agency at Palmyra

Palmyra is a rewarding case study because of the wealth of material and the clearly different traditions that meet in this material. Other elements of Palmyrene culture may also be structured along local, regional, and global narratives, but the point should be clear: the search for Palmyrene

Figure 8. Relief of unknown deity found in the Sanctuary of Allat. Palmyra Museum. Photo: Jørgen Christian Meyer.

153

identity has had a tendency to look for Western, Eastern, and local traits and determine that none, some, or all of them are present. The ensuing conclusion may be that Palmyrene identity had elements of hybridity, that is of a combination of other identities, of creolization, implying a distinct, new identity emerging as a result of cultural encounter, or of globalization, in the sense that Palmyrenes adopted elements of the many different cultural expressions circulating in the first millennium *oikumene*. These conclusions all find support in the evidence but remain founded on the notion that cultural identity has an essentialist nature that can be identified on the basis of archeological, epigraphic, and iconographic material. By looking instead at Palmyrene cultural expressions as outputs resulting from active utterances in the sense of speech acts inscribing the people who produced them into narratives, we take a performative approach to the material, allowing for change, flexibility, and above all for agency. By viewing cultural expressions as active, if not necessarily therefore conscious choices, rather than responses to contact, we place the Palmyrenes at the center of their own world rather that at the periphery of the Roman and Persian worlds. Above, I have identified five such narratives that the Palmyrenes told about themselves: the family, the lineage, the city, the desert, and the world.

Bibliography

Andrade, Nathanael J. 2013. *Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baird, Jen B. and Zena Kamash. 2019. "Remembering Roman Syria: Valuing Tadmor-Palmyra, from 'Discovery' to Destruction." *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 62, no. 1: 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-5370.12090.

Ball, Warwick. 2016. *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Brughmans, Tom, Olympia Bobou, Nathalia B. Kristensen, Rikke R. Thomsen, Jesper V. Jensen, Eivind H. Seland, and Rubina Raja. 2021. "A Kinship Network Analysis of Palmyrene Genealogies." *Journal of Historical Network Research* 6, no. 1: 41–84. https://doi.org/10.25517/jhnr.v6i1.65.

Butcher, Kevin. 2003. *Roman Syria and the Near East*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum.

Colledge, Malcolm A. R. 1976. *The Art of Palmyra*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Edwell, Peter M. 2008. *Between Rome and Persia: The Middle Euphrates, Mesopotamia and Palmyra under Roman Control*. London: Routledge.

Fletcher, Roland. 2004. "Materiality, Space, Time, and Outcome." In *A Companion to Archaeology*, edited by John Bintliff, 110–40. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gawlikowski, Michał. 1970. *Monuments funéraires de Palmyre*. Warsaw: Éditions scientifiques de Pologne.

Gills, Barry K. and Andre Gunder Frank. 1993. *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* London: Routledge.

Halifax, William and C. R. Conder. 1890 (1695). *A Relation of a Voyage to Tadmor in 1691*. London: C. R. Conder.

Hillers, Delbert R. and Eleonora Cussini. 1996. *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hingley, Richard. 2005. *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire*. London: Routledge.

Kaizer, Ted. 2018. "'Ich Bin Ein Palmyrerener' or 'Je Suis Tadmor': On How to Be a Proper Citizen of the Queen of the Desert." In *Palmyra: Mirage in the Desert*, edited by Joan Aruz, 76–89. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

LaBianca, Oystein S. and Sandra Arnold Scham, eds. 2006. *Connectivity in Antiquity: Globalization as a Long-Term Historical Process*. London: Equinox.

MacMullen, Ramsay. 1982. "The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire." *The American Journal of Philology* 103, no. 3: 233–46. https://doi.org/10.2307/294470.

McInnes-Gibbons, Rory. 2016–2017. "The Clash for Civilisation: Western Perspectives on Ancient Palmyra through the Image of Zenobia." *Talanta: Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society*, 48–49: 244–73. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348307161_The_Clash_for_Civilisation_-_Western_Perspectives_on_Ancient_Palmyra_through_the_Image_of_Zenobia.

Millar, Fergus. 1994. *The Roman Near East, 31 BC – AD 337*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mommsen, Theodor. 1904. *Die Provinzen von Caesar bis Diocletian*. Berlin: Weidmannsche.

Nitschke, Jessica L. 2020. "Colonial Past and Neocolonial Present: The Monumental Arch of Tadmor-Palmyra and So-Called Roman Architecture

155

in the Near East." In *Postcolonialism, Heritage, and the Built Environment: New Approaches to Architecture in Archaeology*, edited by Jessica L. Nitschke and Marta Lorenzon, 73–90. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Ober, Josiah. 1996. *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Piersimoni, Palmira. 1995. "The Palmyrene Prosopography." PhD diss., University College, London.

Pitts, Martin and Miguel John Versluys, eds. 2014. *Globalisation and the Roman World: World History, Connectivity and Material Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Raja, Rubina. 2017. "To Be or not To Be Depicted as a Priest in Palmyra: A Matter of Representational Spheres and Societal Values." In *Positions and Professions in Palmyra*, edited by Tracey Long and Annette Højen Sørensen, 115–30. Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters.

Raja, Rubina. 2018. "Compilation and Digitisation of the Palmyrene Corpus of Funerary Portraits." *Antiquity* 92 no. 365: e8. https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2018.218.

Richmond, I. A. 1963. "Palmyra under the Aegis of Rome." *Journal of Roman Studies* 53, no. 1–2: 43–54. https://doi.org/10.2307/298363.

Ricoeur, Paul. 1990. *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rostovtzeff, Michael I. 1932a. "Les inscriptions caravanières de Palmyre." In *Mélanges Gustave Glotz*, Vol. 2, 793–811. Paris: Les presses universitaires de France.

Rostovtzeff, Michael I. 1932b. "The Caravan Gods of Palmyra." *Journal of Roman Studies* 22, no. 1: 107–16. https://doi.org/10.2307/297093.

Rüsen, Jörn. 2005. *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation*. New York: Berghahn.

Sadurska, Anna and Adnan Bounni. 1994. *Les sculptures funéraires de Palmyre*. Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider.

Sartre, Maurice. 1996. "Palmyre, cité grecque." *Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes* 42: 385–405.

Sartre, Maurice. 2005. *The Middle East under Rome*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sartre-Fauriat, Annie and Maurice Sartre. 2008. *Palmyre: La cité des caravanes*. Paris: Gallimard.

Schlumberger, Daniel. 1951. *La Palmyrène du Nord-Ouest*. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner.

156

Schmidt-Colinet, Andreas. 1992. *Das Tempelgrab Nr. 36 in Palmyra: Studien zur palmyrenischen Grabarchitektur und ihrer Ausstattung*. Mainz: Von Zabern.

Schmidt-Colinet, Andreas. 1995. *Palmyra: Kulturbegegnung im Grenzbereich*. Mainz: Von Zabern.

Searle, John R. 1969. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Seland, Eivind Heldaas. 2008. "The Indian Ocean and the Globalisation of the Ancient World." *Ancient West and East* 7: 67–79. http://dx.doi.org/10.2143/AWE.7.0.2033253.

Seland, Eivind Heldaas. 2017. "The Iconography of Caravan Trade in Palmyra and the Roman Near East." In *Positions and Professions in Palmyra*, edited by Tracey Long and Annette Højen Sørensen, 106–14. Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters.

Seland, Eivind Heldaas. 2019. "Portable Religion and the Palmyrene Diaspora." In *Revisiting the Religious Life of Palmyra*, edited by Rubina Raja, 181–88. Turnhout: Brepols.

Seland, Eivind Heldaas. 2020. "Rise of the Merchant Princes." In *Inter Duo Imperia: Palmyra between East and West*, edited by Michael Sommer, 85–94. Stuttgart: Steiner.

Seland, Eivind Heldaas. 2021. "Local Dynamics of Globalization in the Roman Near East: The Case of Palmyra." In *Levantine Entanglements: Local Dynamics of Globalization in a Contested Region*, edited by Terje Stordalen and Oystein Sakala LaBianca, 222–39. Sheffield: Equinox.

Seller, Abednego. 1696. *The Antiquities of Palmyra Containing the History of the City, and Its Emperors, from Its Foundation to the Present Time: With an Appendix of Critical Observations on the Names, Religion, and Government of the Country and a Commentary on the Inscriptions Lately Found There*. London: S. Smith & B. Walford.

Seyrig, Henri. 1932. "Antiquités syriennes." *Syria* 13, no. 3: 255–77. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4195681.

Seyrig, Henri. 1950. "Palmyra and the East." *Journal of Roman Studies* 40, no. 1–2: 1–7. https://doi.org/10.2307/298497.

Seyrig, Henri and Jean Starcky. 1949. "Antiquités syriennes." *Syria* 26, no. 1–2: 17–41. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4196520.

Smith, Andrew M., II. 2013. *Roman Palmyra: Identity, Community, and State Formation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sommer, Michael. 2016. "The Venice of the Sands: Palmyrene Trade Revisited." In *Palmyrena: City, Hinterland, and Caravan Trade between Occident and*

157

Orient, Proceedings of the Conference Held in Athens, December 1–3, 2012, edited by Jørgen Christian Meyer, Eivind Heldaas Seland, and Nils Anfinset, 11–17. Oxford: Archaeopress.

Sommer, Michael. 2018. *Roms orientalische Steppengrenze: Palmyra – Edessa – Dura-Europos – Hatra, eine Kulturgeschichte von Pompeius bis Diocletian*, 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Steiner.

Yon, Jean-Baptiste. 2002. *Les Notables de Palmyre*. Beirut: Institut Français du Proche-Orient

Yon, Jean-Baptiste. 2012. "Palmyre". *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie* 17.1. Beirut: Institut Français du Proche-Orient.

Will, Ernest. 1992. *Les Palmyréniens: La Venise des sables (Ier siècle avant – IIIème siècle après J.-C.)*. Paris: Armand Colin.

Wood, Robert. 1753. *The Ruins of Palmyra, Otherwise Tedmor, in the Desart*. London: Purnell Bransby.
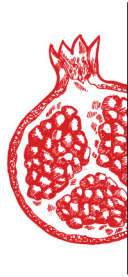
158

CITIZENSHIP AND ETHNICITY IN CASSIUS DIO'S *ROMAN HISTORY*

Jussi Rantala

Abstract

In 212 CE, Emperor Caracalla gave a famous edict, the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, granting citizenship to almost all free denizens of the Roman Empire. Although the document itself is preserved in a fragmentary papyrus, we know surprisingly little about it, as written sources are mostly silent about the edict. The only description of some length is provided by Cassius Dio, a Roman historian, a senator, and a contemporary of Caracalla. Cassius Dio's critical attitude toward the edict is well-known (and a much-researched topic); according to him, Caracalla's motive for the declaration was to increase the number of taxpayers in the Empire. In this article, I concentrate on the idea of citizenship in Dio's history: How does he see its role during the hundreds of years of Roman history he describes? What is the relationship between citizenship and Roman identity for Cassius Dio in the Roman past? I evaluate Dio's attitudes in the political context of his own time and consider them as a statement from a Roman senator taking part in a contemporary discussion on Roman identity. Moreover, as Caracalla's edict had a particularly strong impact the eastern part of the Empire, I will pay special attention to Dio's attitudes toward eastern peoples–"new Romans" in the contemporary context of Dio and Caracalla.
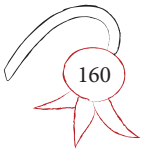
En 212 de notre ère, l'empereur Caracalla promulgue un édit célèbre, la *constitutio antoniniana*, qui accordait la citoyenneté à la quasi-totalité de la population libre de l'Empire romain. Bien que le document lui-même soit conservée dans un papyrus fragmentaire, nous savons étonnamment peu de choses sur le sujet, puisque les sources écrites ne disent pour la plupart rien sur l'édit. La seule description un peu fournie vient de la main de Dion Cassius, historien romain, sénateur et écrivain contemporain de Caracalla.

L'attitude critique de Dion Cassius à l'égard de l'édit est bien connue (et a fait l'objet de nombreuses recherches) ; selon lui, le but de la déclaration de Caracalla était d'augmenter le nombre des contribuables dans l'empire. Je me concentre sur l'idée de la citoyenneté en général dans l'histoire de Dion : comment perçoit-il le rôle de cette dernière dans les centaines d'années d'histoire romaine qu'il décrit ? Dans le passé romain, quelle est la relation entre la citoyenneté et l'identité romaine pour Cassius Dion ? J'examine les attitudes de Dion dans le contexte politique de son époque et analysées comme les déclarations d'un sénateur romain qui participe au débat contemporain sur l'identité romaine. En outre, comme l'édit de Caracalla a eu un impact surtout dans la partie orientale de l'empire, je m'intéresse particulièrement aux attitudes de Dion à l'égard des peuples orientaux–des « nouveaux Romains » dans le contexte contemporain de Dion et de Caracalla.

CITIZENSHIP AND ETHNICITY IN CASSIUS DIO'S *ROMAN HISTORY*

Jussi Rantala

161

Introduction

The period from the late second to the early third century was one of great change for the Roman Empire. A civil war, the first in over a hundred years, took place in 190 CE. As a result, Septimius Severus, a usurper from North Africa, rose to power and established a new dynasty. This meant many changes for Roman political life, including the development of more explicitly autocratic policies compared to those of perhaps a more conciliatory nature practiced by most of the Antonine rulers earlier in the second century.[1] One of the major events of the period was the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, an edict promulgated by Emperor Caracalla, the successor and son of Severus. The edict, which took effect in 212 CE, gave citizen rights to practically all free men in

---

[1] For the birth of the Severan dynasty and the political ideas pursued by Septimius Severus, see Rantala 2017.

the Empire.[2] The edict and its significance is a much-debated issue and provides many problems for analysis—not least because of a lack of sources.[3] In fact, only one author in Roman literature provides even a few lines on the subject—Cassius Dio (c. 155–235 CE). He was a historian and Roman senator who, as a contemporary writer, personally witnessed the reign of Caracalla and his imperial edict.[4]

In this article, I take a closer look at Dio's view toward the concept of citizenship.[5] However, instead of concentrating solely on Dio's passage on the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, my aim is to evaluate the role of Roman citizenship as a part of Dio's history as a whole. How does Dio value citizenship in his history throughout the centuries? Does he see it as a purely legal concept, or does he have other interpretations? How does Dio see and link the role and development of citizenship through his history as a part of his political aims? Moreover, dealing with concepts such as citizenship and the ideal government also leads us to the question of identity. While the notion of Romanness, or *Romanitas*, ideologically consisted of common values, morals, customs, and so on, the latter were, in practice, actualized in a political community (Woolf 2000, 120); for centuries, the most obvious mark of one's membership in a political community was Roman citizenship.

Indeed, Dio's writings were deeply connected to his own political community. While sometimes considered a "second-class" historian without any particular political motivation (Millar 1964) and seen simply as a good resource to check various, isolated facts without a need to care too much about his work's entirety, recent years have witnessed

---

[2] The papyrus containing the edict can be found in *P.Giss.* 40. Considering free women, they were to be given the same rights as Roman women.

[3] Most recent studies include Corbo 2013; de Blois 2014; Ando 2016.

[4] Dio's massive *Roman History* (*Historia Romana*) consisted of 80 books (most of which are lost) and covered about 1,400 years from the arrival of Aeneas in Italy to the reign of Emperor Alexander Severus in 229 CE; apparently, it was composed between 220 and 231 CE, the process beginning a couple of years after Caracalla's death (Rantala 2017, 9).

[5] Apart from the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, not many studies concerning Dio's relationship with Roman citizenship exist; see the studies mentioned in subsequent sections of this article.

a change in attitude toward Dio. An increasing number of scholars nowadays highlight the historiographical setting of his work and the links between various parts of his history, and acknowledge that Dio did indeed have a political agenda—that is, to present his version of an ideal government, a Roman monarchy, as established by Augustus.[6] My starting point takes its cue from this newly found interest in and view of Dio and his work. While the historian admittedly had his shortcomings, he was nevertheless presented a valuable and unique perspective on the contemporary politics of the early third century CE. He was an intellectual as well as a politician at a time when Rome was at its zenith, writing a politically motivated history as an important member of his own political community during a period of great change. As the *Constitutio Antoniniana* appeared to be one of the most remarkable products of these changing times, Dio's general view on citizenship can be seen as an interesting part of his political views.

163

While citizenship, as a concept itself, has traditionally had close ties with *Romanitas*, we should also acknowledge the significant role played by ethnicity in the Greco-Roman context that Dio represents, and how it is tied in with the issue of identity. While Romans were perhaps more inclusive with regard to the subject, traditional Greek views on identity were more strictly based on language and inherited ethnicity (Woolf 2000, 120). Cassius Dio himself had his origins in Greece as he was a native of Nicaea, in the province of Bithynia. Thus, he was not just a proud Roman senator and citizen (Madsen 2009, 124–26), but also a Greek who clearly valued his cultural origins.[7] Inasmuch as defining one's identity on ethnic grounds was commonplace in ancient Greek thought, I seek in this article possible traces of the relationship

---
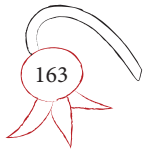
[6] Lange and Madsen 2016, 1–3. This recent research includes, e.g., Fromentin et al. 2016; Lange and Madsen 2016; Burden-Strevens and Lindholmer 2019; Osgood and Baron 2019. For a new general introduction to Dio himself, see Madsen 2019.

[7] Cassius Dio underlines in his history that Bithynia, his home province, was indeed part of the Greek world (Sørensen 2016, 90). For Dio's Greek intellectual heritage, see Rantala 2016, 174–75.

between citizenship and ethnic identity in the work of Dio.[8] The identification and analysis of such traces, I believe, would help us to widen our scope toward the question of identity in an era when the *Constitutio Antoniniana* affected not only the people actually becoming citizens but also contemporary intellectuals of that time, such as Dio, that took part in discussions on the nature of the Roman Empire and Roman identity.

Citizenship in Dio's Pre-imperial History

Dio's coverage of Roman regal and republican history before the civil wars of the first century BCE is a somewhat forgotten subject, much overlooked by scholars,[9] and this is even more the case considering the role of citizenship in that period. On the other hand, this oversight is somewhat understandable. The appearance of citizens in Dio's early history is, while present, quite uneventful and politically insignificant, even if the idea of an "active citizen" does appear a few times in his early narrative.[10] For example, we can read how the kings of Rome had to take into consideration the view of citizens when forming the Roman city-state; even the "bad king" Tarquinius Superbus could not take his power for granted, because his soldiers, "in their capacity as citizens,"

[8] Benjamin Isaac (2004, 35) defines an ethnic group as a group that has a long-shared history, of which the group is conscious as distinguishing itself from other groups, as well as the memory of which it keeps alive. Moreover, the group should have a cultural tradition involving certain family and social customs, and often religious customs as well. In addition to these two "essential" characteristics, other relevant aspects often are, for example, a common geographical origin, a common language, a common literature, and a common religion. In this article, I consider Dio's definitions such as "Syrian," "Egyptian," and so on as ethnic definitions; I understand that from his point of view those names refer precisely to groups with a shared origin, language, history, etc.

[9] However, an excellent recent volume, edited by Christopher Burden-Strevens and Mads Lindholmer (2019), fills the gap. See also, e.g., Simons 2009.

[10] In Dio's political vocabulary, the basic word for citizen is πολίτης, following earlier Greek historiographical tradition (see, e.g., Hdt. *Hist.*, 9.34; Thuc. *Hist*, 6.104). Dio's use of the term is discussed in Freyburger-Galland 1997, 43–52.

164

might revolt (*Hist. Rom.* 2.10; 2.10.2 [Zonaras]). Dio also records the traditional Struggle of the Orders between patricians and plebeians in books 4–8, describing how activities of the lower classes eventually led to the fairer treatment of all citizens.[11]

However, Dio's narrative from the very beginning is centered on the actions of great men, and his attitude toward the deeds of ordinary citizens and their struggle for power seems to be either uninterested or cautious compared to other historians, such as Livy or Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who also described the events.[12] While Dio recognizes that the unwillingness of the rich to compromise with poor citizens was often a reason for troubles in early Rome (*Hist. Rom.* 4.14.6), his attitude toward citizen activity as such is not too enthusiastic. For example, he highlights how unjust and even tyrannical the tribunes acted after the office was established because of the demands of the people (*Hist. Rom.* 4.15.1). As mentioned by Mads Lindholmer, political competition in general was seen as a destructive process by Dio, and events such as the Struggle of the Orders had their logical continuation during the late Republic, when they were replaced by struggles between great men (2019, 211). Similarly, I believe Dio's cautious attitude toward citizen activity is part of this general approach. Accordingly, Dio's view on citizenship seems to be most positive when it has purely symbolic, not political, value. Such is the case when Dio mentions that, if somebody rescued a citizen from peril during battle in the days of the Republic, the rescuer had "the greatest praise and would receive a crown fashioned of oak, which was esteemed as far more honourable than all the other crowns, whether of silver or of gold" (*Hist. Rom.* 6.12.1 [Zonaras]).[13] Thus, he reminds his readers about the symbolic value of citizenship for society.[14]

---
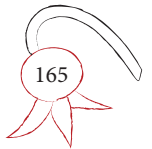
[11] *Hist. Rom.* 5.18.1 records the story of Romans sending men to Greece to "observe the laws and the customs of the people there."

[12] For example, Liv. *Ab urbe cond.* 2.32.4; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.47.2. See Lindholmer 2019 for discussion.

[13] Trans. Cary and Foster 1914–1927.

[14] Citizens as "worthy" people are also mentioned in *Hist. Rom.* 13.55.1. Other examples of at least some "citizen activity" are presented, for example, in 4.14.6; 7.29.5; 9.40.7.

Eventually, records of citizens as at least somewhat active participants in society cease completely in Dio's history with the arrival of powerful figures in the late Republic, such as Julius Caesar, Pompey the Great, Marc Anthony, and Octavian. However, we do find a few other passages regarding the actual process of granting citizenship in the pre-imperial era. The first case takes place early in the republican period, when the Romans were waging a war against the Etruscans. According to the story, as the Etruscans did not offer resistance but instead continued their everyday business and welcomed Romans in a friendly manner, the Romans, likewise, "far from doing them harm, enrolled them subsequently among the citizens" (*Hist. Rom.* 7.28.1). Moreover, soon after that we encounter a case of the granting of citizenship to the Latins:

166
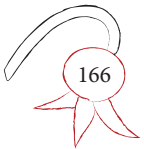
> The Romans, by way of bringing the Latins in turn to a condition of friendliness, granted them citizenship, so that they secured equal privileges with themselves. Those rights which they would not share with that nation when it threatened war and for which they underwent so many dangers they voluntarily voted to it now that it had been conquered. Thus, they rewarded some for their alliance and others because they had made no move to rebel. (*Hist. Rom.* 7.29.10)[15]

When mentioning these cases of citizenship expansion, Dio seems to deal with the issue without much problematization. What the republican passages do show, however, is that citizenship was something granted by Romans by their own free will, in practice, as a mark of their domination. In Dio's narrative, it was an impossible idea that somebody could force the Romans to do so. This attitude can be traced to the description of the conduct of the Samnites, another Italian people, who ravaged Campania during the Social War of the first century BCE, and, as a condition to cease their attacks, demanded Roman citizenship. This was, according to Dio, too much of a request for the Roman senators and they refused (*Hist. Rom.* 31.102.7). While the Samnites were, in Roman historical thought, a kind of archenemy during the early republican period and a people Dio described as untrustworthy liars and cheats (Jones 2019, 287–88), the real problem regarding citizenship

---

[15] Trans. Cary and Foster 1914–1927.

was probably their challenge to Roman rule; their citizenship would be a result of their demands instead of a goodwill gesture from Rome. Indeed, while traditionally described as bitter foes of Rome, the relationship of these two peoples was more complicated than simply one of good vs. evil. As Brandon Jones notices, while the Samnites were treacherous, Romans of the day also had a vice of their own—excessive pride often led them to trouble (Jones 2019, 287–88). Moreover, the fragmentary eighth book of Dio, covering the Samnite wars of the past, does not paint a particularly negative picture of the Samnites, even if they were a stubborn enemy of Rome. This is in line with the earlier historical tradition. Livy, for example, while describing the wars against the Samnites as particularly bitter and cruel, nevertheless writes several admirable passages about them. For Livy, they were a people, which, even when all hope was lost, still fought on. He writes: "So far were they from tiring of freedom even though they had not succeeded in defending it, preferring to be defeated rather than not to try for victory" (*Ab urbe cond.* 10.30.9). Thus, it is unlikely that the Samnites were more "unworthy," ethnically or culturally speaking, for citizenship than were other Italian peoples; it was simply their challenge to Roman superiority, another central theme of Roman identity, which was the problem.

We can trace a slight change of attitude in Dio's writings when he describes the last decades of the Republic. This was a period when Italy not only was unified under Roman rule, more or less, but also a time when Roman political and military influence expanded beyond Italy. Thus, Dio describes how there was a dispute about the people living north of Italy, beyond the river Po; some Romans were willing to grant a citizenship to them, some were not. Dio describes:

> All those who were resident aliens in Rome, except inhabitants of what is now Italy, were banished on the motion of one Gaius Papius, a tribune, because they were coming to be too numerous and were not thought fit persons to dwell with the citizens. (*Hist. Rom.* 37.8.3)[16]

What we can trace here is that, first of all, citizenship still was an important sign of identity, as giving rights of citizenship even to people living

---

[16] Trans. Cary and Foster 1914–1927.

right next to Italy appears to be a tense subject. On the other hand, Italian inhabitants, in general, were held to a different, higher category of citizenship than the aliens by Dio. Italians were "fit" to dwell with Roman city folk, and foreigners were not. This seems to point to the significance of Italy compared to other lands occupied by the Roman Republic.[17] Indeed, while the actual discussion about Italy during the late republican / early imperial era does not need to detain us much here, we should recognize that Dio himself lived and wrote in a political and cultural context wherein Italy had long been an essential part of traditional Roman self-understanding. It was a *topos* among intellectual life as well as an important aspect of imperial politics and propaganda.[18] This does not necessarily mean as such that the Greek historian Dio, on a personal level, was particularly attached to Italy. However, as Italy had become one of the central symbols of the Roman Empire and Roman identity, we can assume that his relationship with Italy was, at minimum, something akin to his relationship with the city of Rome. While Dio apparently did not care about the city itself too much, he nevertheless was proud of his personal senatorial status and in this way was attached to what Rome represented—power and authority.[19] As Italy had also become a symbol of this political entity, Dio seems to follow these ideas in his reports of the granting of citizenship outside Italy.

The question of granting civil rights outside Italy is also dealt with by Dio when he mentions how Julius Caesar gave citizenship to the people of Gades (*Hist. Rom.* 41.24.1) and also to the Gauls living south of the Alps, beyond the Po, because he had once governed them (*Hist. Rom.* 41.36.3). While these acts may sound insignificant, there still seems to be a hint of reluctance on the part of Dio. While he admits that the

[17] The contemporary discussion during the late Republic on the role of Italy is dealt with, for example, by Filippo Carlá-Uhink (2017), who shows that for Cicero the Italian Peninsula and its elites were the very root of his political ideal, which was later continued by the Augustan policy of *tota Italia*.

[18] The development is discussed in Dench 2004, 153–221. The strong role of Italy during early imperial era can be traced in the literature (e.g., Plin. *HN* 3.5.39; Plin. *Ep.* 6.19; SHA *Hadr.* 6.5) as well as in imperial coinage—particularly in the Antonine coins (see Dench 2004, 487).

[19] For Dio on the city of Rome, see Gowing 2016, 135.

Roman people confirmed Caesar's act toward the people of Gades, he does lead the reader to understand that these were tactical choices of Caesar by pointing out that the latter had a good experience with them, particularly because of his governorship. Similarly, Dio's attitude toward Caesar and his policy of granting citizenship is also evident later in his history when he reports how Caesar was quite liberal when rewarding those who had supported him in his political and military affairs. As Dio mentions, Caesar granted citizenship status to some and colonist status to others, but he also mentions that he "did not give these favors for nothing" (*Hist. Rom.* 43.39.5). These passages may indeed be read in accordance with the general tone Cassius Dio took with Julius Caesar as a person and a ruler. As Adam Kemezis has pointed out, while modern scholars have painted a picture of Caesar as a "reforming autocrat," Dio's account gives a less impressive picture of him. While Dio sees Caesar as a "master manipulator" in obtaining power, he also portrays him as quite ineffective when in power. For example, Dio's books dealing with Caesar's years as the sole ruler are more dedicated to describing Caesar's various ways to celebrate his victories and position than to describing his actual domestic initiatives, highlighting a certain lack of effectiveness. While Dio seems to admit that Caesar had good intentions as such, he did not have the ability to create a concrete system that guaranteed peace and stability; it was his successor, Octavian/Augustus, who would complete the task (Kemezis 2014, 118–20). Accordingly, I would suggest that Caesar's policy of granting citizenship more or less liberally to his supporters outside Italy was part of the picture of the man himself created by Dio; Caesar was cunning and, as such, impressive in the politics of "manipulation" while on his way to the throne. However, regarding acts concerning Rome and its identity, those decisions were not very remarkable or positive as such; their value was positive mainly to Caesar in his quest for power.
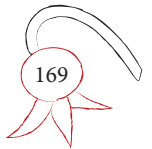
Early Empire: From Ideal to Decline?

An interesting passage can be found a bit later in Dio's history, where he provides an account of the death of Augustus. According to Dio,

Augustus had left detailed instructions for how his followers should act after his death. These instructions contained four books; the first dealt with his funeral, and the second with various acts that he had performed and that he ordered to be inscribed upon bronze columns placed around his shrine. The third contained issues regarding military affairs, revenues, public expenditures, money in the treasuries, and other issues significant for the administration of the Empire. Lastly, the fourth had instructions for Tiberius and for the public (*Hist. Rom.* 56.33.1).

While Dio does not describe any of these books in detail, he does single out one particular instruction of Augustus from the fourth book:

> The fourth [book] had instructions and commands for Tiberius and for the public. Among these injunctions was one to the effect that they should not free many slaves, lest they should fill the city with a promiscuous rabble; also, that they should not enrol large numbers as citizens, in order that there should be a marked difference between themselves and the subject nations. (*Hist. Rom.* 56.33.3)[20]

Here, we find a certain demand for consideration or prudence when granting new citizen rights, and now can also trace an ethnic, or at least cultural, aspect to citizenship. There was a divide between Romans, which mainly meant Italians in terms of citizenship, and "subject nations."[21] Remarkably, this is the only detail included in Augustus's instructions that Dio singles out. Thus, it possibly appeared for Dio as a piece of advice particularly worth reminding his readers of. At least it is more or less in line with the attitude he shows in his few other passages about granting citizenship.

After the Augustan period, Dio also recorded, from the reign of Claudius (41–54 CE), an occasion where the emperor asked a question to a member of a Lycian envoy, to a man who was Lycian by birth but who had been made a Roman citizen. As the man could not understand Claudius's question, the emperor took away his citizenship, saying that

---

[20] Trans. Cary and Foster 1914–1927.

[21] See, e.g., Cooley 2016 for the significance of Italy for Augustan policy and propaganda.

it was not proper for a man to be a Roman who had no knowledge of the "language of the Romans" (*Hist. Rom.* 60.17.4). Thus, Dio points out here that Claudius, at least in principle, tried to show some strictness considering the citizen rights of non-Italian peoples, or at least toward those who were not acquainted well enough with Roman culture, with language being the decisive ethnic definer.[22] Interestingly, Claudius's famous proposal to the Senate to allow monied, landed citizens from further Gaul to enter the senatorial class, and thus the Senate itself, is not dealt with by Cassius Dio at all, although Tacitus records it at some length (*Ann.* 11.23–25).[23] Apparently, the question of recruiting new senators from the provinces was not a major concern for Dio, being a provincial senator himself, particularly as they already had obtained Roman citizenship by his time.

However, even though Dio acknowledged the occasional strictness in Claudius's policy on citizenship, he nevertheless describes that this policy was not to last. Eventually, citizenship became a trading item during the reign of Claudius. Dio writes:

> For inasmuch as Romans had the advantage over foreigners in practically all respects, many sought the franchise by personal application to the emperor, and many bought it from Messalina and the imperial freedmen. For this reason, though the privilege was at first sold only for large sums, it later became so cheapened by the facility with which it could be obtained that it came to be a common saying, that a man could become a citizen by giving the right person some bits of broken glass. (*Hist. Rom.* 60.17.5–6)[24]

Overall, the passages about granting citizenship in the Julio-Claudian era are admittedly few, and we should perhaps be careful before making too bold of an interpretation. However, what we have seen seems to

---

[22] Suetonius gives a similar account on ethnical/cultural demands related to Roman citizenship in Claudius's policy; see Suet. *Claud.* 16.2; 25.3. A similar attitude considering language as a mark of Romanness can also be related to the policy of Claudius's predecessor, Tiberius (*Hist. Rom.* 57.17.1).

[23] Claudius's speech is also preserved as an inscription in the so-called "Lyon Tablet" (*CIL* XIII, 1668).

[24] Trans. Cary and Foster 1914–1927.

171

indicate that for Dio granting citizenship in the past required deliberation and some kind of cultural, ethnic, or political qualification. This is observed in particular with Augustus, the emperor who created the new monarchical system that Dio in his writings supports and considers as an ideal form of government.[25] However, we may also read that already during the reign of Claudius citizenship for Dio started to lose its prestige as it was sold cheaply and without much consideration.

Indeed, while Dio is never enthusiastic about citizens taking an active part in politics, he nevertheless values citizenship as a symbol of Roman identity from republican times all the way to the early Empire, where the ideal ruler, Augustus, tried to preserve its limited nature. But this eventually changed during Claudius's reign. That said, for Dio Claudius himself was initially not responsible for this, as we have noticed about his politics. However, his weakness when it came to Empress Messalina and his freedmen soon became evident.[26] As a result, the granting of citizenship became somewhat irregular business, despite his good intentions. According to Dio, a "great many other persons unworthy of citizenship were also deprived of it, whereas he granted citizenship to others quite indiscriminately, sometimes to individuals and sometimes to whole groups" (*Hist. Rom.* 60.17.5).

Dio and the *Constitutio Antoniniana*

Dio's narrative dealing with the post-Julio-Claudian imperial era does not deal much with citizenship. He briefly mentions how Otho (in 69 CE) tried to gain popularity among the people by putting on theatrical shows and by granting citizenship to foreigners, albeit without much success (*Hist. Rom.* 63.8.22). He also records how Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–180 CE) "gave audience to those whom came as envoys from outside nations, but did not receive them all on the same footing; for this varied

---

[25] Dio's pro-monarchical and pro-Augustan attitude is widely accepted by modern scholars; see, e.g., Gowing 1992, 26; Hose 1994, 394; Kemezis 2007, 270; Rees 2012, 151–53; Kemezis 2014, 120–26.

[26] As also expressed in *Hist. Rom.* 60.28.2.

172

according as the several states were worthy to receive citizenship" (*Hist. Rom.* 72[71].19).[27] Dio does not mention what the qualifications were to be "worthy" of citizenship, and does not, in fact, directly mention either if the envoys were eventually granted civil rights at all. Roman citizenship was, however, spread beyond the borders of Italy already in the republican and early imperial period by, for example, military veterans and Italian settlers who moved to various, foreign-populated, provinces. It was spread as well by the granting of citizenship to local provincial elites serving Rome. Thus, it is estimated that, by the death of Augustus in 14 CE, perhaps 4–7 percent of the free provincial population had Roman citizenship (Lavan 2016, 4). While the spread of citizenship continued to grow during the first two centuries CE, the volume of this growth is extremely hard to estimate because of our lack of sources (this question will be addressed shortly). However, what we do know is that the process experienced somewhat of a conclusion in 212 with the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of Caracalla, an edict providing citizen rights to (almost) the entire free population of the Empire. The edict is, as mentioned in the introduction, partly preserved on a fragmentary papyrus:

> Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Augustus Antoninus Pius says: […] rather […] the causes and considerations […] that I give thanks to the immortal gods, because [when that conspiracy occurred] they preserved me, thus I think that I should be able [magnificently and piously] to make suitable response to their majesty, [if] I were able to lead [all who are presently my people] and others who should join my people [to the sanctuaries] of the gods. I give to all of those [who are under my rule throughout] the whole world, Roman citizenship, [(with the provision that) the just claims of communities] should remain, with the exception of the [ded]iticii. The [whole population] ought […] already to have been included in the victory. […] my edict will expand the majesty of the Roman [people]. (*P. Giss.* 40, col. 1.1–12)[28]

As dramatic as Caracalla's edict sounds, we have a very limited number of other sources mentioning the act. Besides the papyrus, we have a

---

27 Trans. Cary and Foster 1914–1927.
28 Adapted from Potter 2004, 138–39.

short sentence in the *Digesta*, where Ulpian, a jurist from the Severan period, states how "all persons throughout the Roman world were made Roman citizens by an edict of the Emperor Caracas" (*Dig.* 1.5.17).[29] There is also a passage from Cassius Dio:

> Now this great admirer of Alexander, Antoninus [Caracalla], was fond of spending money upon the soldiers, great numbers of whom he kept in attendance upon him, alleging one excuse after another and one war after another; but he made it his business to strip, despoil, and grind down all the rest of mankind, and the senators by no means least. In the first place, there were the gold crowns that he was repeatedly demanding, on the constant pretext that he had conquered some enemy or other; and I am not referring, either, to the actual manufacture of the crowns—for what does that amount to?—but to the vast amount of money constantly being given under that name by the cities for the customary "crowning," as it is called, of the emperors. Then there were the provisions that we were required to furnish in great quantities on all occasions, and this without receiving any remuneration and sometimes actually at additional cost to ourselves all of which supplies he either bestowed upon the soldiers or else peddled out; and there were the gifts which he demanded from the wealthy citizens and from the various communities; and the taxes, but the new ones which he promulgated and the ten per cent tax that he instituted in place of the five per cent tax applying to the emancipation of slaves, to bequests, and to all legacies; for he abolished the right of succession and exemption from taxes which had been granted in such cases to those who were closely related to the deceased. This was the reason why he made all the people in his empire Roman citizens; nominally he was honouring them, but his real purpose was to increase his revenues by this means, inasmuch as aliens did not have to pay most of these taxes. (*Hist. Rom.* 78[77].9)[30]

Besides the paucity of sources, there are also other aspects that have led scholars to somewhat belittle the significance of the edict. It has been claimed, for example, that the edict was basically meaningless, as imperial rule had abolished the privileges traditionally connected with

---

[29] "Caracas" obviously refers here to Caracalla. Some additional, small pieces of evidence can be found from various later texts; see Marotta 2009, 101–3.

[30] Trans. Cary and Foster 1914–1927.

Roman citizenship (Ando 2011, 16). It has also been seen as a "natural" conclusion to a long process that was, as such, an act with very little meaning (Sherwin-White 1973, 251–63), and so on.[31] However, there is a number of recent studies questioning this approach, highlighting instead the impact of the edict for Roman society. As pointed out by Arnaud Besson (2017, 215–16), during the period just prior to the edict, citizenship was still an enviable status expressing a privileged relationship with Rome; it was a status reserved for certain, limited groups in the provinces and mainly those in the service of the Empire. Similarly, Myles Lavan (2016, 33–34) has pointed out that the spread of Roman citizenship, while steady, was very limited during the first two centuries CE, and that perhaps 67–85 percent of the free population of the provinces still did not have citizenship when Caracalla promulgated his edict.

Thus, we may suggest that Cassius Dio, as a Roman senator, witnessed in the *Constitutio Antoniniana* a major political and cultural change, or at least a phenomenon of a larger political change, to which he also responded in his writings. Regarding the act itself, it appears that Dio's view was that Caracalla's motive was economic—namely, to increase the number of people available to be taxed. How "right" Dio was in his claims is a debated issue and does not need to concern us too much here, although David Potter's observation is worth mentioning. As he points out, one of the aims of Caracalla could also have been to promote a sense of Roman identity to the diverse population of the Empire, as Caracalla appears to be interested in linking the fortunes of the Empire's population to his own, as expressed in the edict (2004, 139).[32] In any case, Dio's tone is cynical; his hostility toward Caracalla

[31] For the studies arguing for the minimal significance of the act, see Besson 2017, 200.

[32] Potter does not claim that Dio was wrong in his economic claims as such, but that "there was more to the story that he chose to tell." As Potter continues, the edict also meant that a vast number of new citizens took Caracalla's name, as it was the custom among new citizens to take the name of a person sponsoring their entry into the community of citizens. This was a good way for Caracalla to encourage a huge amount of people to symbolically join him. Besides, it should also be noticed that the number of wealthy people receiving citizenship by

is well attested (Jones 2016, 306), and it seems he did not want to give the emperor any credit either. Moreover, when mentioning the act, he obviously mentions a thing very familiar to his audience—his fellow senators.[33] Thus, he simply does not need to explain the edict itself or its consequences. His main motive seems simply to remind his readers of the typical nature of Caracalla; his creed, and his desire to get more money. This is very much in accordance with other criticisms Dio has toward Caracalla in his writings. He records quite bitterly, on many occasions throughout his history, how the emperor, for example, wished to live in luxury and splendor, and that his greed had no limits. Caracalla was not only an evil emperor but also an overall economic burden to Dio and his fellow senators (*Hist. Rom.* 78[77].10.4; 12.6; 18.3–4; 20.1).

The "New Romans" in Dio's History

Whatever the imperial motives were, the edict probably affected the life of many people in the Empire. Rome had reached its largest expanse under Emperor Trajan (r. 98–117 CE); during that period, the Empire stretched from northern England to the Euphrates in Syria, and from the Rhine and Danube to the plains of the North African coast and the Nile Valley in Egypt (Le Glay et al. 1996, 270–77). While his successors, starting from Hadrian (r. 117–138 CE) adopted a policy of maintaining rather than expanding the Empire (Southern 2001, 14–16), Rome was still a vast entity in Dio's time, almost as large as it was back in the days of Trajan.

While the *Constitutio Antoniniana* probably had an impact in the western part of the Empire as well, it probably affected the East more, where citizenship had not spread as much as it had in the West by the

---

Caracalla's edict apparently was quite small. Thus, it is unlikely that the edict had a significant economic effect.

[33] As suggested by Alan Gowing (1992, 190), Dio's primary audience was his fellow senators, particularly those coming from the Eastern part of the Empire.

early third century CE.[34] Thus, it would be beneficial to shortly evaluate Dio's attitude toward those who were most affected by Caracalla's edict—the eastern populations who were now "new Romans" in terms of citizenship. Indeed, Dio was generally not too concerned about western peoples living inside the Roman Empire, such as Gauls, or those living outside it, such as Germans. While he once makes a comment about Gallic inconstancy, cowardice, and impetuosity (*Hist. Rom.* 78[77] 6.1a.), his main interest are peoples living in the East. This might reflect the general, particularly economic, importance of the eastern part of the Empire that had already begun in the second century and continued in Dio's lifetime as well (Le Glay et al. 1996, 297–310); as a senator, Dio was probably aware of the serious political, social, and economic issues facing the Empire.

Speaking of the East, the connection between citizenship and ethnicity in Dio's writings also arises in his descriptions of warfare in the East—even if he is usually not too direct or explicit about it. Dio's account of the Battle of Pharsalus, for example, which involved many non-citizen Easterners, a defining battle of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey in 48 BCE, is particularly interesting in this regard. For Dio, the battle itself was epic, even "apocalyptic" by its very nature.[35] These were indeed the "end of times" for Dio, as he considered the soon-to-be following Augustan reign a new, ideal Roman Empire. Quite early in his record of the battle, Dio separates the citizens from the "foreigners" in both armies by reporting that both Caesar and Pompey tried to inspire the men in their legions to fight, and, in doing so, used a similar kind of language. He writes: "As they both came from the same state and were talking about the same matters and called each other tyrants and themselves liberators from tyranny of the men they addressed, they had nothing different to say on either side" (*Hist. Rom.* 41.57.1–2).[36]

---

[34] I thus follow here the "conventional" view (as expressed by Lavan 2016, 34), even if admittedly there were many regional differences and the citizens were probably a minority compared to non-citizens also in the West during the early third century CE.

[35] The battle is described in *Hist. Rom.* 41.55–62.

[36] Trans. Cary and Foster 1914–1927.

Thus, their legions were addressed, in Dio's account, with the rather traditional language of Roman political life. How well this would have inspired ordinary soldiers in the actual battle is another issue, but it is nevertheless noteworthy that Dio expresses this kind of language in his work. On the other hand, the allies and subject nations are simply inspired by "hopes of a better lot and fears of a worse one" (*Hist. Rom.* 41.57.3).

For Dio, the attempts at motivating citizens were not too successful on either side. His description of the actual beginning of the battle is particularly noteworthy:

> Such was the struggle in which they joined; yet they did not immediately come to close quarters. Sprung from the same country and from the same hearth, with almost identical weapons and similar formation, each side shrank from beginning the battle, and shrank from slaying anyone. So, there was great silence and dejection on both sides; no one went forward or moved at all, but with heads bowed they stood motionless, as if devoid of life. Caesar and Pompey, therefore, fearing that if they remained quiet any longer their animosity might become lessened or they might even become reconciled, hurriedly commanded the trumpeters to give the signal and the men to raise the war cry in unison. Both orders were obeyed, but the combatants were so far from being imbued with courage, that at the sound of the trumpeters' call, uttering the same notes, and at their own shout, raised in the same language, they showed their sense of relationship and betrayed their kinship more than ever, and so fell to weeping and lamenting. But after a long time, when the allied troops began the battle, the rest also joined in fairly beside themselves at what they were doing. (*Hist. Rom.* 41.58.1–3)[37]

The reluctance of a Roman soldier to fight is indeed an "apocalyptic" sign. Everywhere in the historiography and other literature—including Dio—we see the *topos* of brave Romans who are characterized by their excellent combat ability, quality in hand-to-hand fighting, manly courage, and personal bravery. Indeed, among the aforementioned features of *Romanitas*, courage in battle and militarism were a crucial part of

---

[37] Trans. Cary and Foster 1914–1927.

178

Roman self-understanding as well.[38] Thus, when Dio describes the unwillingness or Romans to fight in a defining moment that would affect the fate of both the city of Rome and its empire (*Hist. Rom.* 41.56.1), the Romans are acting against their very nature. Indeed, when they heard "the same notes" from trumpets and shouts "raised in the same language" they "fell to weeping and lamenting." Eventually, the citizens did their duties and began to fight, but only after their allies had started it. In practice, Dio seems to refer to only those who did not share language or customs as able to do so, and not those who "sprung from the same country and from the same hearth."

Eventually, the "apocalyptic" nature of the battle becomes even clearer when Dio describes various incredible, or even miraculous, proceedings taking place during the struggle. There is confusion because of the multiple languages shouted in during the heat of the combat, as well as the "confusion of nations" fighting against each other (*Hist. Rom.* 41.60). Thus, even if there were citizens on both sides who were reluctant to start the battle because of their mutual kinship, Dio makes it clear that the armies were not composed solely of Romans who had a common language, common customs, and common values, but of forces that were multilingual and multicultural. And while citizens on both sides were not eager to fight each other, they were still the best soldiers overall. The ultimate reason why Pompey lost the war was because Caesar had more Romans in his ranks, while Pompey's forces were, according to Dio, more "Asian." He writes:

> Caesar had the largest and the most genuinely Roman portion of the state legions and the most warlike men from the rest of Italy, from Spain, and the whole of Gaul and the islands that he had conquered; Pompey had brought along many from the senatorial and the equestrian order and from the regularly enrolled troops, and had gathered vast numbers from the subject and allied peoples and kings. (*Hist. Rom.* 51.55.2)

---

[38] For the immense value for military virtues for Roman identity and self-understanding, see, e.g., Roth 2009, 1; Zimmermann 2009, 10–16; Hahn 2017, 36–37.

179

At last, after they had carried on an evenly-balanced struggle for a very long time and many on both sides alike had fallen or been wounded, Pompey, since the larger part of his army was Asiatic and untrained, was defeated, even as had been made clear to him before the action. (*Hist. Rom.* 51.61)[39]

While Dio is not explicit, it can be read that the more "genuinely Roman" army is the one which consists of more Roman citizens. Within the period in which Dio writes, this means mostly Italians. Hence, Italy is therefore more powerful and virtuous in military affairs. Indeed, Caesar's army as an "army of citizens" is highlighted by Dio in another earlier story, where Caesar warns some of his mutinying troops that they, while armed, were no better than the citizens back home and had no superiority over them in birth, education, training, or customs, and that the citizens were also Romans who could be soldiers as well (*Hist. Rom.* 51.31.1–2). Thus, for Dio, Caesar's legions shared the origin, social customs, and other important traits with citizens residing in Rome, and were more "genuinely" Roman than Pompey's troops.

The lack of Roman virtues among Eastern peoples is also a recurring theme in Dio's history, as he quite closely follows the old stereotypes of Easterners presented by many Roman and Greek writers who came before him. Of course, Dio is not an Italian himself but a Greek. However, in his history, he also clearly separates both Greeks and Romans from "barbarians" (*Hist. Rom.* 37.18.1; 52.10.2).[40] These barbarian peoples receive a harsh treatment by Dio; Egyptians are cowardly and fickle worshippers of cattle (*Hist. Rom.* 51.16.6), Arabians treacherous (51.7.1–2), Syrians crafty and brash (78[77].10.2; 79.39), and so on. Even when reporting the events of his own lifetime, Dio mentions the revolts in Syria (in 175 CE) and writes about how Marcus Aurelius declared Cilicians, Syrians, Jews, and Egyptians as peoples who have never been proven as superior to Romans and never will. Thus, a clear border is drawn between Romans and Eastern people already under Roman rule (*Hist. Rom.* 72[71].25). Later, Dio describes the siege of Hatra in 198 CE by Septimius Severus, writing how Europeans were

---

[39] Trans Cary and Foster 1914–1927.

[40] For the classification of different types of foreigners in Dio, see Sørensen 2016.
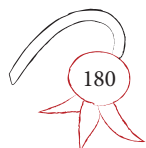
the only part of Severus's army with the ability to do anything, while his Syrian soldiers were completely useless (76[75].11.3–4). Dio's contempt toward Easterners becomes particularly clear when he recounts the deeds of Elagabalus, a Roman emperor with a Syrian background who ruled during Dio's own lifetime. For Dio, the young ruler was a "Sardanapalus"[41] who represented the luxury, degeneration, and unmanly habits of the East (Rantala 2020, 125–26).

Interestingly, while Dio's attitude is quite unfriendly toward those who had, during his own lifetime, become Roman citizens, he appears less hostile toward Parthians, the "archenemy" of Rome. While Dio stresses that the Parthians are still an inferior people compared to the Romans, he seems to consider them as the most admirable group existing in the East.[42] Apparently, this attitude derives from the military achievements of Parthia in their numerous wars against Rome, which also took place during Dio's own lifetime.[43] As Parthians were formidable soldiers, they in fact represent Roman ideals and qualities attached to the Roman identity better than other, weaker Eastern peoples, such as those who had just become Roman citizens en masse by the edict of Caracalla.

181
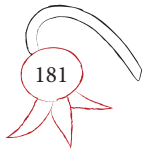
Conclusion

From the purely "legal" point of view, citizenship has a very limited value in Dio's history, as demonstrated by his mostly uninterested attitude toward "active citizens" during the days of the early and mid-Republic. From very early on, the roles of citizens are mostly subordinate to the acts of great men, and even when citizens do make a rare appearance as

---

41 For example, *Hist. Rom.* 80[79].1.1; 2.4; 10.2; 11.1; and so on (cf. SHA *Heliogab.* 17.4). Sardanapalus was an Assyrian king who, in Roman literature, represented a stereotype of a weak and feminine Easterner, summarized in Diod. Sic. *Bib. Hist.* 2.23.

42 For example, *Hist. Rom.* 37.7.2; 40.14.4.

43 For a more detailed study on Dio's views on Parthians, see Peltonen and Rantala 2022.

active actors in Roman political life, Dio does not regard these occasions very highly. For him, the political activity of citizens in pre-imperial Rome mostly highlights the unstable nature of the republican system itself. Thus, it serves in its own way Dio's political mission; while the problems of pre-Augustan Rome were primarily caused by competition between strong individuals, the role of ordinary citizens did not make things any better.

However, the idea of citizenship is not superfluous to Dio On the contrary, it seems to have value as a symbolic mark of membership within the Roman community during the first centuries of its history. As such, it also had a clear ethnic dimension, which is shown in Dio's work by the role of Italians as "natural" members of the citizen-community. This dimension can be traced both from his descriptions of the "normal" process of granting citizenship inside Italy, as well as his more cautious attitude when describing the granting of citizen rights outside Italy, seeing the process as part of a political game during the shaky period of the late Republic. As Dio was not an Italian by birth, his seemingly cautious attitude might seem odd. After all, he himself was not only a Roman citizen but also a senator, and extremely proud of his status (Rantala 2016, 175). However, when reading Dio, we can see that, while he does not appear enthusiastic about citizenship begin given outside of Italy, his lack of enthusiasm applies to proceedings wherein citizen rights are granted en masse to "peoples," not individuals. Thus, Dio does not directly criticize the Roman traditional policy of granting citizenship to local elites in the provinces who took care of much of the local government for Rome and sometimes became Roman senators as well.[44] What he apparently wished for was simple moderation.

A similar attitude can be traced to when he described the actions of Claudius, who initially had good intentions. We can trace occasional prudence and, again, an ethnic dimension in Dio's account. However, the moderation was lost with the actions of Empress Messalina and imperial freedmen and the selling of citizenship out of greed without any

---

[44] While the role of these local elites was crucial for Rome from a governing perspective, it should also be noticed that the number of provincial citizens in total was much bigger than simply that of the elites (Lavan 2016, 33).

control. Claudius, with all his good intentions, could not resist such greed. This was a dangerous precedent, and the first step away from Augustus' precious advice had been taken. Later, similar action was taken by Caracalla, again motivated by money; first he bankrupted the senatorial class, and then gave citizenship to all, without any consideration to whom he was giving it, out of greed. In other words, both Claudius (or Messalina) and Caracalla broke away from the policies of an ideal monarch, although Caracalla's decision had much more radical consequences. Despite the actions of Messalina and Claudius, citizenship had probably not spread very widely by 212 CE; after the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, the situation was very different. A vast number of new citizens now emerged in the Empire, and yet the majority of them did not impress Dio. His attitude toward Easterners is extremely hostile, and, as we have seen, he makes a clear separation between Italian "citizens" and Eastern "Asians"—particularly with regard to their combat abilities— an important marker of Roman identity in Roman historical thought throughout the centuries. Caracalla's policy was, thus, an explicit step away from Augustan ideals and further proof that he was inadequate as a ruler.

Hence, while citizenship itself is not an idea to which Dio gives very much attention to in his history, we can still recognize that it occasionally appears as part of his "mission." Thus, for Dio the *Constitutio Antoniniana* expressed the abandonment of the ideal monarchical system of Augustus, in which citizenship should be controlled and only very carefully expanded. The changing status of citizenship from the Augustan era to Caracalla went hand in hand with the changing nature of the Roman Empire itself—a direction that a Roman senator such as Cassius Dio found unacceptable.

Bibliography

Ando, Clifford. 2011. *Law, Language and Empire in the Roman Tradition.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Ando, Clifford, ed. 2016. *Citizenship and Empire in Europe, 200–1900: The Antonine Constitution after 1800 Years*. Stuttgart: Steiner.

Besson, Arnaud. 2017. "Fifty Years before the Antonine Constitution: Access to Roman Citizenship and Exclusive Rights." In *Citizens in the Graeco-Roman World: Aspects of Citizenship from the Archaic Period to AD 212*, edited by Lucia Cecchet and Anna Busetto, 199–220. Leiden: Brill.

Blois, Lukas de. 2014. "The Constitutio Antoniniana (AD 212): Taxes or Religion?" *Mnemosyne* 67, no. 6: 1014–21. https://doi.org/10.1163/1568525X-12301497.

Burden-Strevens, Christopher and Mads Ortving Lindholmer, eds. 2019. *Cassius Dio's Forgotten History of Early Rome: The Roman History, Books 1–21*. Leiden: Brill.

Carlá-Uhink, Filippo. 2017. "Alteram loci patriam, alteram iuris: 'Double Fatherlands' and the Role of Italy in Cicero's Political Discourse." In *Citizens in the Graeco-Roman World: Aspects of Citizenship from the Archaic Period to AD 212*, edited by Lucia Cecchet and Anna Busetto, 259–82. Leiden: Brill.

Cary, Earnest and Herbert B. Foster, trans. 1914–1927. *Dio's Roman History*. 8 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cooley, Alison E. 2016. "Coming to Terms with Dynastic Power, 30 BC–AD 69." In *A Companion to Roman Italy*, edited by Alison E. Cooley, 103–20. Chichester, UK: Wiley & Sons.

Corbo, Chiara. 2013. *Constitutio Antoniniana: Ius Philosophia Religio*. Naples: M. D'Auria.

Dench, Emma. 2004. *Romulus' Asylum*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Freyburger-Galland, Marie-Laure. 1997. *Aspects du Vocabulaire Politique et Institutionnel de Dion Cassius*. Paris: De Boccard.

Fromentin, Valérie, Estelle Bertrand, Michèle Coltelloni-Trannoy, Michel Molin, and Gianpaolo Urso, eds. 2016. *Cassius Dion: Nouvelles lectures*. Bordeaux: Ausonius Éditions.

Gowing, Alan. 1992. *The Triumviral Narratives of Appian and Cassius Dio.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Gowing, Alan. 2016. "Cassius Dio and the City of Rome." In *Cassius Dio: Greek Intellectual and Roman Politician*, edited by Carsten Lange and Jesper Madsen, 117–35. Leiden: Brill.

Hahn, Johannes. 2017. "Rituals of Killing: Public Punishment, Munera and the Dissemination of Roman Values and Ideology in the Imperium Romanum." In *Imperial Identities in the Roman World*, edited by Wouter Vanacker and Arjan Zuiderhoek, 16–35. London: Routledge.

Hose, Martin. 1994. *Erneuerung der Vergangenheit: Die Historiker im Imperium Romanum von Florus bis Cassius Dio*. Stuttgart: De Gruyter.
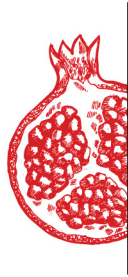
Isaac, Benjamin. 2004. *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jones, Brandon. 2016. "Cassius Dio: Pepaideumenos and Politician on Kingship." In *Cassius Dio: Greek Intellectual and Roman Politician*, edited by Carsten Lange and Jesper Madsen, 297–315. Leiden: Brill.

Jones, Brandon. 2019. "Cultural Interactions and Identities in Dio's Early Books." In *Cassius Dio's Forgotten History of Early Rome: The Roman History, Books 1–21*, edited by Christopher Burden-Strevens and Mads Ortving Lindholmer, 285–310. Leiden: Brill.

Kemezis, Adam M. 2007. "Augustus the Ironic Paradigm: Cassius Dio's Portrayal of the Lex Julia and Lex Papia Poppaea." *Phoenix* 61, no. 3–4: 270–85. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20304659.

Kemezis, Adam M. 2014. *Greek Narratives of the Roman Empire under the Severans: Cassius Dio, Philostratus and Herodian.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lange, Carsten and Jesper Madsen, eds. 2016. *Cassius Dio: Greek Intellectual and Roman Politician*. Leiden: Brill.

Lavan, Myles. 2016. "The Spread of Roman Citizenship, 14–212 CE: Quantification in the Face of High Uncertainty." *Past and Present* 230, no. 1: 3–46. https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtv043.

Le Glay, Marcel, Jean-Louis Voisin, Yann Le Bohec, and David Cherry. 1996. A History of Rome, 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lindholmer, Mads Ortving. 2019. "Breaking the Idealist Paradigm: Competition in Dio's Earlier Republic." In *Cassius Dio's Forgotten History of Early Rome: The Roman History, Books 1–21*, edited by Christopher Burden-Strevens and Mads Ortving Lindholmer, 190–214. Leiden: Brill.

Madsen, Jesper Majbom. 2009. *Eager To Be Roman: Greek Response to Roman Rule in Pontus and Bithynia*. London: Duckworth.

Madsen, Jesper Majbom. 2019. *Cassius Dio*. London: Bloomsbury.

Marotta, Valerio. 2009. *La cittadinanza romana in eta` imperiale, secoli I–III d.C.: Una sintesi*. Turin: Giappichelli.

Millar, Fergus. 1964. *A Study of Cassius Dio*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Osgood, Josiah and Christopher A. Baron, eds. 2019. *Cassius Dio and the Late Roman Republic*. Leiden: Brill.

Peltonen, Jaakkojuhani and Jussi Rantala. 2022. "Roman-Persian Wars in Roman Historiography from Livy to Procopius: Expressions of Proto-Orientalism?" In *Negotiation, Collaboration and Conflict in Ancient and Medieval Communities*, edited by Christian Krötzl, Katariina Mustakallio, and Miikka Tamminen, 139–59. London: Routledge.

185
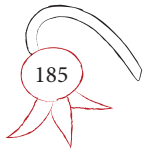
Pferdehirt, Barbara and Markus Scholz, eds. 2012. *Bürgerrecht und Krise: Die Constitutio Antoniniana 212 n. Chr. und ihre innenpolitischen Folgen.* Mainz: Schnell & Steiner.

Potter, David. 2004. *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180–395.* London: Routledge.

Rantala, Jussi. 2016. "Dio the Dissident: The Portrait of Severus in the Roman History." In *Cassius Dio: Greek Intellectual and Roman Politician*, edited by Carsten Lange and Jesper Madsen, 159–76. Leiden: Brill.

Rantala, Jussi. 2017. *The Ludi Saeculares of Septimius Severus: The Ideologies of a New Roman Empire.* Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Rantala, Jussi. 2020. "Ruling in Purple … And Wearing Make-up: Gendered Adventures of Emperor Elagabalus as seen by Cassius Dio and Herodian." In *Exploring Gender Diversity in the Ancient World*, edited by Allison Surtees and Jennifer Dyer, 123–30. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Rees, William. 2012. "Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely: Cassius Dio and the Fall of the Roman Republic." In *Corruption and Integrity in Ancient Greece and Rome*, edited by Philip Bosman, 151–68. Pretoria: Classical Association of South Africa.

Roth, Jonathan P. 2009. *Roman Warfare.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sherwin-White, A. N. 1973. *The Roman Citizenship.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Simons, Benedikt. 2009. *Cassius Dio und die römische Republic: Untersuchungen zum Bild des römischen Gemeinwesens in dem Bücher 3–35 der ῾Ρωμαϊκα.* Berlin: De Gryuter.

Southern, Pat. 2001. *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine.* London: Routledge.

Sørensen, Søren Lund. 2016. "Cassius Dio and the Foreigners." In *Cassius Dio: Greek Intellectual and Roman Politician*, edited by Carsten Lange and Jesper Madsen, 76–91. Leiden: Brill.

Woolf, Greg. 2000. *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zimmermann, Martin. 2009. "Zur Deutung von Gewaltdarstellungen." In *Extreme Formen von Gewalt in Bild und Text des Altertums*, edited by Martin Zimmermann, 7–45. Munich: Herbert Utz.

186

LETTER FROM MARTYRS OF LYONS AND VIENNE AS A DIASPORA QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY

Jarkko Vikman

Abstract

This article argues that the *Letter from the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne* (Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1–4) should not only be treated as an early Christian martyrdom narrative, but also analyzed as a Greco-Roman minority text. Even though it concentrates on violent outbursts against a group of Jesus adherents and possesses graphic depictions of their suffering, its significance is not limited to intra-Christian discussions. It also displays experiences and needs from a colonized world full of competing diaspora realities. It can be read as a message home from an author living abroad. It emphasizes the genuine way of life of the diaspora group and uses it as a device in translocal negotiations. Paradoxically, many of these valuations of authenticity were also shared by the Roman authorities in Gaul as well as by the resistance that the Roman authorities had previously faced. According to Rey Chow's (1993) diaspora studies, this paradox colors all production of diaspora culture. This article enlightens this feature by comparing the text with two non-Christian sources: Tacitus's depiction of Gallic resistance fighter Mariccus (*Hist.* 2.61) and a letter that Syrian merchants sent to their hometown from Roman Puteoli (*OGI* 595).

Cette contribution explique que la *Lettre des martyrs de Lyons et de Vienne* (Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 5.1-4) ne doit pas être lue seulement comme un récit de martyre chrétien primitif, mais aussi être analysée comme un texte minoritaire gréco-romain. Même si le texte se concentre sur des explosions de violence à l'encontre d'un groupe d'adeptes de Jésus et sur la description graphique de leurs souffrances, sa signification ne se limite pas aux discussions intra-chrétiennes. Au contraire, le texte présente également les expériences et les besoins d'un monde colonisé empli de réalités diasporiques rivales. Il peut être lu comme le message d'un auteur vivant à l'étranger à l'intention de son lieu d'origine. Il souligne le mode de vie authentique du groupe de la diaspora et l'utilise comme un dispositif dans des négociations translocales. Paradoxalement, bon nombre de ces valeurs d'authenticité étaient également partagées par les autorités romaines en Gaule, ainsi que par des groupes de résistance à laquelle les autorités romaines avaient été confrontées auparavant. Selon les études de Rey Chow sur la diaspora (1993), ce paradoxe colore toutes les productions dans la culture de la diaspora. L'article met en avant cette caractéristique en comparant le texte avec deux sources non chrétiennes : La description par Tacite du résistant gaulois Mariccus (*Hist.* 2.61) et une lettre que des marchands syriens ont envoyée à leur ville d'origine depuis la ville romaine de Puteoli (*OGI* 595).

188

LETTER FROM MARTYRS OF LYONS AND VIENNE AS A DIASPORA QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY

Jarkko Vikman

189
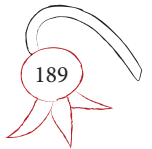
Introduction

What else can we learn from an early Christian martyr narrative, besides how to live and die as a Christian? I argue that the *Letter from the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne* (Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1–4) should not only be treated as an early Christian martyrdom narrative but also as one Greco-Roman minority text among others. Even though the text concentrates on violent outburst against a group of Jesus adherents and on graphic depictions of their sufferings, its significance is not limited to intra-Christian discussion of what it meant to act as good Christ-believer. Instead, the *Letter* also displays experiences and needs from a colonized world full of competing diaspora realities.[1] Eusebius

---

[1] I use the term "diaspora" as a wider indicator of an ethnic minority group living abroad and of the sociopolitical realities that are related to living as an ethnic

claims that the narrative had a twofold goal, namely, to interact with the inhabitants of the *Letter*'s "native land" in Asia Minor and to alter the way prophetic movements from Asia Minor were appreciated in the capital of Rome. If we choose to believe Eusebius in this statement but remain critical of his views on the universal nature of Christian identity, the *Letter* can be read as a message to home from an author[2] living abroad that emphasizes the genuine way of living of the diaspora group and uses this way of life as a device in translocal negotiations.

I argue that the *Letter* wants to indicate how thoroughly a diaspora group of Asians and Phrygians living in Lyons and Vienne are following the honorable behavior of exemplary Asian individuals. Paradoxically, many of these valuations of honorific behavior were also shared by the Roman authorities in Gaul as well as by the resistance that these authorities had previously faced. This paradox can be analyzed as part of a diaspora rivalry for authenticity: the need to follow closely the "original" cultural system of a perceived native land and the tragedy that arises from the fact that no such pure cultures and identities exist. As Rey Chow (1993) in his research on contemporary Chinese diasporas has argued, this need for authenticity creates essentializing caricatures of stable ethnically divided cultures, which the ones living in the diaspora still must support in hopes of future success.

The *Letter*'s quest for an authentic minority way of life can be compared to the letter that Tyrian merchants sent to their native land from Puteoli (*OGI* 595). On the other hand, the impossibility of a genuine diaspora culture becomes apparent when we compare the *Letter* with Tacitus's description of the resistance of the Gallic hero Mariccus in *Hist.* 2.61. As in Tacitus, so too in the *Letter*: Roman ideals, the struggle of a subordinated minority, and stereotypical depictions of mindless

---

minority in an imperial context (Edwards 2007). It should thus not be understood as a term related only to the Jewish diaspora. This means that I also wish to leave open the question of how much the "Asians" of the *Letter* would have considered themselves as related to Judeans.

[2] For the sake of readability, I will use singular form about the one(s) responsible for the creation of the text. This does not need to imply that a single historical person wrote it.
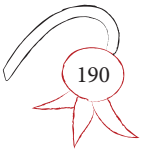
barbarity mix to create a complex picture of colonized experiences. The text's rhetoric may thus not persuade us as critical scholars about the diasporic lifestyle's authenticity. Researchers familiar with cultural phenomena know all too well that such authenticity is always an over-simplification. Still, the text's tragic narrative could have been used to persuade its recipients that the author was worthy of recognition. In addition to this speculation about the motives for the text, we should also be aware that it may solely be responsible for creating the group that it describes. It is by no means necessary that the author was part of a socio-historical group that also included the individuals described as suffering diaspora inhabitants. Instead, the author may have wanted to benefit from making them appear as part of a group of oppressed traditionalists.

I believe this kind of push toward the appreciation of local realities and networks between different local actors is a needed turn in a scholarly world that has often concentrated on universal-like ideologies.[3] Whether the emphasis has been on the social identities of religious groups or on the theological connotations of certain authors, a real situatedness has often only given a "context" for ideas to rise. Unlike these universal-like interpretations, my reading contributes to scholarly discussions by stating that the force of the *Letter* lies precisely in its capability of creating conventional interaction between certain local realities.

191

---
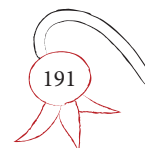
[3] This of course does not denote that the social setting could be analyzed somehow separately from ideological valuations, only that the local contexts need to be taken into consideration as one part of early Christian formation—a notion already arising from regional differences in early Christian belief as analyzed in Walter Bauer (1934). Heikki Räisänen—one of the key researchers of the early Christian thought world—introduced the relation of ideological and other factors to the study of early Christianity: "I do not want to explore ideas as if they were floating in the air. On the contrary, they are to be firmly rooted precisely in the 'social and cultural realities': in the experience of those who gave verbal expressions to the ideas" (Räisänen 2010, 2). If this article helps to scaffold the *Letter* into the local and translocal cultural politics of its Roman context, I will be more than satisfied.

Scholarly Views on the *Letter* and Its Context

I begin by briefly presenting the *Letter* and the introductory problems related to its historical context. After the introductory matters, I argue that Eusebius's way of framing the *Letter* guided research to understand it as a struggle between abstract ideologies, and not as diaspora text. I then widen the previous understanding with the help of Maia Kotrosits's (2015, 2020) research on early Christianity as a multifaceted assemblage of diaspora anxieties that had arisen from colonial settings. I give the examples, mentioned above, of Puteoli merchants and Tacitus's Mariccus, as they may help us find similar diaspora patterns as that found in the *Letter*. I especially focus on the *Letter's* portrayal of the deaths of the diaspora inhabitants as a tool for proving the honorable nature of the author's inner circle. Lastly, I hypothesize about why this kind of diaspora had a need for such reassurance about their noble nature in the first place.

The Letter from Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne paints a gruesome image of a local violent outburst that was directed toward a minority living in the cities of Lyons and Vienne in Gallia Lugdunensis. According to the text, the events occurred during the seventeenth reigning year of Marcus Aurelius (177 CE). The *Letter* has been preserved only as part of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*. The first chapter of the *Letter* describes the sudden rise of the "tribulations" (θλῖψις; *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.4), the verdicts that are given to those considered guilty of being Christians, and the latter's subsequent executions. The second chapter describes the modesty and love that the convicted ones show toward their fellows. In the beginning of the third chapter, Eusebius adds further details about the group: how Alcibiades, one of the imprisoned ones, had a vision that criticized his extreme ascetism, and how the group decided to send a letter to Asia, Phrygia, and Rome discussing the rising local Phrygian prophetic movement known as Montanism. The fourth chapter brings the description of the Gallic group to a close by presenting its recommendation for Irenaeus to be sent to bring a message from the Gauls to Eleutherus, the overseer of a Roman Christ group.

I focus my analysis on the *Letter's* descriptions of trials, judgments, and death penalties in its first chapter. Particularly interesting for ear-

lier research as well as for my topic have been the fates of three different characters of the narrative (even though several others are also mentioned in the *Letter*, as will become apparent). A deacon named Sanctus is the first one presented in the plot. He is applauded as he gives no further information about his background to his interrogators besides the words "I am a Christian" (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.20). A second character of interest is Attalus, who is described as part of the local elite, yet he must meet a disgraceful death in the arena (5.1.43–52). Finally, the narrative seems to culminate in the fate of an enslaved girl named Blandina (5.1.41–56). Though coming from a significantly lower social stratum than that of Sanctus or Attalus, it is she who gets the most attention in the plot of the *Letter*: she even takes the form of Christ when facing more cruel violence than the other characters in the narrative. Blandina stays alive through torture twice (5.1.41–42, 54), is whipped, thrown to beasts, roasted, and finally dies when trapped in a net and thrown before a bull (5.1.56).

Curiously, no other witnesses about the Gallic persecution of early Christians are available to us before the fourth-century author Sulpicius Severus (*Chron.* 2.32.2). Even his statement may only imply that some of the first Christians in Lyons were arrested at the end of the second century CE.[4] Besides these historical problems, the *Letter*'s background as a Gallic second-century document has also been questioned.[5] However, most scholars seem to regard Gaul as the original provenance of the text, as its vocabulary differs from the rest of *Ecclesiastical History*. Furthermore, the *Letter*'s interest in the character of Stephen from Acts 7 (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.2.5) seems to be an especially Gallic phenomenon, since Irenaeus of Lyons is one of the few other early Christian writers who refer to the martyr-deacon.[6] I agree with the majority view about Gallic provenance, even though it must be acknowledged that Eusebius framed

---
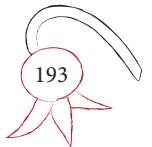
[4] Thompson 1912, 361–64; C. R. Moss 2012, 100–1.

[5] For the text as a complete third-century forgery, see Thompson 1912. For the text's heavy redaction by Eusebius, see Löhr 1989.

[6] Iren. *Haer.* 3.12.10; 3.12.13; 4.15.1. See the detailed discussion on the date and provenance of the *Letter* in C. R. Moss 2012, 103–6; Petitfils 2016, 211–16.

the *Letter* in a new textual setting, which undoubtedly had a significant impact on the observations of its readers (DeVore 2014, 233–35).

Even though the *Letter*'s diasporic nature has been widely acknowledged, lately this aspect has not gained much scholarly attention. Instead, research has emphasized the *Letter*'s role as a creator of early Christian identity. Elizabeth Castelli, Stephanie Cobb, Candida Moss, and James Petitfils have each analyzed what kind of ideals the *Letter* gives for living (and dying) as a Christian, and how these ideals are entangled with wider Greco-Roman values.[7] This is an understandable scholarly emphasis, since it has become harder and harder to understand sources such as the *Letter* as historically apt descriptions of actual second-century persecutions. And so it seems reasonable to look for ways to understand the text as something other than a mere historical reporting of facts. The notion of community building is a straightforward starting point for seeking other explanations for the wide popularity of martyrdom narratives. However, I wish to complicate this explanation (and others) by concentrating on how the local and trans-local dimensions of the *social* reality may have played their part in the creation of the *Letter*.

Even if the diaspora aspect of the *Letter* has not been the main topic of research lately, roots for this kind of perspective go back to the nineteenth century. Already William Simpson (1870, 73) suggested that originally Polycarp from Smyrna had first sent missionaries to Lyons. And Irenaeus would have been among these missionaries. Whatever we think of Simpson's suggestion, it is evident that Asians and Phrygians formed a significant minority in the area. Lyons seems to have functioned as a vivid center for trade, and thus attracted people from around the Empire.[8] The Phrygian cult of Kybele became a popular one in Gaul, and we also have evidence of Phrygian participants in the localized cult of the divine mother in Lyons.[9] An Asian minority population, consisting of sailors and merchants, is attested in sev-

---

[7] Castelli 2004; Cobb 2008; C. R. Moss 2010, 2012; Petitfils 2016.

[8] Frend 1964, 127; 1965, 4.

[9] *CIL* XIII 1751 (Tabbernee 2007, 29).

194

eral Lyonnaise inscriptions.[10] W. H. C. Frend notes how Greek seems to function as the native language for the *Letter*'s distressed community: every time a member of the group speaks Latin, it is explicitly pointed out.[11] Frend also points out how Attalus is described as being from Pergamum (5.1.17) and Alexander—another one among the eight named martyrs—as a Phrygian (5.1.49).[12]

This aspect of diaspora and translocal correspondence is easily bypassed. In the following sections, I argue that this omission is due not only to scholarly neglect. Eusebius himself may have intentionally cast the narrative as a universal fact about what being a Christian was like, and thus set aside the *Letter*'s role as an example of a mundane piece of "business-as-usual" diaspora correspondence.

The Universal Tone of Eusebian Martyrdom

195

Eusebius has an interest in displaying the events depicted in the *Letter* as a common feature of the translocal church. This becomes evident in his conclusion of the events in *Hist. Eccl.* 5.2.1: "Such things happened to the churches of Christ under the above-mentioned emperor, from which we may reasonably conjecture the occurrences in the other provinces."[13] The persecution of "the" church is a universal feature for Eusebius, one defining marker of its orthodoxy (C. R. Moss 2012, 105, 116). As David DeVore notes, Eusebius's opening words for the events had already set the scene by citing features of Christianity that are significant everywhere:

---
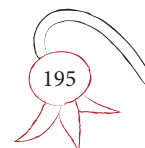
[10] For proof of an Asian minority population, see *CIL* XIII 2005, 2022, 2448 (C. R. Moss 2012, 190 n. 6). For the presence of sailors and merchants, see *CIL* XIII 1942, 1945 (Tabbernee 2007, 29).

[11] *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.20, 1.44, 1.52.

[12] Frend 1964, 126–27. Gregory of Tours (*Glor. Mart.* 48–49) names forty other martyrs, half of whom have Asian names (1964, 127). However, the list includes several problems and historical improbabilities (Thompson 1912, 364–65).

[13] Translations of Eusebius Pamphilus's *Ecclesiastical History* are from McGiffert 1890.

> At the beginning of book 5 Eusebius quotes the greeting of the *Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne*, where communities in Gaul address other communities in Asia and Phrygia. The distance between the letter's senders and its addressees highlights the reach of ecclesiastical communication. Eusebius emphasizes this distance by noting before the greeting that "the Rhone River, which flows round the entire country [of Gaul] with a powerful current, passes through both" Lyons and Vienne. This detail—the only geographical description I have found in the *Ecclesiastical History*—introduces the location of the martyrdoms as remote, unknown territory, inviting readers to ponder the distance between Lyons and the Asian and Phrygian addressees of the *Martyrs*. (DeVore 2014, 233)
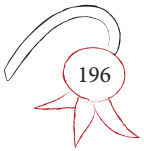
According to DeVore, the rare geographical description points to the same universalizing direction as Eusebius's words related to the martyrdom of Polycarp. When describing the heroic tragedy of Polycarp, Eusebius similarly emphasizes how all the churches around the world read the letter that depicted Polycarp's death. Eusebius has a keen interest to show that martyrdom is an essential feature of the Christians around the world and that all the Christians in most distant places are interested in it (DeVore 2014, 232–34). However, Eusebius is writing 150 years after the anonymous author of the *Letter*. Not only is their context different, but their motives might differ as well.

Eusebius's universalizing tone can also be detected from the way he portrays the relationship of the Gallic martyrs to Roman Christians. Eusebius describes how the ones imprisoned in Gaul wrote a letter about the Phrygian prophetic movement that was sent both to Asia Minor and Rome (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.3.4). Later, Eusebius ends his presentation of the Gallic situation with a letter of recommendation from the martyrs to Roman Christ group leader Eleutherus regarding their fellow Irenaeus (5.4.1–2). At least for Eusebius, the recommendation seems to have functioned, as Irenaeus is later depicted as having close ties with fellow Roman Jesus adherents. This is noted by DeVore, who considers that Eusebius deliberately presents introduction letters first and then later sets their senders and recipients in the same geographical location. This way, Eusebius can portray Christian relationships as stable, long-lasting, and as translocal as

196

possible.[14] Yet, as I argue in more detail below, these letters that Eusebius portrays as proof of stable Christian relationships can also be read as diaspora competition for prestige and praiseworthiness.

Eusebius's universalizing tone may have affected the scholarly questions that have been asked of the *Letter*. Current research has concentrated on the *Letter*'s tactics for portraying early Christian identity, as well as its relationship to the phenomena of martyrdom and honorable death. The questions have remained at the abstract level of ideas and identities. This would suit Eusebius, who uses these stories as markers of true Christians everywhere around the world. Yet, while these questions of Christian identity markers are important and interesting, one can also ask other questions.

One way to highlight different aspects of the *Letter* is to apply Jonathan Z. Smith's categories of "here," "there," and "anywhere" religions (2003, 30–35). In Smith's categories, the Eusebian understanding of the *Letter* would belong to the dimension of "anywhere": it is interested in dimensions that transcend geographical limits and seems disinterested about questions of political power and material goods. In addition to these "religions of anywhere," Smith's categories name those traditions that are especially interested in kinship lineages and ancestral customs as "religions of here." The third category, "religions of there," is about the religious practices that are linked to official institutions out *there* in public life, especially to temples that also function as centers of political and economic activity. In the following section, I would like to introduce these dimensions of "here" and "there" to the analysis of the *Letter*. I understand the function of text as something that consists of all three dimensions named by Smith. The *Letter* is a local text with a "here" nature: a narrative about a certain kinship lineage—a diaspora group—following the ways of highly esteemed Asian figures. Yet, it also has translocal needs, as it seeks to enforce the tangible sociopolitical realities of the author with the help of translocal exchange. As a by-product of this here-and-there exchange, the *Letter* also participates in creating

197

---

[14] For Irenaeus depicted together with the Roman *ekklesia*, see *Hist. Eccl.* 5.5.9–5.6.5, 5.20.1, 5.24.11–17 (DeVore 2014, 233–34).

a new and forceful mode of translocal identity that we have learned to recognize as early Christianity.

Diaspora theory may help to bring aspects of "here" and "there" to the analysis of the *Letter*. The perspective allows us to theorize what it is like to live in a certain location while simultaneously emphasizing that one could also live authentically in another context, and how these kinds of emphases may interact with ideological flows of an "anywhere" nature. I now present one such perspective.

"Early Christianity" as One Tool for Claiming Diaspora Authenticity—Among Many Other Honorable Minority Positions

Maia Kotrosits (2015, 2020) has analyzed how first- and second-century martyrdom narratives can be viewed as diaspora experiences in colonized contexts. Instead of understanding them as tools for intra-Christian identity construction and mythmaking, Kotrosits understands them as diaspora documents that aim to turn experiences of not-belonging to victory and success.[15] I would argue that the *Letter* should be analyzed from a similar perspective. We should take time to assess it as a diaspora document that was sent to Asian and Phrygian people by an author who claims to be their fellow, and who is currently living as one of the "slaves for Christ" in Vienne and Lyons (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.3). The *Letter* does construct Christ myths and shows various aspects of common reactions to these myths. Yet, as Kotrosits argues, diaspora contexts and their complexity should be considered as an even more important background

---

[15] Kotrosits 2015; 2020, 124–44. To fit my argument into a single article, I have had to cut Kotrosits's emphasis on affective forces of not-belonging and hostility and reduce this theoretically rich view to a vague label, "colonial experiences." Even though this choice does not do full justice to Kotrosits's argument, I still hope that her views as I have presented them may help to give new light to the scholarly discussion related to the *Letter*. The affective side of Kotrosits's work is introduced in Kotrosits 2015, 1–20.

198

for these kinds of texts than abstract intra-Christian discussion (which is a mark of "anywhere religion," as Smith [2003] would call it).

Kotrosits argues that the term "Christian" is used in these martyrdom narratives both to exclude diaspora minorities from the wider society and to turn this experience of ostracism into victory (2015, 104–5). Kotrosits uses letters of Ignatius of Antioch as the earliest examples of the use of the term "Christianity," and links its usage to this phenomenon of not-belonging (2015, 76–77).[16] The letters present Ignatius as a cultic authority who has been imprisoned in Antioch and is now being transported to Rome to face the death penalty. Throughout his journey, Ignatius writes to other authorities of Jesus adherents in Asia Minor and Rome. Yet, he does not describe himself in the letters as a Christian. He says that he is called such and is hopefully about to become one. According to Ignatius (*Rom.* 3:2–3), he will become a Christian, as he becomes eaten by the beasts of the arena and as his body totally vanishes (Kotrosits 2015, 77–78). In this way, he becomes sacramental nourishment for the groups that have accepted his message (*Rom.* 4).[17] Kotrosits's understanding of "Christianity" as part of diaspora experience does not imply that the significance of the phenomenon should be reduced to an inner emotion. Kotrosits states that Christianity in the Ignatian epistles is also a belief system and a social reality comparable to Judaism. This can be seen in the letter to the Magnesians (*Mag.* 8.2), which states that prophets of ancient Israel were actually Christians (and not Jews), for they were persecuted because of Christ (Kotrosits 2015, 72–73). Christianity is a belief structure, but for the author of the Ignatian letters it is a belief system that breathes through the need to not-belong and to react correctly to the ostracism and violence.
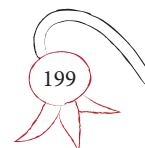
[16] The situation would not drastically change even if the letters would be considered as late-second- or early-third-century forgeries. For example, no other writer in the collection of the Apostolic Fathers uses the term (Kotrosits 2015, 77). I am not assuming that the author of the *Letter* had to know the Ignatian epistles. I only consider it likely that the author may have known the same tradition that Polycarp also mentions about the executed overseer called Ignatius (Pol. *Phil.* 9, 13).

[17] Kotrosits 2015, 79–80. See also Castelli 2004, 80–83, whose interpretation of Ignatius as becoming a disciple of Christ has affected to the work of Kotrosits.

According to Kotrosits, complex experiences of colonized minorities become manifested in statements entwined with trauma, forced actions, tragedies, and violent scenes.[18] These embodied experiences become visible when the diaspora group negotiates its borders and alliances with others. Kotrosits applies Chow's (1993) studies on contemporary Chinese diaspora culture to elaborate how this negotiation easily leads the diaspora culture to become particularly obsessed with its own authenticity: how closely it follows the "original" cultural system of the perceived native land. The most authentic diaspora group is also seen as the most valuable one. Yet, when seen from the outside, such authenticity does not even seem to exist, as negotiations of belonging and surviving in a colonized environment will inevitably lead to compromises and hybrid identities (Kotrosits 2015, 12–13, 95–96). These negotiations are often conducted between a rock and a hard place, as it were, and thus leads to the creation of bonds with odd bedfellows. They create "monstrous families of reluctant belongings" as one must join the same team with those who could be perceived as a diaspora group's archenemies in different contexts (Kotrosits 2015, 96–97, 112–15). Negotiations with colonizing powers and rival groups also become visible in the *Letter*'s violent narrative (as we can see below). As earlier studies on martyrdom stories have already noted, these negotiations often lead to strange actions and valuations that override our simple categories of Jewish, Christian, Pagan, or Roman influences.[19]

Another Letter of a Diaspora Group: The Case of the Tyrian Merchant Station

The importance of authentic diaspora behavior is not limited to early Christian narratives on martyrdom. A similar theme is addressed in

---

[18] Kotrosits 2015, 37–39, 80–83, 165–68, 187–88, 227–28; 2020, 143–44.

[19] See, e.g., Daniel Boyarin's (1999, 64) notion of "the enormous convolutions of cultural multicausation, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman, in the production of the multifold discourse of martyrdom." Boyarin's statement is applied to the *Letter* in Petitfils 2016, 248 n. 185.

the letter from Tyrian merchants stationed in Puteoli, Campagna, to their native compatriots in Syria in 174 CE (available to us through the inscription *OGI* 595 = *IGRom.* I 420).[20] The inscription consists of two parts: (1) a plea for help sent to the city of Tyre; and (2) a resolution that was made in the meeting of the city. Here, I offer Philip Harland's (2012) translation of the first part:

> This is a letter which was written to the city of Tyre, the sacred, inviolable, and autonomous metropolis of Phoenicia and of other cities, and mistress of a fleet.
>
> To the civic leaders (*archontes*), Council and People of their sovereign homeland, from those settled in Puteoli (*hoi en Potiolois katoikountes*), greetings. Because of the gods and the fortune of our lord, the emperor, if there are any other stations in Puteoli, our station (*statiōn*) is better than the others both in adornment and in size, as most of you know. In the past, this was cared for by the Tyrians settled in Puteoli, who were numerous and wealthy. But now our number has dwindled to a few and, since we pay the expenses for the sacrifices and services to our ancestral gods established here in temples, we do not have the means to pay the station's annual payment of 250 denarii, especially as the expenses for the bull sacrifice at the games in Puteoli have been imposed on us. We therefore beg you to provide for the station's continued existence. Now it will continue if you make provision for annual payment of 250 denarii. For we took care of the other expenses and those incurred in the restoration of the station for the sacred day of our lord, the emperor, so as not to burden the city (i.e. Tyre). We also remind you that no income accrues either from shippers (*nauklēroi*) or from merchants (*emporoi*) to our station, as is the case with the station in royal Rome. We therefore beg you to make provision in this circumstance. Written in Puteoli, July 23, during the consulship of Gallus and Flaccus Cornelianus.

Already the openings of the letter from Puteoli and the letter from Gaul bear interesting similarities. "The slaves of Christ" are depicted

201

---

[20] Sosin 1999, 275. See line 20 of the inscription, which indicates that the response from the Tyrians to Puteoli was formed in a gathering "of the boule conducted on 11 Dios year 300 [= 174 CE] …". The inscription and translation are available in Sosin 1999 and in the Associations in the Greco-Roman World database (Harland 2012).

as Οἱ ἐν Βιέννῃ καὶ Λουγδούνῳ τῆς Γαλλίας παροικοῦντες (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.3). They live in the foreign lands of Vienne and Lugdunum (Lyons). Respectively, the merchants at Puteoli begin their letter with the greeting τῆς κυρίας πατρίδος οἱ ἐν Ποτιόλοις κατοικοῦντες χαίρειν—"settlers from Puteoli that greet their sovereign homeland." Both openings are thus setting the scene for what follows: the groups are far away from home and inhabiting an area that is not ancestrally theirs.

When the merchants ask for financial support (a rather modest sum of 250 *denarii*) and recognition of their unique status amid other merchant stations, their problems are framed in cultic language. The ancestral traditions of the "greatest and most splendid" merchant station in Puteoli have caused them economic stress, as they not only had to take care of their own ancestral customs, but also contribute a bull offering to an annual festival of the town. The station exceeding all the other stations in greatness also wanted to exceed others in piety. On the other hand, the moderate plea from Puteoli might merely evince an experience of injustice at the hands of a rival Tyrian merchant station in Rome.[21] The Port of Ostia, near the city of Rome, was rising to a position more significant than ever before. In addition, the Tyrian station in Ostia did get supplementary funding from associations of shippers and merchants—a benefit not available to the older Puteoli station (as the inscription also notes). The relatively small sum might not have been the main issue of the note. Its significance might have been to function as a symbol for stating the injustice and thereby as a means to gather more support for the Puteoli station.

Like the letter of the Puteoli merchants, so too the *Letter* from Gaul belongs to the sphere of multifaceted diaspora realities. In these contexts, examples of mythologized traditions were used to negotiate between diaspora minorities, native areas, rival groups, and colonizing

---

[21] Scholars have even suggested corrections to the inscription so that the correspondence would have addressed larger sums—without too much to base their corrected readings on, as Joshua Sosin has demonstrated (1999, 279–81; arguing against larger sums expressed in, for example, Mommsen 1850, 61; Dubois 1907, 92–93; D'Arms 1974, 105).

forces. The *Letter* uses cultic language related to Christ myths in these negotiations.

The Impossibility of a Genuine Diaspora Culture: The Case of Mariccus in Tacitus' *Histories*

As Kotrosits and Chow have noted, the struggle for authentic diaspora culture is not tantamount to an innocent listing of existing values. More likely, it should be treated as a vigorous need for creating an authentic way of life in a context where previously obvious realities have been questioned. At the same time, this demand for authenticity hides the colonial forces that always complicate the demand for authenticity. Even in the case of the *Letter*, the appreciation of the pure and authentic ways of the great men of Asia is an impossibility arising from diaspora needs. For example, Blandina's death closely resembles not only the fate of Polycarp, who had to face several executionary efforts before giving up his life (*Mart. Pol.* 15–16), but also the story that the Roman Tacitus recounts about a Gallic resistance fighter Mariccus in *Hist.* 2.61. Tacitus depicts the end of Mariccus in Lyons in 68 CE:
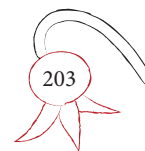
> While men of high distinction were thus [in a more cowardly manner] endangered, it raises a blush to record how a certain Mariccus, a common Boian, dared to take a hand in Fortune's game, and, pretending the authority of heaven, to challenge the Roman arms. And this liberator of the Gallic provinces, this god—for he had given himself that honor—after collecting eight thousand men, was already plundering the Aeduan cantons nearest him, when that most important state, with the best of its youth and the cohorts which Vitellius gave, dispersed the fanatic crowd. Mariccus was taken prisoner in the battle. Later, when he was exposed to the beasts and the animals did not rend him, the stupid rabble believed him inviolable, until he was executed before the eyes of Vitellius.[22]

Tacitus appreciates Mariccus's manner of heroic death, even though in other aspects he seems to consider Mariccus and his followers as

---

[22] Tac. *Hist.* 2.61; trans. Moore 1925.

203

mindless savages.[23] The legend related to Mariccus may point to Chow's and Kotrosits's conceptualization of diaspora identity: it is in continuous negotiation with several other forces, such as dominating ethnicities and colonizing powers. In the *Letter*, the diaspora from Asia Minor joins with an ideal that was also related to Gallic resistance. Elsewhere, the *Letter* sides with Tacitus's standard Roman mockery of "the stupid rabble" and their uncivilized and unmanly savagery (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.57–60)—as if siding with Tacitus's notion of Mariccus's supporters.[24] The *Letter* wants to show its protagonists as heroes of resistance such as Tacitus's Mariccus, but at the same time displays its antagonists as mindless savages like Mariccus's followers. The legend of Mariccus indicates the complexity of resistance themes in the diaspora context of the *Letter*: one's resistance is one's accommodation and vice versa. There is no optimal equilibrium for an authentic diaspora identity.

Kotrosits's theorization on diaspora experiences may thus help to widen recent discussions on the nature of the *Letter*. For example, James Petitfils (2016) has recently argued that the text wants to emphasize the exclusivity of the Christian identity. Petitfils interprets Sanctus's responses to his torturers (in *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.20) as proof of this exclusivity. According to the *Letter*, "he [Sanctus] would not even tell his name, or the nation or city to which he belonged, or whether he was bond or free, but answered in the Roman tongue to all their questions, 'I am a Christian.'" Petitfils argues that this is to signify that Christianity is the only relevant self-categorization that the author wishes the audience to have: "The ubiquitously celebrated confession of the martyrs functions as a rejection of bloodline, hometown, and inherited status" (2016, 235–36, 243). Eusebius would certainly agree with Petitifils's reading: Christianity should be the only defining factor for the whole Empire. However, for the *Letter*'s author, it might have been enough to

---

[23] In addition, Tacitus wanted to portray Emperor Vitellius as a bloodthirsty savage by emphasizing that Mariccus's execution had to be postponed until Vitellus happened to arrive in Lyons. On Tacitus's interests regarding the depictions in *Hist.* 2.61, see Morgan 1993, 770–76.

[24] The barbarity and unreasonable unmanliness of the crowd is also analyzed in Cobb 2008, 84–86.

204

show that the protagonists did not show any kind of cooperative spirit when facing their opponents, but merely wanted to be handled in the way that was familiar to them from tales about Ignatius, Polycarp, and others. This as such does not mean that the author wanted to portray the heroes only as Christians, but that the text wanted them to be perceived as such when facing the distresses of colonial realities.

For Petitfils, the way the ingroup continuously calls its members "brethren" (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.5.2–8) also displays the overriding Christian identity for the group that was detected from Sanctus's responses to his torturers (2016, 242–43). For the same reason, Petitfils repeatedly translates the kinship term ἀδελφοί as "Christians."[25] While I do not wish to state that the group could not have considered themselves as Christians, there remains a need to understand this kinship terminology from perspectives other than that of intra-Christian discourse. As Harland has noted, kinship vocabulary was a key part of the language that many informal associations used to denote belonging to their group. For example, in addition to cultic groups, several professional guilds call their members ἀδελφοί. In several situations, it is impossible for us to define whether a group calling themselves merely "brothers" should be understood as referring foremost to a cultic gathering or to an activity related to professions, neighborhood, leisure time activities, or to something else (Harland 2005). For the *Letter*'s context, I would especially underline the ways kinship terminology is also apparent in the sources that we have from different ethnic (diaspora) groups from the turn of the Common Era. Judean groups from several locations around the Mediterranean considered their members as brethren.[26] The funerary inscription of Selgian immigrants in Cilicia states that the ἀδελφοί could sell their burial rights to other brothers, but not to outsiders.[27]

---
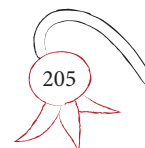
[25] Petitfils 2016, 227 (regarding ἀδελφῶν in *Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.9 and 5.1.10), 228 (ἀδελφῶν in 5.1.10), 240 (ἀδελφούς in 5.2.4), 242 (ἀδελφῶν in 5.2.5; 5.2.8).

[26] *IEgJud* 114 (Heliopolis); *IEurJud* II 171 (Rome); *IEurJud* II 528 (Rome); *IEgJud* 86 (Egypt); *IJO* III Syr 70 (Syria); Harland 2005, 500 n. 25.

[27] *IKilikiaBM* II 201; Harland 2005, 497–98. For Harland's argument, it is relevant to separate the uses of fictive kinship language from "literal" kinship, as he is comparing the language of associations to the wordings of New Testament "fictive

Thus, as I will argue in more detail below, the *Letter*'s claims for persecution of "brothers" should not be understood only as a sign of exclusively Christian identity. Instead, the term also points to an ideal of a shared bloodline with common ancestors, which is one dimension in the construction of shared ethnic identity.[28] The significance of brotherhood thus does not empty to "religious" affiliation. Instead, it is also closely related to the way the diaspora author wants to cast the group also as an ethnic minority in Gaul.[29] This notion aligns with Kotrosits's wider project, which wants to question the recent scholarly focus on specific early Christian identity. According to Kotrosits, the current scholarly focus tends to understand early Christian identity as something totally different from the surrounding ways of belonging—as a *sui generis* phenomenon in the Greco-Roman world—when in fact it should be understood as nothing more than one aspect of living in a complex social reality full of negotiating and competing colonial experiences (Kotrosits 2015, 21–60). Similarly, in the *Letter* the tribulations

---

kinship." For my argument, the division between fictive and actual kinship does not need to be this clear, if we choose to believe that several members of the group described in the *Letter* are portrayed as part of the same ethnic group. Ethnicity is often constructed according to ideas of common ancestors and a shared bloodline. In this construction of ethnic identity, kinship terminology descriptions may vary between more metaphorical usages and those usages that describe the genealogical relatedness of individuals. Furthermore, I would argue that it also signifies the relationship that the *Letter* portrays with its heroic ancestors, whose honorable behavior in hostile circumstances is imitated in the violent events described in the text. My view aligns with Smith's description about the role of associations and their fictive kinships in the birth of the religion of anywhere: "Associations have the potential of working at cross-purposes to the older conceptualizations of family in the religions of 'here,' as when differing memberships divide genealogical siblings while, at the same time, establishing new, intimate relations and loyalties among their socially created fellow 'brothers' and 'sisters'" (Smith 2003, 35).

[28] Schermerhorn 1970, 12; Horowitz 1985, 51–54; Hutchinson and Smith 1996, 6–7.

[29] It needs to be noted that also "Christianness" can be seen as an alternative ethnic identity, as argued in Buell 2005; Hodge 2007; Horrell 2020. This may also be used to read the Eusebian imperial "everywhere identity" of Christianity against its purposes.

and the honorable reactions elicit prestige in a situation that is painted as diasporic anxiety. Affirming one's Christian identity is thus not solely a question of devotional identity.

The *Letter*'s Honorable Deaths as Proof of Properly Imitated Behavior

Several scholars have pointed out how the motive of imitation should be understood as an important feature of the *Letter*, especially in its descriptions of reactions to extreme violence. The *Letter*'s protagonists have been interpreted as imitators of Roman elite virtues, idealized masculine behavior, and Jewish / early Christian heroes. Candida Moss has studied the imitation of motives embodied by Christ in the *Letter*.[30] Stephanie Cobb has focused on the *Letter*'s habit of portraying its characters as mimicking the masculine noble death tradition of Greco-Roman society.[31] Petitfils's analysis seems to function as a synthesis of those of Moss and Cobb, as it traces both ideals of Roman elite and especially early Christian/Jewish elite virtues in the text (2016, 224–48). To supplement these views, I argue that the diaspora author was writing to Asia Minor to prove their loyalty to the native traditions. This allowed displaying the behavior of exemplary characters, shared with the intended audience of the native land.

To clearly underline the domestic-yet-displaced diaspora realities of the *Letter*, I have chosen to treat the prototypical heroes as reputable men that were especially well-known in Asia Minor. These figures can be compared to the role that "ancestors" have in Smith's typology. Following Smith's "religion of here," I consider that these exemplary figures display the local character of Asia Minor as well as the behavior expected from those honoring an important local figure (2003, 24–27). The narratives about Paul, Ignatius, and Polycarp are relevant, because they share the ethos born out of the patriarchal ideas of the time: these

---

[30] C. R. Moss 2010, 68, 90–94; 2012, 113, 118–21.

[31] Cobb 2008, 55–57, 78–79, 113–16.

martyrs live by the honorary code displayed by those who want to present themselves as ideal men.

Again, this is not to state that we could not also comprehend the roles of these important men as proponents of a new cultic identity. Their significance, however, is not reduced to their Christian "anywhere" nature. To follow Kotrosits, they can also be read as representations of ideal behavior from "back home." They were natives crushed under brutal imperial forces, yet they managed to save face and to preserve the honor of their extended families. By relating to these Asian figures, one also relates to the ways their cry for being a Christian signified the fantasy of staying true and authentic under the threats of imperial powers and local ethnic majorities. I demonstrate next how the diaspora author may have proceeded to assure fellow individuals or associations in Asia and Phrygia that the group in Gaul shared the same role models as them—even when the loyalty of the Gallic group is tested by extreme circumstances. Partly, this could have been done by demonstrating how the personal attributes tied to prestigious exemplars—such as Polycarp, Paul, and Ignatius—had spread in the community.

Unlike the tribulations of Polycarp, Paul, and Ignatius, the narrative of the *Letter* does not have a single main character. The events are not described from a perspective of a single leading authority. Instead, several individuals from different social strata and genders are acting as suffering exemplars. Already, the disorder of character presentations is peculiar: their judgments, tortures, and executions are not presented in a clear order. The author does not handle the legal process of each character separately. Nor does the narrative proceed gradually from judgments to tortures to executions. If we want to build an inner logic for the presentation, it may be interpreted as a story of heightening antagonism that finds its highpoint in the person of the enslaved Blandina and in the injustice and violence that she faces.

Sanctus the deacon is said to become the example of a hero tortured for others (5.1.23: εἰς τὴν τῶν λοιπῶν ὑποτύπωσιν). Yet, he is not described as an exemplar of one who dies as a martyr. Pothinus the overseer is the first one in the narrative whose death is explicitly described (5.1.31). He does not die spectacularly in the arena but following his injuries in jail.

The true "enthronements" (5.1.36) of the martyrs begin only after the description of the mistreatments faced by these officeholders.

Sanctus and Maturus die as first "spectacles for the world" (5.1.40). Already at the beginning of their respective spectacles, they are aware of the outcome: their victory (5.1.38), which is gained through their personal sacrifice (5.1.40). As in the beast fight that Ignatius of Antioch awaits impatiently (*Rom.* 4), similarly the result of the victorious game is decided for Sanctus and Maturus beforehand: they are to be victorious.

After the deaths of Sanctus and Maturus, the execution narrative pauses for two scenes of torture and humiliation. First, Blandina is put up on a cross. This Christ-like scene inspires Blandina's brethren (5.1.41). Next, Attalus, "a man of distinction," is brought to the amphitheater and is forced to circulate around the arena with a sign pointing to his Christianness. The crowd mocks him during his walk of shame. Connections to Jesus's humiliating path to Golgotha are obvious. The *Via dolorosa* is also a motif that the author of the Ignatian letters wanted to apply in the description of Ignatius's travel toward his execution. Even when the character of Ignatius is explicitly following Christ's footsteps, he is at the same time imitating Paul and his experiences of living "in chains" across Asia Minor and thus being a "disgrace for Christ."[32] Unlike Ignatius's journey, Attalus's passion suddenly cuts off, as the governor learns that Attalus is a Roman citizen and therefore should deserve a nobler punishment (5.1.43–44)—another feature that strongly echoes the status of "Roman citizen" of Paul in Acts and the way his citizenship causes twists in the court narratives (Acts 16:37–38; 22:25–29; 23:27).

---
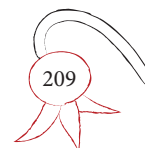
[32] For example, Ign. *Rom.* 6:3: "Allow me to be an imitator of the suffering of my God. If anyone has him within himself, let him both understand what I want and sympathize with me, realizing the things that constrain me" (trans. Ehrman 2003). For Paul as Ignatius's role model in his painful travels, see Ign. *Eph.* 12.2: "You are a passageway for those slain for God; you are fellow initiates with Paul, the holy one who received a testimony and proved worthy of all fortune. When I attain to God, may I be found in his footsteps, this one who mentions you in every epistle in Christ Jesus" (trans. Ehrman 2003). Ignatius's imitation of Paul is handled in more detail in Y. Moss 2017.

Attalus's luck does not last long: when the local festivities begin, the furious mob demands that he return to the stage. He meets his death accompanied with Alexander, who also has confessed to being a Christian (5.1.51). The narrative reaches its macabre culmination when the slave girl Blandina and a 15-year-old boy Ponticus are killed (5.1.53–56). According to Cobb, the scene highlights that even an adolescent boy and a female slave are more in (Roman) manly control of the situation than the mindless (Gallic) masses, who as "wild and barbarous" (5.1.57) are unable to control their emotions. Exactly like Polycarp in *Mart. Pol.* 13–14, Blandina also stays calm in the middle of the turmoil—she does not even experience pain during the torture.[33]

The disorganized narrative creates a succession of chaotic events, unexpectedly connected with each other, flavored with almost sadistic descriptions of violence. This chaos is met with uniformity and order: the suffering ones react to the tribulations similarly and, even more importantly, calmly. The unanimous answers of the main characters to the chaotic events have guided my interpretation about the intentions of the *Letter*. I believe this technique of connecting haphazardly several shocking yet glorified destinies could have been used to prove that the Gallic community learned a single model that guides their behavior, and that the model is not limited to a certain social or cultic status. When Blandina hangs on a cross, this model is explicitly named: her fellows are seeing her as "him who was crucified for them" (5.1.41). Yet, as we have seen, echoes of Paul, Polycarp, and Ignatius can also be heard through this suffering Christ.

Adequate reactions to persecution, suffering, and death can be learned from the *Letter*'s several protagonists. Some of them are explicitly called exemplars. Yet, while a deacon can function as an example, so can a slave girl hanging on a cross.[34] This resolve when confronted with

---

[33] *Eccl. Hist.* 5.1.19, 56; Cobb 2008, 65–66, 81–85.

[34] Similarly, Petitfils 2016, 225: "Even socially disadvantaged martyrs (like Blandina, for example) are presented in *Lyons* as leaders and ideal paradigms for individuals of all social stripes." An important and grimmer interpretation on the role of Blandina can be gained from Ronald Charles's analysis. Charles (2019, 178–83) emphasizes that the slave girl is only used as a tool in the author's

chaos was used to create trust in the receivers of the *Letter*. Especially if we conceive of the *Letter* as a plea for help from a diaspora author, it shows that the Asian diaspora in Gaul stands unified and in control when faced with gruesome spectacles despite their terrible nature. It emphasizes that the community (whether it is imagined or real does not need to concern us at this point) is worth helping during their tough times, whatever their actual challenges may have been. Whether group leaders and nobility or slaves and teens, all are acting according to their honorable exemplars: remaining controlled under a duress—not joining the overemotional barbarity but giving their lives in sacrifice. Whatever the motives were for writing "back home," the author wanted to prove that their diaspora group was honoring the proper code of conduct across several social strata, and that this socially heterogeneous yet unanimous group was worth noticing.

The author of the *Letter* creates a picture of a group that has learned its lesson in imitating their exemplars. The sociocultural knowledge associated with Ignatian, Pauline, and Polycarpine traditions has been embraced. The diaspora society is now acting as a single noble man. The explicit violence of the text separates the sensible, honorable, and masculine behavior from the barbarian and unmanly rage. It creates anxiousness to condemn the illegal and dishonorable bloodshed and strengthens the belief that the diaspora Asian and Phrygian heroes of the spectacles are on God's side, while the Gallic barbarous mob and their Roman leaders are in union with Satan.

At the same time, this idealized image about the honorable ways of the community members is not as seamless as the author would like it to be. The diasporic obsession for authenticity leads to an ironic outcome: Roman ideals, Gallic resistance, and Asian exemplars are mixed

---

technique for stating how all the Christians from all social strata are virtuous, and how God is in command of each life. Yet, the contempt for enslaved persons is still visible, as Blandina does not get much to say. Her character is not meant to act, but to face the actions of others. Her role is only to face unimaginable amounts of sadistic violence. The author creates her body to disappear, so that others may see the body of Christ. In total, Blandina is a silenced inferior body used for relaying an ideological message.
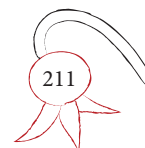
to create one genuine reaction to persecution. This closely resembles the legend about Mariccus, whose death Tacitus describes as both an act of mindless anti-Roman resistance and as a sign of proper Roman honorable death. In addition, the *Letter*'s depiction of noble masculinity breaks down in the case of Blandina. As Luis Josué Salés has noted, when masculine virtues are attached to the chaste maiden, the result is a queer hybridity: "Amusingly enough, the result is that even these stereotypical images of femininity become queered through their disconnect from the system of differences that render them intelligible in their original articulations" (2021, 95).

The *Letter*'s quest for pure honorability is thus simultaneously Roman and Gallic, Christian and pagan, hypermasculine and queer, and barbaric and civilized. Its purpose is to convince outsiders that the diaspora group members are genuine heirs of their local heroes. In this, the *Letter* shares in the strategy of the Puteoli merchants: the ingroup is the greatest, most splendid, and the most pious group known in the area.

Whence the Need for Authenticity?

Lastly, one needs to ask: from where did this desire for displaying authentic diaspora behavior arise? We cannot reach certainty about the concrete questions and problems that motivated the Gallic author. Even if the *Letter* contained some concrete pleas, Eusebius only selected passages relevant to his project. This becomes evident in the way Eusebius first presents the opening of the *Letter* and then proceeds to the contents most urgent to him: "Then, having related some other matters, they begin their account in this manner" (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.1.4). Nevertheless, the example from Puteoli may remind us that diaspora communities have other needs besides cultic identity formation, and that these needs may still have been approached through cultic language. The Puteolian example of financial distress may guide us to ask whether the *Letter* from Gaul could have been composed in an analogous situation: is it a plea for economic support in a tough situation?

On the other hand, the example of the Puteolian merchant station also points to how authentic ancestral behavior can be used as a tool in

the rivalry between different diaspora communities. Puteolians wanted to surpass the newer Ostian station, who had been able to secure funding where the Puteolians had not. This dimension may help us to understand the role of other letters "from the same imprisoned" group that Eusebius attaches to his report on Gallic persecutions. Eusebius describes how the ones imprisoned in Gaul wrote a letter about the Phrygian prophetic movement that was sent both to Asia Minor and Rome (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.3.4). Later, Eusebius ends his presentation of the Gallic situation with a letter of recommendation from the martyrs to the Roman overseer Eleutherus regarding their fellow Irenaeus (5.4.1–2). Since this letter is discussed right after the one about the prophetic movement, it is easy to get the impression that the recommendation was needed in order for Irenaeus to deliver the letter concerning Phrygians to Eleutherus (Tabbernee 2007, 34–35).

These two letters sent by the "same imprisoned group" in *Hist. Eccl.* 5.3.4 and 5.4.2 point to a situation in which other Asian/Phrygian cultic authorities and a leader of a Roman Christ association (whether friend or rival to the group in Gaul) were meant to be convinced about the validity and honorability of the diaspora group in Gaul. In 5.3.4, the "imprisoned ones" are sending "their own prudent and most orthodox judgment in the matter [of the Phrygian prophetic movement]" to Eleutherus, overseer of a Christ group in Rome. As the brief mention of prudence and orthodoxy leaves many interpretations possible, several views exist about the relationship between the Gauls and the New Prophecy (later known as Montanism or simply as the "Phrygian heresy"). For example, Antti Marjanen (2005, 193–94) claims that the Gauls decided to side with the New Prophecy. Marjanen deduces this from the information according to which it was specifically Irenaeus who was selected to bring the letter to Eleutherus (see below). Irenaeus does not seem to condemn the movement anywhere in his own texts. Instead, he sides with the New Prophecy concerning the Pauline gift of prophecy and the Gospel of John, which were both criticized by opponents of the movement (Iren. *Haer.* 3.11.9). Against the view of Marjanen, several researchers have argued that the mention of orthodoxy underlines how the Gauls disapproved of the Phrygian

movement.[35] William Tabbernee reads the juxtaposition of prudence and orthodoxy as a diplomatic strategy to reach an equilibrium between those siding with the New Prophecy and those opposing it (2007, 33–34). According to Tabbernee, the group did not want to exclude those siding with the prophecy. Yet, it still needed to prove that even when accepting the New Prophetic tendencies from their native area, the group as such remained an honorable bearer of Asian traditions.[36]

As I mentioned above, the Gauls decided that Irenaeus should be the one to make their views known to Eleutherus. The "martyrs" are so unanimous in their wish to recommend Irenaeus to Eleutherus in 5.4.2 that some researchers have suggested Irenaeus as the author of a narrative directed to polish his own reputation.[37] Even if this seems unlikely (why would Eusebius not mention Irenaeus as the author of the *Letter*?), it correctly indicates the context of the martyrdom narrative: it may have played a role in negotiations that were occurring (1) between different diaspora actors in Rome; and (2) between different cultic associations in Asia and Phrygia. It sends a message to Rome and Asia Minor that resembles the one of the Tyrian merchants in Puteoli: "Even though we are not in the capital of the world, we are still the most pious, oldest, and the greatest when it comes to honoring the ways of our fathers." If we read the mention of "prudent and orthodox evaluation" as a diplomatic statement (as Tabbernee suggests), this may point to the balancing of Phrygian prophetic tendencies with other valued traditions of the diaspora author's native land.

---

[35] For a thorough discussion, see Tabbernee 2007, 33 nn. 133, 134.

[36] According to Tabbernee, this balancing could also explain the way Alcibiades turns away from the extreme asceticism (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.3.2–4): he wants to perform his prophetic practices in an honorable way, which does not include extremities. This does not need to be understood as a critique of the New Prophecy. Instead, it may merely claim that its adherents were also decent people who could fit into the larger society.

[37] Irenaeus was considered as the author of the *Letter* already by tenth-century writer Oecumenius (Migne, *PG* 119, 536C–D). This view has been followed in Nautin 1961, 54–61; Steenberg 2008, 10 n. 24. For a critical review of this thesis, see C. R. Moss 2012, 104–6.

214

My perspective suggests that the *Letter* and its glorified violence should not be understood only as part of intra-Christian identity formation. It also belongs to the sphere of multifaceted diaspora realities, in which examples of mythologized heroes were used to negotiate between diaspora minorities, native lands, rival groups, and colonizing forces. Cultic language related to Christ myths is used in these negotiations. Yet, this does not need to imply that the negotiation is done primarily between individuals understanding themselves as exclusively Christians. Even less does it imply that the negotiated questions were related strictly to Christianity. Instead, the inscription of Tyrians in Puteoli may point to the tangible questions that were often handled with cultic language related to ancestral customs. My perspective does not imply that the research of early Christian identities would be a futile task. I only wish to highlight (along with Kotrosits) that the research should be conducted so that it takes the complexity and fluidity of identities seriously. In addition (and along with the theme of this special issue), I wish to highlight how local realities and translocal relations should be considered as valid factors in the complex processes of identity construction. That is, all three Smithian perspectives of here, there, and anywhere should be taken seriously in the research of early Christian identities.

Finally, the social reality behind the *Letter* needs to be complicated through one more notion. In the *Letter*, we do not have access to the work of a group, even though the text itself claims so. It is the work of an author (or several) who claims to be part of a group that (according to the author) has faced persecution. We do not know if such a diaspora group existed, or if the members of such a group would have counted themselves as part of the same group as the author. A distinction needs to be made between a group that writes about persecution and an author that writes about a group facing persecution. Textual activity is thus also a part of group creation. It signifies to its recipients (both in Asia Minor and Rome) that there is a significant group in the Gaul, who lives and dies honorably, whose opinion should be heard in cultic matters, and who know important people such as Irenaeus and Eleutherus. We simply cannot know if this was really the case. Yet, the translocal effort that the text makes also does its part for bringing this kind of group alive in the minds of

215

others.[38] The creation of a cohesive group is the starting point for the author's technique: there first needs to be a group that can be considered as an authentic diaspora community in the middle of colonial hostilities.

Conclusion

I have argued above that the *Letter from Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne* should not be approached only as a sign of an actual conflict between locals and early Christians in Gaul, nor solely as a document of universal early Christian identity (even though Eusebius's presentation of the matter may easily guide our interpretation in this direction). Instead, we may also understand the *Letter* as a tool for a diaspora author who wants to create and maintain alliances abroad. I have applied an approach from diaspora studies on the need for "authentic" cultural representation in

216

---

[38] This view owes much to Stanley Stowers's perception of the problems that should be considered evident when talking about historical communities behind early Christian texts (and thus to sociologist Rogers Brubaker's concept of "groupism"). To quote Stowers: "Paul did not merely try to persuade those whom he wanted as followers that they ought to become a very special kind of community. He told them that they had in their essence already become such a community. This was a brilliant strategy. Instead of putting an impossible ideal before them and saying, 'try to reach this goal,' he said 'you are this community of transformed people so live up to what you are.' As the sociologist Rogers Brubaker writes, the skill of ethnopolitical or religious entrepreneurs is that 'by invoking groups, they seek to evoke them, summon them, call them into being' …. Paul told them that no matter what their ethnic-religious identity, gender, or social status, they were all ontologically one (Gal 3:27–28)" (Stowers 2011, 242, quoting Brubaker 2004, 10). Whereas Paul may have created a group out of his audience, I argue that the author of the *Letter* may have created themselves a group to belong to. The unanimous group is an ideological creation of the author (even though we cannot be sure about in what sense it is based on historical characters). Even as this seems an obvious fact, my experience still is that this innovative aspect of community building becomes easily forgotten. This has become evident during the writing of this article, as I have needed to revise several times sentences that have begun with the phrase "the diaspora group says/writes/argues."

diaspora realities. From this perspective, the *Letter* can be understood as a device that constructs a threat through which the honor of the diaspora group can be tested and then depicts reputable reactions to the distress. These honorable reactions arise from the code of conduct that the author may have considered as authentic Asian behavior. While the threats of violence and the death penalty may have been fictional, they may still bear the social stigmas and complex negotiations of colonized experience. The author of the *Letter* turns this wounded experience into its own victory by presenting a monstrous situation and a collectively honorable resolution to it. As is the case in every such effort for authentic minority identity, this effort arises from specific needs and does not stand as a consistent depiction when analyzed outside its context: the *Letter* ends up building a peculiar hybrid identity for its ingroup. The specific need for the proof for authenticity is hard to discern, but some direction can be gained from the alliances and group-level rivalries that Eusebius explicitly states after the martyr narratives: rivalries over honorability seen through the eyes of those living in the "native land" and the trustworthiness in the larger imperial discussion on the valid prophetic praxis of those coming from Asia Minor.

217

Bibliography

Bauer, Walter. 1934. *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Boyarin, Daniel. 1999. *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Brubaker, Rogers. 2004. *Ethnicity without Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Buell, Denise Kimber. 2005. *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Castelli, Elizabeth A. 2004. *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Charles, Ronald. 2019. *The Silencing of Slaves in Early Jewish and Christian Texts*. London: Routledge.

Chow, Rey. 1993. *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Cobb, L. Stephanie. 2008. *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts*. New York: Columbia University Press.

D'Arms, John H. 1974. "Puteoli in the Second Century of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study." *Journal of Roman Studies* 64: 104–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/299263.

DeVore, David J. 2014. "Character and Convention in the Letters of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History." *Journal of Late Antiquity* 7, no. 2: 223–52. http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jla.2014.0026.

Dubois, Charles. 1907. *Pouzzoles antique (histoire et topographie)*. Paris: A. Fontemoing.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. 2007. "Diaspora." In *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, 2nd ed. New York: New York University Press. https://keywords.nyupress.org/american-cultural-studies/essay/diaspora/.

Ehrman, Bart. 2003. *The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Frend, W. H. C. 1964. "A Note on the Influence of Greek Immigrants on the Spread of Christianity in the West." In *Mullus: Festschrift Theodor Klauser*, edited by Alfred Stuiber and Alfred Hermann, 125–29. Münster: Aschendorffsche.

Frend, W. H. C. 1965. *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Harland, Philip A. 2005. "Familial Dimensions of Group Identity: 'Brothers' (ΑΔΕΛΦΟΙ) in Associations of the Greek East." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 3: 491–513. https://doi.org/10.2307/30041036.

Harland, Philip A. 2012. "Letter of the Tyrian Settlers at Puteoli to the City of Tyre (174 CE)." Associations in the Greco-Roman World. 2012. http://www.philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/?p=1852.

Hodge, Caroline Johnson. 2007. *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Horowitz, Donald L. 1985. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Horrell, David G. 2020. *Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Hutchinson, John, and Anthony D. Smith. 1996. *Ethnicity*. Oxford: University Press.

Kotrosits, Maia. 2015. *Rethinking Early Christian Identity: Affect, Violence, and Belonging*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
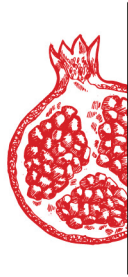
218

Kotrosits, Maia. 2020. *The Lives of Objects: Material Culture, Experience, and the Real in the History of Early Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Löhr, Winrich A. 1989. "Der Brief der Gemeinden von Lyon und Vienne (Eusebius, h.e. V, 1–2(4))." In *Oecumenica et Patristica: Festschrift für Wilhelm Schneemelcher zum 75. Geburtstag*, edited by Damaskinos Papandreou, Knut Schäferdiek, and Wolfgang A. Bienert, 135–49. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Marjanen, Antti. 2005. "Montanism: Egalitarian Ecstatic 'New Prophecy.'" In *A Companion to Second Century Christian "Heretics,"* edited by Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, 185–212. Leiden: Brill.

McGiffert, Arthur C., trans. 1890. Eusebius Pamphilus, *Ecclesiastical History*. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 1, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co.

Mommsen, Theodor. 1850. "Epigraphische Analekten, Nr. 6–8." *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Königl. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig*, 57–72.

Moore, Clifford H., trans. 1925. *Tacitus, Histories Book 1–3*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Morgan, M. Gwyn. 1993. "The Three Minor Pretenders in Tacitus, 'Histories' II." *Latomus* 52, no. 4: 769–96. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41536781.

Moss, Candida R. 2010. *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Moss, Candida R. 2012. *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Moss, Yonathan. 2017. "'From Syria All the Way to Rome': Ignatius of Antioch's Pauline Journey to Christianity." In *Journeys in the Roman East: Imagined and Real*, edited by Maren R. Niehoff, 409–21. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Nautin, Pierre. 1961. *Patristica*, Vol. 2: *Lettres et Écrivains Chrétiens des II et III Siècles*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf.

Petitfils, James. 2016. *Mos Christianorum: The Roman Discourse of Exemplarity and the Jewish and Christian Language of Leadership*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Räisänen, Heikki. 2010. *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Salés, Luis Josué. 2020. "Queerly Christified Bodies: Women Martyrs, Christification, and the Compulsory Masculinisation Thesis." *Journal of Early Christian History* 10, no. 3: 83–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/2222582X.2020.1845572.

219

Schermerhorn, Richard A. 1970. *Comparative Ethnic Relations: A Framework for Theory and Research*. New York: Random House.

Simpson, William. 1870. *An Epitome of the History of the Christian Church during the First Three Centuries and of the Reformation in England*. Cambridge: Macmillan.

Smith, Jonathan Z. 2003. "Here, There, and Anywhere." In *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, edited by Scott Noegel, Joel Walker, and Barron Wheeler, 21–36. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Sosin, Joshua D. 1999. "Tyrian Stationarii at Puteoli." *Tyche* 14, no. 1: 275–84. http://dx.doi.org/10.15661/tyche.1999.014.23.

Steenberg, Matthew C. 2008. *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption*. Leiden: Brill.

Stowers, Stanley K. 2011. "The Concept of 'Community' and the History of Early Christianity." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23, no. 3: 238–56. https://doi.org/10.1163/157006811X608377.

Tabbernee, William. 2007. *Fake Prophecy and Polluted Sacraments: Ecclesiastical and Imperial Reactions to Montanism*. Leiden: Brill.

Thompson, James Westfall. 1912. "The Alleged Persecution of the Christians at Lyons in 177." *American Journal of Theology* 16, no. 3: 359–84. https://doi.org/10.1086/479093.

220

FROM BAD BARBARIANS INTO GOOD ROMANS? THEMISTIUS AND THE CASE OF GOTHS IN THE FOURTH CENTURY

Maijastina Kahlos

Abstract

In this article, I examine the Constantinopolitan rhetorician and philosopher Themistius and his speeches in the context of changing Romano-Gothic relations from the 360s to the 380s–from the policies of Valens (364–378) to those of Theodosius I (379–395). The changes in Themistius's rhetoric and imagery of barbarians illustrate the fluctuating policies of the Roman government before and after the infamous Battle of Hadrianople in 378. I show that the concept of 'the barbarian' was versatile and could be modified in varying ways for different purposes. Themistius's orations reflect not only tensions in the Roman attitudes toward barbarians–which ranged from fear to arrogance to benevolence–but also simply what was thought of as useful strategies at various specific times. I also analyze recruitment and accommodation policies in the preceding centuries and compare them with the arguments and *exempla* that Themistius uses to advocate the settlement of barbarians. I contextualize Themistius's rhetoric within earlier imperial policy on the utility of moving people into the Empire.

Dans cet article, j'étudie les discours du rhétoricien et philosophe constantinopolitain Thémistios dans le contexte de l'évolution des relations romano-gothiques entre les années 360 et 380–de la politique de Valens (364–378) à celle de Théodose Ier (379–395). Les changements dans la rhétorique et dans l'imagerie des barbares chez Thémistios illustrent les politiques fluctuantes du gouvernement romain avant et après la tristement célèbre bataille d'Andrinople en 378. Je montre que le concept de « barbare » était polyvalent et pouvait être modifié de diverses manières à des fins différentes. Les oraisons de Thémistios reflètent non seulement les tensions dans les attitudes romaines à l'égard des barbares–qui allaient de la peur à l'arrogance en passant par la bienveillance–mais aussi ce que l'on considérait comme des stratégies utiles à différents moments. J'analyse également les politiques de recrutement et d'accommodation des siècles précédents et les compare aux arguments et aux exemples que Thémistios utilise pour préconiser l'organisation des habitations des barbares. Je replace la rhétorique de Thémistios dans le contexte de la politique impériale antérieure quant à l'utilité de déplacer des peuples dans l'Empire.

FROM BAD BARBARIANS INTO GOOD ROMANS? THEMISTIUS AND THE CASE OF GOTHS IN THE FOURTH CENTURY

Maijastina Kahlos

"So will we see the Scythians do likewise within a short time. For now their clashes with us are still recent, but in fact we shall soon receive them to share our offerings, our tables, our military ventures, and public duties."

— Them. *Or.* 16.211d

Introduction

The Constantinopolitan philosopher and senator Themistius assures his audience that the Goths can and will be integrated into Roman society.[1] The Goths, whom Themistius calls "Scythians" (*Skythoi*) in his

---

speech, according to Greek literary conventions, had been settled in Thrace after the Romano-Gothic War ended with a peace treaty in 382.

This war had its origins in the 370s when a Gothic group, the Tervingi, arrived at the Danube border as refugees and requested permission to cross the river and settle in the Roman Empire. In 376, Emperor Valens (364–378), ruling the eastern part of the Empire, gave the Goths permission to cross the Danube. However, as a result of famine, black-marketing, the slave trade, and the misconduct of a few Roman officers, the Tervingi started rebelling, and soon they were at war with the Romans. The conflict culminated with the defeat of the Romans at the Battle of Hadrianople in 378, in which thousands of Roman soldiers, Emperor Valens among them, were killed.[2] Theodosius I (379–395), who succeeded Valens on the throne in the East, continued the war against the Goths and was finally able to conclude a compromise peace with them.

It was at the beginning of the following year that Themistius gave his speech to compliment Theodosius's peace. Themistius had a challenging job ahead, for, as we saw above, the Romans had some history with the Tervingi. He had to convince his listeners that Theodosius's policy of peace was commendable and to demonstrate that the emperor both victoriously chastised and mercifully spared the Goths at the time. Furthermore, Themistius had to show them that all this was profitable

224

[2] See Amm. Marc. 31.4.6; 31.3.9–11 on the corruption of the army; Jer. *Chron. sub anno* 377: "per avaritiam Maximi ducis fame ad rebellandum coacti sunt [Gothi]"; Oros. 7.33.11: "propter intolerabilem avaritiam Maximi ducis fame et iniuriis adacti in arma surgentes." For the slave trade as the most important commerce in the frontier regions, see Harper 2011, 79–83; Kahlos 2022a. For the Romano-Gothic War, see Heather 1991, 142–56; Lenski 1997, 161; Lenski 2002, 325–41. Here, it is important to stress that the group of Tervingi allowed to cross the border was only one of many groups of Goths in the Danube region.

to the whole society, as the barbarians could become useful—and even Romans.[3]

Themistius was probably the right person to carry out this propagandistic task. He was an experienced orator at the Constantinopolitan court and in several instances had worked as the mouthpiece of the ever-changing imperial politics of three emperors: Constantius II, Valens, and Theodosius I.[4] He had promoted Valens's policies with the Goths in his previous speeches; therefore, he definitely knew how to approach the topic at hand.

The encounters between the Romans and other peoples, and their movements both within and outside the Empire, have been examined from different perspectives, inspired by various theories. Modern scholars have tackled the complexities of the confrontations and symbiotic life in the frontier regions. In these encounters, the identities of groups or individuals never remained fixed but were multivariate and constantly under transformation and negotiation. Likewise, what being Roman meant was in constant change, and the transformations of Romanness have also been intensely analyzed in recent scholarship. The ideas of being Roman were intermingled with the notions of non-Romans, the versatile concept of "the barbarian."[5] In this article, I examine Themistius's argumentation concerning Goths in his speeches in the context of changing Romano-Gothic relations from the 360s to the 380s—from the policies of Valens to those of Theodosius I.[6] The changes in Themistius's rhetoric and imagery of barbarians illustrate the fluctuating policies of the Roman government. I show that the concept of "the barbarian" was malleable and could be modified (as Themistius does) in varying ways for different purposes. First, he

---

[3] *Barbarians* here is the term used by Greek and Roman writers to depict non-Greeks and non-Romans and is therefore an emic term, that is, used within the ancient context, and is used by modern researchers only in this manner.

[4] For Themistius's career and speeches, see Dagron 1968, 5–16; Daly 1972, 351–79; Vanderspoel 1995; Leppin and Portmann 1998, 1–26; Penella 2000, 1–5.

[5] For surveys of the research, see Woolf 1998, 4–6, and Dench 2013, 258 (Republican Rome); Ando 2000, and Shumate 2006, 15 (Imperial Rome); and Halsall 2007, 38–41, Conant 2012, 7, and Pohl et al. 2018 (Late Antique Rome).

[6] I focus on Themistius's Orations 8, 10, 14, 15, and 16 (Schenkl et al. 1965).

225

depicts barbarians as a dangerous enemy and threat that must be kept under control. Punishing the bad barbarians is the task of the victorious emperor. However, the emperor does not always destroy barbarians altogether, and here we come to the second notion, that of good barbarians. They can at times be useful because they can become allies, and even Romans!

By looking at Themistius's rhetoric, I aim to show how his orations reflect not only tensions in the Roman attitudes toward barbarians—which ranged from fear to arrogance to benevolence—but also simply what was thought of as useful strategy at various specific times. I contextualize Themistius's rhetoric within earlier imperial policy on the utility of moving people into the Empire and making them Romans, discussing the Roman "migration and accommodation policies" from the viewpoint of how they were depicted in imperial literature. My purpose here is not to make claims about how and to what extent the movement of groups was carried out and how it influenced the life in provinces in everyday reality but rather to examine how it was advertised in imperial propaganda. I also analyze recruitment and accommodation policies in the preceding centuries and compare them with the arguments and *exempla* that Themistius uses to advocate the settlement of barbarians.

Confrontations and Symbiosis between Romans and Goths

Romano-Gothic affairs have never been simple, and they did not merely consist of wars. Instead, we could speak of symbiotic relations in which military interventions alternated with peace agreements and alliances.[7] In the struggle for power between Emperors Constantine and Licinius

---

[7] Heather and Matthews (1991, 19–20) distinguish three phases in Romano-Gothic relations in the fourth century before the arrival of the Huns, which changed the established order on the northern side of the Danube: first, the confrontation and peace during Constantine's reign in the 320s and 330s; second, disturbances in the late 340s during the reign of Constantius II, who resolved the conflict with negotiations; and third, in the 360s in connection with another civil war, namely,

in the 320s, the latter recruited Goths to fight for him. Consequently, after defeating Licinius and consolidating his supremacy Constantine made a punitive campaign against these Goths and celebrated an illustrious victory with a column and annual games in 332. According to the praises of Constantine, the peace he concluded with these Goths was made after he subdued them and made them his "slaves."[8] Be that as it may, after that peace these Goths fought as Constantine's and his family's allies. Furthermore, here we already find the literary *topos* of the triumphant emperor at work.

A similar pattern occurred in the 360s in connection with the civil war between Emperor Valens and the pretender to the throne, Procopius, who recruited Goths to fight for him. Procopius's coup ended disastrously in 366, and Valens sent Roman troops to chastise these Goths in 367–369. It was in this context of frontier war that Themistius addressed a speech (Oration 8) to Valens in 368 in Marcianople, from where the emperor led his military operations. The Roman troops were preparing for the second season of warfare.[9] At the same time, the emperor was aiming to end the war that had not been very successful. Themistius was in charge of working on public opinion in favor of peace. Showing it as a compromise peace was not an option: the Roman emperor had to be portrayed as eternally victorious. At the same time, his enemies needed to be depicted as threatening and palpable. Consequently, Themistius argues that ending the war will lighten the burden of taxes for Romans. The reduction of taxes had always functioned as a persuasive argument. Themistius even succeeds in styling the situation as a true victory over both Goths and tax collectors (*Or.* 8.172/114–115).[10] Valens is not only a triumphant general, but also a beneficent ruler to his subjects. A

---

that between Valens and Procopius in which some Gothic groups fought on Procopius's side.

[8] Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 4.5 and Lib. *Or.* 59.89; Heather and Matthews 1991, 21.

[9] Them. *Or.* 8 (March 28, 368); see *Or.* 8.174/116 on the preparations. For the date and occasion, see Heather and Matthews 1991, 14.

[10] While wars on the frontiers (the Eastern, Danube, and Rhine frontiers) benefited people in the border regions, tax reduction was to the "advantage of all" (Heather and Matthews 1991, 25, 29 n. 47).

good emperor like Valens makes people within the Empire rejoice but people outside it despair (*Or.* 8.173–174/115).[11] Themistius also assures his audience that the resources spent on the army are worthwhile (*Or.* 8.174–175/115–116).[12] However ominous the enemies at the Eastern, Rhine, and Danube frontiers are, the emperors both in the East and in the West keep them at bay. Themistius depicts the Goths at the Danube as "looming threateningly" and as a greater menace than the enemies on the Eastern and Rhine frontiers (*Or.* 8.179/119).

Bad Barbarians and the Triumphant Emperor

Emperor Valens concluded his frontier war with a compromise peace, which was ceremonially confirmed in a meeting on a ship in the middle of the Danube. The arrangement was probably a carefully planned concession of symbolic equality to Athanaric, the leader of the Goths (Amm. Marc. 31.4.13).[13] In the speech (Oration 10, "On the Peace") addressed to Valens in 370, Themistius does his best to represent the occasion as favorable to the emperor and the Romans (Them. *Or.* 10; January or February 370).[14] As an eyewitness, he depicts the Goths on the other

228

---

[11] Themistius compares Valens favourably with preceding traditionally well-reputed emperors Augustus, Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius, who (Themistius claims) certainly were "hard on barbarians" but not so nice to their subjects.

[12] The Roman army is disciplined and trained, and the emperor, inspiring every soldier to fulfill his own task, is responsible for their success.

[13] According to Ammianus, Athanaric surmised that the show in making the peace agreement might have made Valens angry and just in case withdrew his troops from the immediate surroundings of the Danube. While Themistius makes everything look favorable to Valens, Ammianus systematically portrays the emperor in a negative manner. The Goths were as eager as the Romans to end the war and sent several embassies to Valens before the peace was made (Amm. Marc. 27.5.8–9; see also Them. *Or.* 10.201–202/132–133). This implies that the Romans to some extent had the upper hand in the war (Heather 1991, 118–19; Heather and Matthews 1991, 14, 19–26, 40).

[14] Themistius (*Or.* 10.201–202/132–133) compares Valens with the Persian king Xerxes—Valens's boat for peace is of course superior to Xerxes's bridge made of rafts to make war in Greece. See Herod. *Hist*. 7.21ff.

side of the Danube in confusion—they were a "congregation of fear" and an "assembly of panic" while the Romans dictated terms of peace to the Gothic leaders. Themistius stresses that he had not heard "the barbarian war shout but … their keening, their wailing, their entreaties [were] utterances more appropriate to prisoners than peacemakers, by which one harder than adamant would be moved to tears." The contrast with the Romans is even greater when Themistius compares the two armies on the two banks of the Danube: the one was "glittering with soldiers who are in good order" and in "tranquil pride," and the other was "a disordered rabble of suppliants cast down upon the earth" (*Or.* 10.201–203/132–133).[15] Thus, in Themistius's rhetoric, the Goths have become pitiful rather than frightening. In the panegyrics to the emperors, the enemies have to be represented as submissive suppliants, and here this imagery functions to hide the fact that in the warfare with the Goths the Romans had not been particularly successful and that Valens had to make a compromise peace.

As a skillful panegyrist, Themistius makes a virtue of necessity and camouflages the compromise peace as Valens's mercy to the downtrodden Goths. The emperor could have destroyed the Goths but decides not to do so: Themistius justifies Valens's decision by appealing to the Platonic teaching of the rational and irrational parts of the human soul. With this metaphor, Themistius construes Romans as the rational element and Goths as the irrational one:

> There is in each of us a barbarian tribe (*barbaron phylon*), extremely overbearing and intractable—I mean the temper and the insatiate desires, which stand opposed to the rational elements as the Scythians and Germans do to the Romans. (*Or.* 10.199–200/131)[16]

The metaphor of the human soul makes it possible for Themistius to argue for the uselessness of entirely wiping out barbarians in the Roman world. It would be impossible and even disadvantageous to eliminate

---

[15] Greek and Roman writers conventionally depicted the troops of barbarians before battles as being in confusion and chaos—as contrasted to the disciplined order of the Roman army.

[16] With the reference to Pl. *Leg.* 628E. Trans. Heather and Matthews 1991, 38.

the irrational passions when they attack the better elements in the human soul. In the same way, the Roman emperors do not root out barbarians completely but rather restrain them in order to "safeguard and protect them as an integral part of the Empire." The emperor is merciful (*pheidetai*) even when he is the triumphant conqueror (*kratei*) (*Or.* 10.199–200/131). Thus, in Themistius's argumentation, barbarians are not to be annihilated; they are only to be kept under control and even protected as an essential part of the Roman commonwealth. Themistius returns to the same idea later in his speech, now using a parallel with animals and stating that they spare barbarians in the same way as the emperor now spares the Goths "we spare the most savage beasts from which we are separated not by the Ister [Danube] or Rhine but by nature herself so that their species might survive and endure." Acting as a sort of conservationist of nature, Themistius lists elephants in Libya, lions in Thessaly, and hippopotami in the Nile whose disappearance is a tragedy. Similarly, in the case of humankind, the emperor decides not to wipe out but to spare the Goths, whom Themistius depicts as "impoverished, downtrodden and consenting to submit to our rule" (*Or.* 10.212/139–140).[17] He is clearly using the rhetoric of superiority; Themistius is even at pains to stress that what keeps Goths separate from Romans is not any river, lagoon, or fortification but *fear*, which is an insurmountable obstacle once the enemy is "convinced that he is inferior" (*Or.* 10.210–211/138).[18] In any case, the barbarians are to be kept under control: the emperor knows that barbarians' nature cannot be changed and that they cannot be trusted (*Or.* 10.206/135).

The Role of Barbarians in the Mental Geography of the Romans

Themistius's rhetoric of superiority derived from the long-standing tradition in which Greek and Roman writers represented their own culture as intellectually and morally superior in comparison with those of the

---

[17] Trans. Heather and Matthews 1991, 48.

[18] Ibid., 47.

peoples outside of their world. Barbarians were depicted as lacking the qualities that Greeks and Romans had: they did not possess rationality, moderation, proper government, laws, correct religion, or even religion completely—or, as we saw in Themistius's portrayal, the Gothic troops lacked discipline, tottering in muddy confusion while the Roman army shone bright as the epitome of order. Consequently, barbarians did not have an independent role to play in these depictions; rather, they were harnessed to the varying agendas of the writers. The "barbarian" was a malleable figure that functioned as a positive or negative contrast to the Romans (or "Romans").[19]

Themistius appealed to this traditional thought pattern in which the emperor had a crucial role in chastising and disciplining barbarians. In imperial propaganda, the triumphant emperor and bad but beaten barbarians went hand in hand.[20] In the mental geography of Greek and Roman writers, the *imperium* and the entire Mediterranean *oikoumene* stood at the center of the world and was surrounded by barbarians. It was the task of Romans to maintain order and restrain chaos.[21]

Themistius was well in line with early imperial writers such as the Greek rhetorician Ailios Aristeides (Aelius Aristides), who in the mid-second century praised the Romans for keeping the barbarians at

231

---

[19] A good example is Orosius, whose "barbarians" have shifting roles (good and bad characters) in his narrative, depending on his agenda. On Orosius, see Van Nuffelen 2012, 171, 176–78.

[20] Michael McCormick (1986, 59–60) found "a correlation between severe and widely perceived blows to imperial prestige and intensification in the rhythm of imperial victory celebrations." Alan Cameron and Jacqueline Long (1993, 330), while criticizing McCormick's statistical argument, admit that in imperial propaganda "more was made of every success." As Ralph Mathisen (2006a, 1026) remarks: "The empire needed its violent, threatening barbarians to justify massive expenditures on the Roman military and to provide emperors with a validation of their very existence"; see also Mathisen 2006b, 27–33.

[21] The Roman self-understanding as the rulers of the world was famously condensed in Vergil's *Aeneid* (6.853) as the task of the Romans to "parcere subiectis et debellare superbos" ("to show mercy to the conquered and to subdue the proud"). Similarly, Cicero (*Rep.* 3.35) argued that the Roman subordination was for the good of the inhabitants of the provinces.

bay. He proclaimed that "beyond the outermost circle of the inhabited world (*oikoumene*), indeed like a second line of defence in the fortification of a city, you [Romans] have drawn another circle" and that "just as a trench encircles an army camp, all this can be called the circuit and perimeter of the walls" that protected the inhabited world (*Or.* 26.81–82).[22] According to this worldview, the further peoples lived from the center, the Mediterranean—on "the edges of the earth," that is, in the lands simply beyond Greco-Roman knowledge—the wilder and more outlandish they were.[23] The anonymous fourth-century writer of the treatise on military issues, *De rebus bellicis*, demarcated anything on the other side of Roman frontier forts as barbarian and anything within the boundary they formed as Roman (*De reb. bell.* 6.20). The writer's words convey an image in which the Roman Empire was "surrounded by the madness of peoples ('nationum … insania') and treacherous barbarity (*dolosa barbaries*)." For the writer of *De rebus bellicis*, the fortification of clear frontier lines was an example of sound imperial administration and effective foreign policy.[24]

Likewise, in Oration 10, addressed to Emperor Valens, Themistius also speaks of a wall "as hard as adamantium" (*teichos adamantinon*)—namely, a heavily defended frontier—that would protect the Empire on the Danube. In Themistius's comparison of the Romans and barbarians with the superior and inferior parts of the human soul, the latter appear as an immutable but necessary element in the Greco-Roman world (Them. *Or.* 10.206/136c). However, the bad, changeless barbarians were not the only kind of barbarians in imperial propaganda. Next, we will

---

[22] "To Rome," Trans. Behr 1981, 90.

[23] The idea already appears in Herodotus and is later repeated by many authors, for example Pliny the Elder, *HN* 7.1–2: odd customs and manners "of people living more remote from the sea." For the mental and political geography, see Halsall 2007, 46; Gillett 2009, 402. The idea is also seen in Tacitus's *Germania*, in which the people remotest from the Mediterranean are the *Fenni*, the most outlandish people of all.

[24] *De reb. bell.* 6.1: "In primis sciendum est quod imperium Romanum circumlatrantium ubique nationum perstringat insania et omne latus limitum tecta naturalibus locis appetat dolosa barbaries." See Elton 1996, 126.

turn to the imagery of barbarians who can be reformed into allies and even made into Romans.

Suppliant Barbarians and the Merciful Emperor

In addition to the reports of continuous attacks by hostile barbarians and equally frequent Roman victories, imperial panegyrists publicized the emperors' ability to change bad barbarians into good ones. With the same stroke, they brought a labor force into the Empire, creating barbarians settlers and taxpayers. Both in laudatory speeches and monumental images, emperors appeared as benefactors who graciously granted land to barbarian migrants and thereby integrated them into Greco-Roman civilization.[25] In Oration 10, Themistius already depicted Valens as a merciful victor who refrained from annihilating the Goths entirely and instead spared them as a kind of essential part of the animal kingdom.

In the speeches (Orations 15 and 16) addressed to Emperor Theodosius I, Themistius represents him as letting Goths stay on Roman soil and making it possible for hostile Goths to become good imperial subjects. The circumstances had dramatically changed between Themistius's speeches to the two emperors. In 370, Themistius celebrated the peace that Valens had concluded after a somewhat successful war and the Goths were left beyond the Danube frontier. As we already saw in the introduction to this article, after 376 Goths and Romans ended up in years of warfare in Thrace, within the boundaries of the Empire. The new emperor, Theodosius I, carried on with the war after Valens's death with varying degrees of success and finally concluded a peace in 382. The Tervingi were granted land in Thrace.

As one can imagine, settling the Tervingi in the regions that they had just harassed in the preceding war raised strong sentiments among the Romans. It is against this grain that Themistius had to go in Orations 15

---

[25] For representations of magnanimous emperors in images and literature, see Mathisen 2006a, 1028.

and 16, before and after the peace was made.[26] In Oration 15, addressed to Theodosius and dated to January 381, Themistius builds up the portrait of an emperor who not only is capable of defeating the Goths but also of making peace. Themistius deliberately transforms Theodosius, who was a renowned general before being raised to the throne, from a military hero into a civilian emperor. Therefore, he stresses the role of the civilian ruler with the metaphor of a shepherd and characterizes the emperor as ruling with the law (*nomos*) that has descended from heaven for the salvation of humankind (*soterian anthropon*; *Or.* 15.186d–187a).[27] Themistius justifies the forthcoming peace agreement by explaining that the emperor subdues his enemies by mildness rather than by arms (*Or.* 15.190c–d).[28]

To avoid sounding (perhaps) too irenic in front of his audience, Themistius ends his speech with a martial theme and repeats the binary oppositions that he had used in his earlier speech (Oration 10). Goths are still the enemy, "the ill-omened and lawless tribe (*tou dysonymou kai athemitou phylou*)." The barbarians have not been victorious over Romans, because order (*taxis*) is stronger than disorder (*ataxia*), arrangement (*kosmos*) stronger than chaos (*akosmia*), valor (*tharraleotes*) stronger than credulity (*thambos*), and discipline (*eupeithes*) stronger

234

---

[26] We can also follow the change in tone in Themistius's speeches to Theodosius from *Or.* 14 to *Or.* 15 and 16. In *Or.* 14, dated to late spring or early summer of 379, Themistius still celebrates Theodosius as the victorious war leader (e.g., using the Homeric epithet *artipous* characteristic of the god of war, Ares, 14.180d) and calls up the suffering that the "damned villains," the Goths, will face through the emperor's maneuvers (14.181c) while the focus in *Or.* 15 and 16 is on the peaceful solution. Peter Heather and David Moncur (2001, 222–24) interpret Themistius's *Or.* 15 as reflecting Theodosius's changing needs after his military setbacks in the Romano-Gothic War in 380.

[27] The authority of (Roman) law extended even to the frontiers of the Empire. In *Or.* 16.212d, Themistius even calls the emperor *nomos empsychos*, the "ensouled law." For the tradition of the emperor as the *nomos empsychos*, see Aalders 1969, 315–29; Ramelli 2006, esp. 89–110; Swain 2013, 35–36.

[28] No one needs to approach the imperial palace with fear. Theodosius even allows the leader of the Goths, Athanaric, to arrive in Constantinople as a suppliant (Heather and Moncur 2001, 243 n. 113).

than insubordination (*dysekoon*). Themistius declares: "These are the weapons with which men conquer other men," expecting the audience to presuppose that Romans have these qualities (*Or.* 15.197a–b).[29] At the very end of his speech, Themistius takes an aggressive stand and reminds his listeners of the Goths' deceitfulness. He uses Homeric references (*Iliad* 13.99–102) to the Trojans who "come against our cities" (only the Homeric "ships" are changed into "cities") and parallels (again with Homeric verses [*Iliad* 3.353–354]) Goths to the Trojan Paris whom Menelaus received "with friendship" and who nonetheless "did ill" to his host. It was clear to the audience that Themistius's Homeric citations were referring to the Goths who were received as refugees into the Empire in 376 and who nonetheless rose up against their Roman hosts (*Or.* 15.198c–199b).[30]

235

Good Barbarians and the Philanthropic Emperor

After the peace with the Goths in October 382, Themistius advocated the imperial policy of accommodation in Oration 16. The peace was a compromise after a protracted and not-so-successful war. The Goths were given permission to settle in Thrace—on what terms is still debated in modern research. The mentions in late antique sources are far from precise or neutral. A number of scholars argue for the Goths' semi-autonomous position both in the army and the Empire, while others maintain that they were treated according to traditional forms of *deditio*, unconditional surrender, as *dediticii* who were then settled in Roman areas in due course. *Dediticii* was the technical term for those who surrendered voluntarily and were settled in the Empire.[31]

---

[29] Trans. Heather and Moncur 2001, 252.

[30] Goths are an infection that is persistent and deep-rooted, and dies hard. Trans. Heather and Moncur 2001, 254.

[31] Oration 16 was made on January 1, 383, to celebrate the consulship of the *magister militum* Saturninus. For the context of this speech and modern debates thereon, see Lenski 1997, 143–44; Garnsey and Humfress 2001, 101.

Let us look at how (and for what reasons) Themistius represents the peace and subsequent settlement.[32] It is impossible to make any specific conclusions from Themistius's skillful balancing: on the one hand, there is the triumphant emperor and subjugated Goths; on the other hand, there is the aim to persuade his listeners that it is beneficial for the Empire that Goths be integrated. Therefore, Themistius needs to follow several *topoi* supporting the Greco-Roman worldview and demonstrate Roman superiority. The Goths are not "destroyed completely" because of the rationality and philanthropy of the Romans. Instead, the Goths are spared, and they are made better, it is implied, because they are made into Romans—that is, by being welcomed into the Empire (*Or.* 16). This is the grandeur of the Romans: their power (*dynamis*) "did not now lie in weapons, nor in breastplates, spears and unnumbered manpower." This power, as Theodosius has understood, in a rule in accordance with the will of God, "comes silently from that source which subdues all nations," "turns savagery to mildness," and wins over Scythians (Goths), Alans, and Massagetes (Huns) (*Or.* 16.207c).[33]

To reinforce his argument for the integration of the Goths, Themistius appeals to the famous Aesopian tale about Persuasion (Peitho) and Force (Bias) in which it becomes clear that more is achieved by the former than by the latter. Forgiveness (*syngnome*) even toward wrong-doers is better than sheer eagerness to fight (*philoneikia*) to the very end. The emperor's "heavenly armor was patience (*anexikakia*), gentleness (*praotes*), and love of humankind (*philanthropia*)," and with these the emperor and his general Saturninus (who negotiated the peace) put an end to the arrogance of the Goths (*Or.* 16.208a–209a).[34] In what follows, Themistius builds an image of barbarians who are tamed and charmed like beasts after having heard Orpheus's sweet sound—the enchantment

---

[32] *Or.* 16.199c states very generally that Goths gave up "their weapons voluntarily."

[33] Trans. Heather and Moncur 2001, 275. Themistius (*Or.* 16.206b) declares that God has summoned Theodosius to leadership.

[34] For Persuasion and Force as divinities and their use in argumentation, see Marcos 2019, 111–18.

is the emperor's *philanthropia*.[35] Greco-Roman writers such as Pliny the Elder asserted that Roman power and Greco-Roman culture tempered barbarian rudeness and cruelty, and the metaphor of Orpheus was sometimes employed in these accounts.[36] The result of this softening, in Themistius's vision, is a series of happy corrections: the Goths' spirit is humbled, they show respect to the land they had just sacked, they respect the deceased, and so forth (*Or.* 16.209a–b). The emperor stands out for his love of humankind (*philanthropia*) in accommodating the Goths: with a series of binary oppositions, Themistius shows the excellence of the imperial policy of making Goths useful—it is better to have Goths as farmers than corpses, to fill the land with living humans than tombs, to go through cultivated fields than wilderness, and so forth (*Or.* 16.211b).

To justify the settlement of Goths in the present, Themistius introduces successful parallels from the past. People who had done wrong had found forgiveness (*syngnome*) and thereafter had turned out to be useful (*en chreia*) to those whom they had just wronged. One of those peoples was the Galatians who had harassed Hellenistic Asia Minor and then settled in the region that was named after them, Galatia. "And now no one would ever refer to the Galatians as barbarian but as thoroughly Roman," Themistius exclaims (*Or.* 16.211c).[37] What makes them Romans becomes clear from Themistius's subsequent characterization: their life is akin (*symphylos*) to the Roman way of life, since they pay taxes, they enlist in the army, they abide by the government's policies, and they obey the laws. It is the four issues that unite all Roman subjects: taxes, military service, government, and laws. Optimistically, Themistius states that the same will happen to the Goths very soon, and

---

[35] Themistius uses the terms *epaeido* ("to sing as an incantation") and *keleo* ("to bewitch"), which are strongly connected with magical practices.

[36] Pliny the Elder, *HN* 3.39.93; for an example of the use of Orpheus, see Cassiodorus, *Var.* 2.40.

[37] Galatians were Celts who attacked the Hellenistic kingdoms and were defeated by several Hellenistic rulers. The Galatians settled in the region that became named after them, Galatia. Another example from the past is North Africa led by Masinissa, who first resisted the spread of Roman power during the Second Punic War but eventually became Roman (see Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 24–30).

his appeal culminates in the passage about sharing offerings (*homospondous*), tables (*homotrapezous*), military ventures (*homou strateuomenous*), and public duties (*homou leitourgountas*), which was quoted above as the epigraph to this article. Themistius highlights shared religion, guest friendship, the army, taxes, and other duties—all essential for being Roman (*Or.* 16.211d).[38]

A similar notion is found in another panegyric to Theodosius in which the emperor does not spurn the beaten arrogantly but rather orders them to "become Roman" ("iussisti esse Romanam"). In yet another laudatory speech, the orator Claudian praises the general Stilicho, under whose command Rome "summoned as citizens those whom she [Rome] had just defeated and drew them together from afar with a bond of affection" ("civesque vocavit / quos domuit nexuque pio longinqua revinxit").[39] In the expectations of the Greco-Roman elite, the only remedy for being barbarian was to become Roman. One manifestation of these expectations is seen in the need of Nicene bishops such as John Chrysostom to convert Goths from Homoian ("Arian") Christianity to Nicene Christianity. By the end of the fourth century, being a proper Roman and loyal imperial subject was increasingly identified with being a Nicene Christian.[40]

Moving People, Getting Settlers

Themistius appealed to the usefulness of defeated Goths becoming settlers and taxpayers. In this, he was very much in line with contemporary

---

[38] Themistius returns to the same theme of the merciful emperor and similar expressions in Oration 34, dates to late 384 or early 385, where he speaks of Goths sharing with Romans their roofs, libations, and even the celebrations of their victory over themselves (Heather and Moncur 2001, 304, 328).

[39] Claud. *Pan. Lat.* 2(12).36.4 in 389; Claud. *Cons. Stil.* 3.152–153. See the discussion in Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 503; Mathisen 2006a, 1023.

[40] As Chris de Wet (2012) points out, for Greco-Roman writers such as Themistius and John Chrysostom it was impossible to "think outside the dichotomy between Roman and barbarian." For the attitudes of ecclesiastical writers on the "Arianism" of the Goths, see Kahlos 2021.

and earlier writers, especially panegyrists who argued for the utility of moving people. For centuries, Romans recruited labor in various ways from outside the Empire in the form of settlers, slaves, and soldiers. In what follows, I discuss Themistius's rhetoric in the context of earlier imperial policy on the utility of moving people into the Empire. I look at the Roman migration and accommodation policies from the viewpoint of how they were advertised in imperial propaganda.

During the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, Roman writers and administrators thought about migrant groups (to the Empire from outside its borders) according to the contributions these groups would make to the Empire's economy and military forces. Roman historians report of transfers of ethnic groups into the Empire, usually after defeating and subduing them.[41] For example, in 8 BCE, in the frontier warfare during the reign of Augustus, the latter's adoptive son Tiberius defeated groups of Suebi and Sugambri (Sigambri) on the other side of the Rhine, the border, and transported them into the Empire to Gaul. The historian Suetonius mentions that the Suebi and Sugambri "submitted to him [Augustus] and were taken into Gaul and settled in lands near the Rhine" ("ex quibus Suebos et Sigambros dedentis se traduxit in Galliam atque in proximis Rheno agris conlocavit"). Suetonius also mentions that in the "Germanic" war Tiberius "brought 40,000 prisoners of war over into Gaul and assigned them homes near the bank of the Rhine" ("Germanico quadraginta milia dediticiorum traiecit in Galliam iuxtaque ripam Rheni sedibus adsignatis conlocavit"). Thus, the Suebi and Sugambri had been defeated, they had surrendered, and, as surrendered people, *dediticii*, in the Roman system, they were settled in new regions in Gaul.[42]

---

[41] Ando 2000, 277–335; Mathisen 2006a, 1024. See Ando 2008, 42–43, on how ethnic groups incorporated through conquest and reception were conceived of as associated with each other. For Roman diplomacy and networks of shifting alliances, see Mattern 2013, 220–24.

[42] Suet. *Aug.* 21; *Tib.* 9. How this process of transfer and settlement was done is not clear. One can also wonder how credible the number 40,000 is. In any case, the number was immense, and the operation must have been massive. See Barbero 2006, 14–15.

In the early first century, according to the Greek geographer Strabo, a Roman general settled 50,000 "Getes" (*Getai*)—probably Dacians—in the same region south of the Danube that later became the province of Moesia. Strabo tells us the following about the operation: "Even in our own times, Aelius Catus transplanted from the country on the far side of the Ister [Danube] into Thrace 50,000 persons from among the *Getai*, a tribe with the same tongue as the Thracians."[43] Another example from the first century CE is a funerary inscription of a Roman officer Ti. Plautius Silvanus, in which it is mentioned that this officer brought across the Danube "more than 100,000 of the Transdanubians [that is, people from the other side of the river Danube], along with their wives, children, chieftains, and kings, to become tribute-paying subjects."[44] Even though one can question the numbers given in these accounts, the core message here is that the number of relocated people was immense. In Plautius Silvanus's inscription, it is specifically pointed out that these came as "tribute-paying subjects."[45] During the imperial period, these accounts and declarations highlighted the need for soldiers and settlers for areas that had, for one reason or other, become desolate and above all, the need for taxpayers.

In the second century, the warfare engaged in by Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180) shows the same patterns of surrenders and transfers of defeated groups as had obtained in the first century. The historian Cassius Dio (*Hist. Rom.* 72.11) tells us that after Marcus Aurelius had defeated the Quadi, many from the populations (*gene* and *ethne*),

---

[43] Strabo *Geog.* 7.3.10. *Getai* was a classicizing term probably referring to Dacians. See Woolf 2017, 37, on ad hoc decisions made by generals on the spot.

[44] *CIL* XIV 3608 = Dessau *ILS* 986: "… legat. pro praet. Moesiae, in qua plura quam centum mill. ex numero Transdanuvianor. ad praestanda tributa cum coniugib. ac liberis et principibus aut regibus suis transduxit." The region was later formed into the province of Moesia. See Conole and Milns 1983, 183–200.

[45] It has been suggested that Plautius Silvanus transferred to his province of Moesia a group of refugees who had been harassed by nomadic Sarmatians; therefore, the transportation was part of military operations. Another suggestion is that the governor Plautius Silvanus wanted to draw a zone of defence and form an empty no-man's land on the other side of the Danube. Similar policies had been carried out on the Rhine frontier. Barbero 2006, 14–15.

240

even if not all, in the regions transferred to the service of the emperor and that they were sent on military campaigns elsewhere. Others, as Dio writes, "received land in Dacia, Pannonia, Moesia, the province of Germania, and in Italy itself." Furthermore, Dio mentions that some of the people, "who settled at Ravenna, made an uprising and even went so far as to take possession of the city," thus implying that not all who were settled were entirely content with this arrangement.[46] From this account, we can deduce that not all transfers were forced but that there were also other factors—the (real or alleged) threat from neighboring groups such as the Marcomanni in the case of the Quadi. However, the differences are not always clear. It is difficult to distinguish between war captives and those who had surrendered "voluntarily" (*dediticii*).

Themistius's laudatory speeches resemble other fourth-century panegyrics addressed to the "invincible" and "divine" emperors. In these praises, warfare against barbarians is represented in triumphalist terms and barbarians are seen as a labor force and military resource. For example, in 297 an anonymous orator (*Pan. Lat.* 8) congratulates Constantius Chlorus, who has just reconquered Britannia from a usurper.[47] The orator praises the Tetrarchic emperors. First Diocletian and Maximian,[48] and then Constantius repopulated several regions of

241

---

[46] Trans. Cary and Foster 1914–1927. The consequence was that the emperor again transported all those who were settled in Italy elsewhere and thereafter did not allow others to be settled in Italy. See also SHA *Marc.* 22.2: "Magno igitur labore etiam suo gentes asperrimas vicit militibus sese imitantibus, ducentibus etiam exercitum legatis et praefectis praetorio, accepitque in deditionem Marcomannos plurimis in Italiam traductis" (Barbero 2006, 32–33).

[47] The speech was probably delivered in Trier, which was Constantius's imperial capital. It gives much information about the conditions in Gaul and alludes many times to the devastation and depopulation in Gaul in the earlier decades (the 260s and 270s). See Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 106. Lukas de Blois (2017, 52–53) connects the deportations, forced migration on a large scale, with military logistics (e.g., on the Danube frontier, with a shortening of defensive lines and a restoration of the frontier).

[48] The circumstances of the transfer ordered by Diocletian from Asia to Thrace are unknown (Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 141 n. 75). It is possible that these people had been taken as captives during the campaigns against Persia in the Mesopotamian

the Empire—not only Gaul, but also Thrace—that had become deso-
late: "So now through your victories, Constantius, invincible Caesar,
whatever land remained abandoned in the territory of the Ambiani,
Bellovaci, Tricasses, and Lingones turns green again under cultivation
by the barbarian ('barbaro cultore')" (8[4].21.1).[49] The orator depicts
Constantius's campaigns against the Franks in the frontier regions in
triumphalist terms—in panegyrics, the emperors' wars could only be
victorious. For example, "so many victories have been won by your
courage, so many barbarian nations wiped out on all sides, so many
farmers settled in the Roman countryside, so many frontiers pushed
forward, so many provinces restored" (8[4].1.4)[50] The transferred and
settled farmers formed an essential part of the imperial victory.[51] The
orator rejoices that the barbarians "crossed over to lands long since de-
serted in order to restore to cultivation through their servitude (*servi-
endo*)" and highlights that these same barbarians restored to cultivation
exactly the same lands that "they themselves, perhaps, had once devas-
tated by their plundering" (8[4].8.4)[52] There is nonetheless no evidence
that these "same" persons "once perhaps" ("fortasse ipsi quondam") had
been plundering the lands they now settled. In any case, what mattered

---

frontier regions. Mass deportations were made on a regular basis by both armies.
The transferred people were probably captives taken by Galerius's troops after the
victory over Persia in 297/298.

[49] "ita nunc per victorias tuas, Constanti Caesar invicte, quidquid infrequens
Ambiano et Bellovaco et Tricassino solo Lingonico restabat, barbaro cultore
revirescit." Trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 141–44. Barbarians earlier settled the
deserted lands of the Arvii (modern Armorica), Treveri (Trier), now also the lands
of the Ambiani (Amiens), Bellovaci (Beauvois), Tricasses (Troyes) and Lingones
(Langres).

[50] "tot … partae victoriae, tot excisae undique barbarae nationes, tot translati dint
in rura Romana cultores, <tot> prolati limites, tot provinciae restitutae." Trans.
Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 109–10.

[51] The emperor fought for victory not only over the barbarians but also over the
treacherous places of the region (here referring to the Rhine delta area)—the
Romans came to control both the barbarians and the region (*Pan. Lat.* 8[4].8.4).

[52] "quae fortasse ipsi quondam depraedando vastaverant, culta redderent servi-
endo." Trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 121 (modified); Barbero 2006, 74.

242

for the Roman audience was that the barbarians were crushed and compelled to surrender, and they were settled as a working force in Roman territory. The orator depicts the humiliation of the bands of barbarians ("captiva agmina barbarorum") taken captive and transferred into servitude for the benefit of the Romans:

> In all the porticoes of our cities sit the captive bands of barbarians, the men trembling, their savagery utterly confounded, old women and wives contemplating the indolence of their sons and husbands, youths and girls fettered together whispering soothing endearments, and all these distributed to the inhabitants of your provinces for service. (*Pan. Lat* 8[4].9.1)[53]

The orator exults over the consequences of the servitude, as now "the Chamavian and Frisian plows, and that vagabond, that pillager, toils at the cultivation of the neglected countryside and frequents my markets with beasts for sale, and the barbarian farmer lowers the price of food" (8[4].9.3).[54] In addition to the added workforce and the consequences thereof for prices, barbarians also make Romans happy because they are submitted to taxation, to discipline, to the lash, and to the military (8[4].9.4).[55] The taxes, the labor markets (slave or free), and the army functioned as an established argument for imperial policies, and, as we saw above, a similar list was mentioned by Themistius.

Another panegyric (*Pan. Lat.* 6) in honor of Emperor Constantine by another anonymous orator celebrates the emperor for defeating diverse

243

---

[53] "totis porticibus civitatum sedere captiva agmina barbarorum, viros attonita feritate trepidantes, respicientes anus ignaviam filiorum nuptas maritorum, vinculis copulatos pueros ac puellas familiari murmure blandientes, atque hos omnes provincialibus vestris ad obsequium distributos." Trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 121 (modified).

[54] "arat ergo nunc mihi Chamavus et Frisius et ille vagus, ille praedator exercitio squalidi ruris operatur et frequentat nundinas meas pecore venali et cultor barbarus laxat annonam." Trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 121–22.

[55] "quin etiam si ad dilectum vocetur accurrit et obsequis teritur et tergo coercetur et servire se militiae nomine gratulatur." Trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 122.

groups of Franks:[56] Constantine, "not content with having conquered [them], transported the peoples themselves amongst the Roman peoples ('in Romanas transtulit nationes'), so that they were compelled to put aside, not only their weapons, but their ferocity as well" (6[7].5).[57] Constantine has settled them "in the deserted regions of Gaul" and now they are useful to Romans: they "promote the peace of the Roman Empire ('pacem Romani imperii … iuvarent') by cultivating the soil and by being recruited to Roman arms" (6[7].6).[58] The orator highlights the usefulness of the barbarians: the Franks have been conquered, and their ferocity has been tamed; they have been transferred to the Empire, and in the regions that had earlier been deserted they support the Romans with their labor.

Common Laws and Mixed Blood

We saw above how Themistius had to argue for a peaceful solution in Orations 15 and 16, both before and after the peace with the Goths was made. In Oration 16, he stressed that in the future Goths would share religion, guest friendship, the army, and taxes and other duties with Romans—all of which are fundamental aspects of being Roman. In Oration 15, he highlights Theodosius's role as a civilian ruler with the metaphor of the shepherd; furthermore, the emperor rules with the law (*nomos*) that had originated from heaven (*Or.* 15.186d–187a). The shepherd as a metaphor for a ruler was used both in classical and Christian literature. Interestingly, Synesius of Cyrene (c. 370–413) employs the imagery of the shepherd, dogs, and wolves in his *On Kingship*

[56] The oration was delivered (probably) in Trier in 310 for the anniversary of the city's foundation. It also celebrates the suppression of Maximian's revolt and Constantine's vision of Apollo (Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 212–14).

[57] "nec contentus vicisse ipsas in Romanas transtulit nationes, ut non solum arma sed etiam feritatem ponere cogerentur." Trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 224 (modified).

[58] "ut in desertis Galliae regionibus conlocatae et pacem Romani imperii cultu iuvarent et arma dilectu." Trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 224, modified.

(*Peri basileias*) in 398 when criticizing the emperors for the growing influence of Goths in the army and at the Constantinopolitan court. He warns that "the shepherd must not mix wolves with his dogs, even if caught as whelps they may seem to be tamed." Likewise, the Goths (in Synesius, "Scythians") can never be trusted—even if they seem to be "tamed" and accepting of Roman law and customs.

According to Synesius, the legislator (*nomothetes*) ought not to provide with arms those who are not born and brought up under the Roman laws. Synesius is set against any notion of Goths becoming Romans, which he compares with mixing "alien portions" (*tõn allotriõn*) that "are incapable of mingling in a healthy state of harmony (*eis harmonian hygieinen*)" into the human body. This will only cause inflammation of the body. With this association, Synesius insists upon separating the alien parts (*tallotrion*) in the cities as in the body. Synesius's conclusion is that no fellowship (*koinonia*) can be allowed with anything barbarian (*to barbaron*).[59] Synesius may have alluded to Themistius's speeches in making his own use of the metaphor of the shepherd, or he may have simply referred to ongoing debates on the use of Goths in the military and other offices.[60] In any case, almost twenty years after Themistius's orations—again in a different political situation—Synesius rejects the option of Goths becoming Romans.

Thus, there were divergent views on the possibilities of becoming Roman. In addition to Themistius, a few other late antique writers such as Prudentius and Orosius voiced optimistic visions of the spread of Romanness—in a manner similar to early imperial writers and fourth-century panegyrists. Prudentius sees the Roman law as the uniting force: "A common law made them equals and bound them by a single name, bringing them by conquest into bonds of brotherhood." The Romans lived in parts of the Empire that were most diverse but as fellow citizens whom the native city embraces in its single walls and

245

---

[59] *De reg.* 14 (Garzya 1989, 426–28). Trans. Fitzgerald 1930, 134. For the speech and date, see Heather 1988; Cameron and Long 1993, 127–42; Gärtner 1993, 105–21; Lenski 1997, 148–49.

[60] Synesius (*De reg.* 15 [Garzya 1989, 343]) alludes to Theodosius I, who "considered the Goths worthy of citizenship."

whom the ancestral home unites.[61] Thus, the city of Rome with its history and mythology formed a common heritage for all citizens. Prudentius stresses the mingling as a positive factor of Romanness: this is achieved by the traditional right of marriage (*ius conubii*) with Romans given to foreign peoples, and consequently "from the mixed blood of two different peoples (*gentibus*), a single offspring is created."[62] Prudentius nonetheless sees Romans and barbarians in dichotomous terms, perceiving them as two *gentes* and lumping all the variety of non-Roman ethnic groups into the category of barbarians. It is obvious that the process of mingling with and subsequent turning into fellow citizens happens on Roman terms.

The historian Orosius was also optimistic about making barbarians into civilized, in his view, Christian, Romans. That is why he wants to present the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 as a relatively moderate calamity and thereby to demonstrate how Christianity had tamed the brutal Goths and thus benefited the whole world by mitigating barbarian assaults. For Orosius, Christianity was the marker of the moral progress of barbarians and their becoming Roman.[63] To enhance his narrative of the civilizing impact of Christianity, Orosius refers to the marriage between the Roman princess Galla Placidia and the Gothic warlord Athaulf. The Goths led by Alaric had taken Galla Placidia, the

---

[61] Prudent. *C. Symm.* 2.608–610: "Ius fecit commune pares et nomine eodem / nexuit et domitos fraterna in vincla redegit. / Vivitur omnigenis in partibus haud secus ac si / cives congenitos concludat moenibus unis / urbs patria atque omnes lare conciliemur avito." Trans. Thomson 1949 (modified). Moreover, Prudentius (v. 2.615) highlights that the regions separated by the sea come together in the shared culture of law courts, trade, and crafts ("forum, commercia, artes").

[62] Prudent. *C. Symm.* 2.617: "ius conubii"; 2.617–618: "nam sanguine mixto / texitur alternis ex gentibus una propago."

[63] See Oros. *Hist. adv. pag.* 7.37.8–9 on the sack of Rome. Examples of the image of moral progress of barbarians: Paulinus *Vit. Ambr.* 36; Rufinus *Hist. eccl.* 10.9–11; 11.6; Prudent. *C. Symm.* 1.458–460; 2.578–618; Victor of Vita *Hist. persec. Afr. prov.* 1.36–37. Orosius construed the dichotomy as between Romanness identified with Christianity and barbarity identified with paganism. Cf. Ambrose (*Ep.* 18.7 = *Ep.* 72, CSEL 82.3), who underlined that what pagan Rome had in common with barbarians was idolatry; both were ignorant of the one true God.

daughter of Theodosius I and the sister of Emperors Honorius and Arcadius, captive during the sack of Rome in 410. After Alaric's death, the succeeding leader of the Goths, Athaulf, married her. Orosius states that Athaulf was a fierce enemy who was first determined to "obliterate the name of Rome and make the Romans' land the Goths' empire in both word and deed." However, he changed his mind as soon as he realized that the unruly barbarity of the Goths ("propter effrenatam barbariem") would need the Roman state and laws and then became the author of Rome's renewal (*Hist.* 7.43.5–6).[64] In this way, Orosius, like the other Greco-Roman writers, eventually stresses the role of Roman law as the significant, maybe even the most important, factor of Romanness.

Conclusion

As we saw above, Themistius reminded his audience of the Galatians, who had tormented the regions in Asia Minor and were now peaceful subjects of the Empire, and of the fact that no one would any longer refer to them as anything but Romans (*Or.* 16.211c). Similarly, Augustine of Hippo asked his listeners in his sermon in 416 who would now know which peoples in the Roman Empire had been what, or when "all had become Romans" and "all are called Romans."[65] Several other late antique writers kept on telling the Roman success story of assimilating conquered peoples into the imperial commonwealth. The rhetorician Libanius states that Romans conquered peoples and then granted a better life to the conquered, "removing their fears and allowing them a share" in the Roman state or civic life (*politeia*).[66] And in the early

---

[64] Orosius (*Hist.* 7.43.7) portrays Athaulf as persuaded by Galla Placidia, a woman truly virtuous in religion ("religione satis probae"). For a discussion on Orosius's argumentative use of barbarians in his *Historiae adversus paganos*, see Kahlos 2022b.

[65] August. *Enarrat. Ps.* 58.1.21. Trans. Conant 2012, 1 (modified).

[66] Lib. *Or.* 30.5. Trans. Norman, LCL, (modified). *Politeia* can be translated as, e.g., "state," "civic life," or "citizenship." Libanius's account of Roman conquest and the spread of civic life forms part of his appeal for the preservation of polytheistic temples.

fifth century, the aristocratic poet Rutilius Namatianus claimed that the Roman Empire had made "one homeland from many different peoples" ("fecisti patriam diversis gentibus unam") (*De reditu suo* 1.63). Again, there was a long tradition of singing the praises of Rome: for example, the above-mentioned mid-second-century Greek orator Aelius Aristides celebrated a Rome that "has never refused anyone. But just as the earth's ground supports all humans, so it too receives people from every land, just as the sea receives the rivers." Rome had become a common home to all its subjects.[67] On the level of ideals at least, for Rome the flexible policy of providing citizenship had been a means of extending its power. Rome had absorbed its enemies as the leaders of the conquered peoples were embraced into the Roman system and thus made loyal.[68]

These kinds of accounts of the incorporation and acculturation of peoples into the Empire were an intrinsic part of Roman self-understanding. Therefore, when Greco-Roman writers discussed barbarians—good or bad—and their being integrated or not into Roman society, they were trying to understand their own Romanness rather than defining who barbarians were. Barbarians, in these cases usually Goths, mirrored Roman writers' values and notions about how things should be, what Romans should be like, what the emperors should be like and how the government and army should be organized in the late Roman Empire. As we saw in the case of Themistius, the "weather vane of imperial policy,"[69] his argumentation shifted according to the day-to-day politics of his time. Even though his argumentation was situational, always attached to the specific circumstances he found himself in, Roman law and customs nonetheless remained as the criteria for membership in the

---

[67] Aristid. *Or.* 26.62 Keil (= *Or.* 14.347 Dindorf). Trans. Behr 1981, 8 (modified). Likewise, Pliny the Elder (*HN.* 3.39.93) claimed that Rome had become the one homeland of all peoples throughout the world ("una cunctarum gentium in toto orbe patria"). For the tradition of the praise of the Empire (*laus imperii*), see Inglebert 2002, 248; Dench 2004, 95; Ando 2008, 43. For the variety of integration in the Empire, see Hingley 2013, 265–70.

[68] Erskine 2010, 4, 14, 61; Kahlos 2022c, 290–304.

[69] The term used by Peter Garnsey and Caroline Humfress (2001, 101).

248

Roman commonwealth. Themistius deployed his arguments and imagery, following the earlier tradition of imperial propaganda—whether forming the enemy image in which barbarians are brutish and inferior to the cultured and disciplined Romans or arguing for the integration of barbarians who are capable of becoming useful taxpayers and soldiers—in strictly Roman terms.

Bibliography

Aalders, G. J. D. 1969. "Nomos Empsychos." In *Politeia und Res publica: Beiträge zum Verständnis von Politik, Recht und Staat in der Antike, den Andenken Rudolf Starks gewidmet*, edited by Peter Steinmetz, 315–29. Wiesbaden: Steiner.

Ando, Clifford. 2000. *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ando, Clifford. 2008. "Decline, Fall, and Transformation." *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1, no. 1: 31–60. http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jla.0.0005.

Barbero, Alessandro. 2006. *Barbari: Immigrati, profughi, deportati nell'impero Romano*. Rome: Laterza.

Behr, Charles Allison. 1981. *P. Aelius Aristides, The Complete Works: Vol. 2, Orations 17–53*. Leiden: Brill.

Blois, Lukas de. 2017. "Invasions, Deportations, and Repopulation: Mobility and Migration in Thrace, Moesia Inferior, and Dacia in the Third Quarter of the Third Century AD." In *The Impact of Mobility and Migration in the Roman Empire*, edited by Elio Lo Cascio and Laurens E. Tacoma, with Miriam J. Groen-Vallinga, 42–54. Leiden: Brill.

Cameron, Alan and Jacqueline Long (with a contribution by Lee Sherry). 1993. *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cary, Earnest and Herbert B. Foster, trans. 1914–1927. *Dio's Roman History*. 8 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Conant, Jonathan. 2012. *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439–700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Conole, P. and R. D. Milns. 1983. "Neronian Frontier Policy in the Balkans: The Career of Ti. Plautius Silvanus." *Historia* 32, no. 2: 183–200. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4435843.

Dagron, Gilbert. 1968. *L'empire romaine d'Orient au IVe siècle et les traditions politiques de l'hellénisme: le témoignage de Thémistios*. Paris: E. de Boccard.

249

Daly, Lawrence J. 1972. "The Mandarin and the Barbarian: The Response of Themistius to the Gothic Challenge." *Historia* 21, no. 2: 351–79. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4435269.

Dench, Emma. 2004. *Romulus' Asylum: Roman Identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dench, Emma. 2013. "The Scope of Ancient Ethnography." In *Ancient Ethnography: New Approaches*, edited by Eran Almagor and Joseph Skinner, 257–67. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Elton, Hugh. 1996. "Defining Romans, Barbarians, and the Roman Frontier." In *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, edited by Ralph W. Mathisen and Hagith S. Sivan, 126–35. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Erskine, Andrew. 2010. *Roman Imperialism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Fitzgerald, Augustine. 1930. *The Essays and Hymns of Synesius of Cyrene Including the Address to the Emperor Arcadius and the Political Speeches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Garnsey, Peter and Caroline Humfress. 2001. *The Evolution of the Late Antique World*. Cambridge: Orchard Academic.

Garzya, Antonio, ed. 1989. *Synesii Cyrenensis Epistolae*. Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato.

Gärtner, Hans Armin. 1993. "Des Synesios Rede über das Königtum: Tradition und Aktualität." In *Philanthropia kai Eusebeia: Festschrift für Albrecht Dihle*, edited by Glenn A. Most, Hubert Petersmann, and Adolf Ritter, 105–21. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Gillett, Andrew. 2009. "The Mirror of Jordanes: Concepts of the Barbarian, Then and Now." In *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, edited by Philip Rousseau, 392–408. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Halsall, Guy. 2007. *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harper, Kyle. 2011. *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heather, Peter. 1988. "The Anti-Scythian Tirade of Synesius' 'De Regno.'" *Phoenix* 42, no. 2: 152–72. https://doi.org/10.2307/1088231.

Heather, Peter. 1991. *Goths and Romans, 332–489*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Heather, Peter and John Matthews. 1991. *The Goths in the Fourth Century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Heather, Peter and David Moncur. 2001. *Politics, Philosophy, and Empire in the Fourth Century: Select Orations of Themistius*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
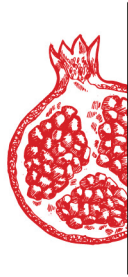
Hingley, Richard. 2013. "Exploitation and Assimilation: The Western Roman Empire from Augustus to Trajan." In *A Companion to Roman Imperialism*, edited by Dexter B. Hoyos, 265–76. Boston: Brill.

Inglebert, Hervé. 2002. "Citoyenneté romaine, romanités et identités romaines sous l'empire." In *Idéologies et valeurs civiques dans le Monde Romain: Hommage à Claude Lepelley*, edited by Hervé Inglebert, 241–60. Paris: Picard.

Lenski, Noel. 1997. "Initium mali Romano imperio: Contemporary Reactions to the Battle of Adrianople." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 127: 129–68. https://doi.org/10.2307/284390.

Lenski, Noel. 2002. *Failure of Empire: Valens and the Roman State in the Fourth Century AD*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Leppin, Hartmut and Werner Portmann. 1998. *Themistius: Staatsreden*. Stuttgart: Hiersemann.

Kahlos, Maijastina. 2021. "Heresy Test and the Barbarian Other." In *Dealing with Difference: Patterns of Response to Religious Rivalry in Late Antiquity*, edited by Geoffrey D. Dunn and Christine Shepardson, 41–55. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Kahlos, Maijastina. 2022a. "Late Roman Ideas of Ethnicity and Enslavement." In *Slavery in the Late Antique World, 150–700 CE*, edited by Chris de Wet, Maijastina Kahlos, and Ville Vuolanto, 87–104. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kahlos, Maijastina. 2022b. "Orosius, Barbarians, and the Christian Success Story." In *Writing History in Late Antique Iberia: Historiographical Praxis in Hispania from the 4th to the 7th Century*, edited by Purificación Ubric Rabaneda, 85–99. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Kahlos, Maijastina. 2022c. "Citizens and the Criteria for Recognition in the Roman Empire." In *Recognition: Its Theory and Practice*, edited by Heikki J. Koskinen and Onni Hirvonen, 290–304. London: Routledge.

Marcos, Mar. 2019. "Recognition through Persuasion: An Aspect of Late Antique Religious Controversy." In *Recognition and Religion: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Maijastina Kahlos, Heikki J. Koskinen, and Ritva Palmén, 109–26. London: Routledge.

Mathisen, Ralph W. 2006a. "Peregrini, Barbari, and Cives Romani: Concepts of Citizenship and the Legal Identity of Barbarians in the Later Roman Empire." *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 4: 1011–40. https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.111.4.1011.

Mathisen, Ralph W. 2006b. "Violent Behavior and the Construction of Barbarian Identity in Late Antiquity." In *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, edited by H. A. Drake, 27–35. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Mattern, Susan. 2013. "Barbarian Friends and Foes: Hegemony beyond Rhine and Danube, AD 14–98." In *A Companion to Roman Imperialism*, edited by Dexter B. Hoyos, 213–24. Boston: Brill.

McCormick, Michael. 1986. *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nixon, C. E. V. and Barbara Saylor Rodgers. 1994. *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Norman, A. F. 1992. *Libanius: Autobiography and Selected Letters*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Penella, Robert J. 2000. *The Private Orations of Themistius*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pohl, Walter, Clemens Gantner, Cinzia Grifoni, and Marianne Pollheimer, eds. 2018. *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Ramelli, Ilaria. 2006. *Il basileus come nomos empsychos tra diritto naturale e diritto divino: Spunti platonici del concetto e sviluppi di età imperiale e tardo-antica*. Naples: Bibliopolis.

Schenkl, Heinrich, Glanville Downey, and Albert Francis Norman, eds. 1965–1974. *Themistii orationes quae supersunt*. 3 vols. Leipzig: Teubner.

Shumate, Nancy. 2006. *Nation, Empire, Decline: Studies in Rhetorical Continuity from the Romans to the Modern Era*. London: Duckworth.

Swain, Simon. 2013. *Themistius, Julian, and Greek Political Theory under Rome: Texts, Translations and Studies of Four Key Works*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thomson, Henry J., trans. 1949. *Prudentius*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vanderspoel, John. 1995. *Themistius and the Imperial Court: Oratory, Civic Duty, and Paideia from Constantius to Theodosius*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Van Nuffelen, Peter. 2012. *Orosius and the Rhetoric of History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wet, Chris L. de 2012. "John Chrysostom and the Mission to the Goths: Rhetorical and Ethical Perspectives." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 68, no. 1. https://hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/1220/2314.

Woolf, Greg. 1998. *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Woolf, Greg. 2017. "Moving Peoples in the Early Roman Empire." In *The Impact of Mobility and Migration in the Roman Empire*, edited by Elio Lo Cascio and Laurens E. Tacoma, with Miriam J. Groen-Vallinga, 25–41. Leiden: Brill.

252

AABNER
ADVANCES IN ANCIENT BIBLICAL AND NEAR EASTERN RESEARCH

THE SEED OF ABRAHAM: GENTILE ETHNICITY IN EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXTS AND THE QURAN

Ilkka Lindstedt

Abstract

In this article, I discuss the reception and espousal of Gentile ethnicity in late antique Arabia and the Quran. I suggest that the Prophet Muhammad and many of his followers identified as Gentile (*ummī* or *ḥanīf*) believers, which they portrayed as carrying positive significations. I discuss various ancient and late ancient Christian texts that appear to be in the background of this development. I argue that the Quran recategorizes Jewish, Christian, and Gentile believers (here: those who believed in the Prophet Muhammad's mission and accepted it) as belonging to the same community of believers. The figure of Abraham is of the utmost importance in the ethnic reasoning of the Quran.

Dans cet article, je traite de la réception et du choix de l'ethnicité des Gentils dans l'Arabie de l'Antiquité tardive et dans le Coran. Je suggère que le prophète Mohammed et nombre de ses disciples se sont identifiés comme des croyants Gentils (*ummī* ou *ḥanīf*), qu'ils ont présentés comme porteurs de significations positives. Je prends en compte divers textes chrétiens anciens et tardifs qui peuvent fonctionner comme l'arrière-plan de cette évolution. Je soutiens que le Coran réorganise les croyants juifs, chrétiens et Gentils (ici, ceux qui ont cru en la mission du prophète Mohammed et l'ont acceptée) comme appartenant à la même communauté de croyants. La figure d'Abraham est de la plus haute importance dans le raisonnement ethnique du Coran.

THE SEED OF ABRAHAM: GENTILE ETHNICITY IN EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXTS AND THE QURAN

Ilkka Lindstedt

Introduction

According to recent research, on the eve of Islam the Arabian Peninsula was, in contrast to the conventional picture, mostly inhabited by monotheists of different sorts:[1] Jews, Christians, and other religious groups

---

[1] I thank Nina Nikki, Anna-Liisa Rafael, Antti Lampinen, Kaj Öhrnberg, Riikka Tuori, Jarkko Vikman, and all the members of the University of Helsinki research group *Sosiaalisten identiteettien välittyminen juutalaisuudessa, kristinuskossa ja islamissa* for commenting on an earlier draft of this text. This study is based on three presentations that I have given over the years. I thank the audiences of those presentations for valuable feedback. The presentations were "Abraham as a Prototype in Paul and the Quran" (with Nina Nikki), EABS/ISBL Conference, Helsinki, July 31, 2018; "Abraham and Gentile Identity in the Quran," Medieval Philosophy and Theology Research Seminar, Helsinki, March 21, 2019; and "Religion and Ethnicity in the Quran," Leiden, January 28, 2020. In this article,

(Sinai 2019).[2] What is more, Arabia was multiethnic, with different languages spoken (and written), and the Arab ethnogenesis was still underway or in the future. The old notions of the peoples of pre-Islamic Arabia being "Arab Bedouin" and idolatrous polytheists have been rebuffed in recent research.[3]

Recent epigraphic finds (e.g., Nehmé 2017) reveal the early presence of Jews and Christians in Arabia, including western Arabia. Indeed, all sixth-century (the century when the Prophet Muhammad was born) epigraphic material is monotheist. Interestingly too, pre-Islamic Arabic poetry suggests that even some Gentiles of Arabia had become monotheists or, at least, henotheists.[4] The Quran, too, appears to indicate that the opponents of the Prophet Muhammad believed in a creator God who was above other supernatural agents, though they might have denied the existence of the hereafter (Crone 2016).

In Arabic poems, some of which are in all likelihood authentically pre-Islamic, God (*Allāh*) is sworn by and extolled (Sinai 2019, 20, 31). He is the creator: for example, a poet by the name of Bāʿith ibn Ṣuraym refers to God as the one "who raised the heaven in its place and the full moon" (trans. Sinai 2019, 27). The fate of human beings is in God's hands, though the notion of the afterlife is, by and large, missing in the poems. Though some poems by Jewish and Christian Arabic poets

---

the biblical passages are quoted according to the NRSV translation. The Quranic citations are cited from Muhammad Abdel Haleem's (2010) translation, though I have sometimes changed his renderings somewhat. This is in particular the case when the context of the citation has required modifying his translation. The article has some overlap with my monograph *Muḥammad and His Followers in Context: The Religious Map of Late Antique Arabia* (passages reproduced with permission).

[2] For a study arguing for the conventional reconstruction, see Lecker 2005. According to him, polytheism was not diminishing. In Lindstedt 2024, I criticize Lecker's view.

[3] Macdonald 2009; Crone 2016b; Webb 2016.

[4] For this question, see Watt 1971; Sinai 2019; Grasso 2021.There are some questions on the authenticity of the poetic corpus, which are rather satisfactorily addressed by Sinai (2019, 19–26). I agree with his idea that much of the corpus is authentic.

are extant,[5] most of the poetic corpus appears to have been composed by poets who were neither Jewish nor Christian: at least neither the contents of the poems, nor the names of the authors suggest Jewish or Christian self-identity. Despite this, the poets still subscribed to a belief in a creator God (*Allāh*), and can be called Gentile monotheists or henotheists. This is, naturally, a categorization imposed upon them by modern scholars: we have no evidence in the corpus of any specific group appellation (except tribal ones) or religious identity that they themselves would have embraced and used.

In this article, I deal with the Abrahamic prototype[6] and its connection with the notion of Gentile ethnicity in the Quran as well as texts that function as the subtexts[7] of the Quran in this regard. I start by discussing Christian texts from antiquity and late antiquity where Abraham functions in a somewhat similar role as in the Quran. Of especial importance is the Pauline articulation of Abraham and its later reception. I also discuss how the Quran creates the ingroup identity for the group called "believers" through the process of *recategorization*.

I use the word "Gentile" in this article to denote people who did not self-identify, or were not seen by others, as Jewish or Christian. No pejorative significations are meant by this usage. Moreover, as I will argue in

257

---

[5] For a discussion of these poets, see Lindstedt 2024, 62–64, 111–16.

[6] A prototype is an abstract fuzzy set of attributes that the group members envision characterize a typical member of the group. A real person exhibiting these features cannot be called a "prototype"; rather, the word "exemplar" is used. However, a person can be "prototypical," and, in the context of Abraham we are in any case dealing with a fictional literary figure rather than a real person. See Esler and Piper 2006, 17–41, for a discussion of these terms and how they can be employed in the discussion of fictional figures. In this article, I speak of the "Abrahamic prototype" and "Abraham's prototypicality."

[7] That is to say, texts that are older than the Quran and that the Quran is in intertextual connection with—echoing them, alluding to them, and commenting on them. See Reynolds 2010, 2018. It is somewhat difficult to tell with precision what texts were known in western Arabia in the early seventh century CE (when the Prophet Muhammad was active), but scholars often look in particular at Ethiopic and Syriac, but also Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic texts for Quranic subtexts. The transmission of these texts (and their ideas) was partly oral.

some length, the Gentile appellation and identity were repurposed and laden with positive meanings in sixth–seventh century western Arabia.

While the similarities between the Pauline Abraham and the Quranic Abraham were noted in scholarship more than a hundred years ago,[8] my treatment offers new viewpoints by discussing what the Quranic Abraham meant for the Arabian religious map, social categorizations, and ethnic legitimization before Islam and in early Islam—that is to say, how a group of (mostly) Gentile believers articulated and buttressed its identity and standing vis-à-vis the Jews and Christians. As far as I know, there is no detailed and comparative study on how this Abraham-as-Gentile-believer figure functions in Christian texts and the Quran.

The Quranic Abraham figure is intimately linked with Quranic *ethnic reasoning*, to borrow a term used by Denise Kimber Buell (2005, 2–5) to describe how early Christians categorized and compared themselves through discourse on the conceptual plane of ethnic groups or nations.[9] The Quran utilizes its narratives of Abraham to argue for a positive interpretation of Gentile believer identity. Looking at the terminology denoting Gentile ethnicity in the Quran also requires discussing what modern scholars mean by the word "ethnicity," a word for which no exact correspondence in Quranic or Classical Arabic can be found. The arguments I put forward in this article also entail revisiting how Quranic words such as *dīn* and *milla*, often (and, I argue, misleadingly) translated as "religion," function in the text.

---

[8] D. S. Margoliouth (1903) was, as far as I know, the first to suggest that the Quranic depiction of Abraham might have its precursor in Romans 4. More recently, a number of scholars have authored studies that have a bearing on the issue of Gentile ethnicity in the Quran. See, e.g., Hawting 2011; Zellentin 2013; Shaddel 2016; Goudarzi 2018; Zellentin 2018; Goudarzi 2019; Zellentin 2019.

[9] In recent years, there has been a growing interest in studying how religion and ethnicity were conceived and intertwined among Jews, Christians, and other groups in antiquity and late antiquity. See Boyarin 1999; Fonrobert 2001; Boyarin 2004; Donaldson 2007; Hodge 2007; Barton and Boyarin 2016; Berzon 2016; Lieu 2016; Boyarin 2018.

Second Temple Judaism, Christianity, and Ethnicity

In the study of Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity, there has been ample work, by scholars such as Paula Fredriksen (2018), on the question of the identity of the people commonly called "Jews," "Christians," and "Gentiles." Nowadays, many scholars hesitate to talk of Christianity as an existing religious identity before the second century of the Common Era or even later. There has also been much discussion and debate about the exact contours of the "Jewish" identity during and after the Second Temple period (until 70 CE). For example, Philip Esler argues that we should not use the word "Jews" to refer to a group in antiquity; rather the word "Judeans" should be preferred. Esler notes: "This is not simply a question of nomenclature, since it goes to the heart of how the identity of the people was understood by themselves and by their contemporaries" (2003, 62).[10] Esler indicates that the self-understanding of these people in antiquity was more ethnic than religious properly speaking.[11]

Now, "ethnicity" is of course a modern concept, as is "identity" (and some might say "religion" as well).[12] There is no reason to clearly separate

---

[10] Similarly in Islamic studies, Donner notes: "The scholarly and popular discussion of Islam's origins has long been hampered—even crippled—by the use of deeply entrenched conventional terminologies that are inappropriate to the historical realities we seek to understand. It is not just that we use 'inappropriate' names for various phenomena; more serious is the fact that these engrained terminological habits inhibit our ability to conceptualize clearly the true nature of the phenomena associated with Islam's origins" (2018b, 2).

[11] For a study on the later developments of the nomenclature related to "Judaism" and "Jews," see Boyarin 2018.

[12] A good definition for the concept religion is given in Jaffee 1997, 5: "Religion is an intense and sustained cultivation of a style of life that heightens awareness of morally binding connections between the self, the human community, and the most essential structures of reality. Religions posit various orders of reality and help individuals and groups to negotiate their relations with those orders." Naturally, it should be acknowledged that the various modern scholars that refer to "religion" might have diverging significations in mind.

ethnicity from other categorizations of identity (Armstrong 1982, 6).[13] However, in certain contexts the word "ethnicity" might bring analytical and conceptual clarity to studying the ways in which people in antiquity perceived themselves. To ground his argument in theories of ethnicity, Esler cites the six features of an ethnos that John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (1996, 6–7) have put forward. In this framework, an ethnic group is understood to possess the following characteristics:

1. A common proper name that the group is called by its members.
2. An imagined (mythic) common ancestry.
3. Shared memories or foundation myths of heroes, historical events, et cetera.
4. Aspects of common culture, for instance religion, language, or norms.
5. A connection with a homeland, which can be either actual living in that territory or a shared understanding of an ancestral land.
6. A sense of group solidarity, felt by at least part of the *ethnos*.

Here, Second Temple Judaism appears to tick all the boxes. Hence, the English concept "religion" does not necessarily entail the important aspects that were part of the self-conceptions and practices of the Judeans, since they, for instance, put much weight on the notion of shared ancestry. It is, perhaps, number 2 in the above list—an understanding of a shared ancestry—that is most important in setting apart "ethnicity" from how "religion" is commonly understood in modern English parlance. After all, though some religions include the notion of ethnicity in the self-understanding of the people identifying with that religion, for the most part religions are conceptualized as sets of beliefs and practices that transcend ethnicity. In theory at least, nowadays people can identify with and convert to Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam whether they are South African, Icelandic, or Japanese in their ethnic or national

---

13 See also Enloe 1996, esp. 199–200: "It may be futile and unrealistic to separate religion and ethnic identity. Many individuals behave as if their ethnic affiliation and professed religion are one and the same: to be born Croatian is to be born Catholic."

affiliation.[14] In the texts under consideration here, the Abrahamic prototype is regularly invoked as modeling a sense of past and belonging in this ethnic notion of lineage. Let me emphasize here that I am not suggesting that ethnic groups are somehow more "real," "concrete," or "bounded" units than, for instance, religious groups. All groups larger than, say, some dozens of individuals are, to an extent, imagined communities.[15] Toward the end of this article, we will come back to this six-point list and see how the Quran's notion of Gentile believer might fit on it.

Abraham as An Example for Gentile Believers in Early Christian Texts

Abraham as a figure prototypical for the Gentile believers in Jesus in particular was essentially an invention of the Apostle Paul, who probably reacted to what his opponents claimed about Abrahamic descent.[16] Some other early Christian texts also invoked and echoed this Pauline notion of Abraham as a vehicle transferring the Gentiles from the outgroup to the community of believers.[17] The secondary literature on the

261

---

[14] But as we are reminded by Buell, this is in all likelihood a markedly modern understanding (and one that only exists in certain contexts): "Instead of positioning Christianness as *not-race*, or aracial, many early Christian texts defined their version of Christianity as a race or ethnicity, sometimes in opposition to other rival articulations of Christianness, and sometimes in contrast to non-Christian groups and cultures (including, but not limited, to those defined as 'Jews')" (2005, 9).

[15] To refer to the name of the classic study by Benedict Anderson (1983). Or, as Kwame Appiah puts it: "Once you move beyond the village world of the face-to-face, a people is always going to be a community of strangers" (2018, 74).

[16] However, it can also be understood that, for Paul and his Gentile believers, believing in Jesus was a pathway for becoming the descendant of Abraham. I thank Nina Nikki for this remark. In any case, the idea is that Abraham functions as an example for the Gentile Jesus-believers.

[17] While the topic is outside the scope of this article, it is interesting to note that in rabbinic Judaism as well Abraham functions as a vehicle for Gentile converts. Male

New Testament and later Christian texts is vast. I restrict the citations to those works that deal mainly with the early Christian texts from a social identity perspective.

Paul's Letters

As is well known, the most important writer in the New Testament to argue for an Abrahamic ancestry and prototype for the Gentiles is Paul.[18] This issue is raised in particular in Galatians 3 and Romans 4, and is

---

converts sometimes adopted the name Abraham the son of Abraham our father. But the label Abraham does not mean that the proselytes of Gentile background were a group set apart in rabbinic Judaism, since they were considered, at least in theory, as fully Jewish and expected to follow the law *in toto*; see BT Yevamot 22a (for the Babylonian Talmud, see https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Talmud). Things naturally functioned a bit differently for the God-fearers (*theosebeis*), who did not adopt most Jewish practices; see Jaffee 1997, 131–32. Paul and later Christian authors (and, I would claim, the Quran as well) put forward the notion that Gentile believers have to obey the law in only a limited fashion, if at all, so the context is different from the proselytes to Judaism but somewhat similar to the God-fearers. It should also be noted that the idea of Abraham as an exemplar for the proselytes might already be present, or at least stem from, Jubilees (the original version of which was composed in the second century BCE). Jubilees 11–12 describes how Abraham stands up to his people and his father Terah and forsakes idolatry and adopts monotheism. He is, in a sense, a convert himself. See Fredriksen 2017, 105, and, in more detail, Nickelsburg 1998.

[18] It must be noted and emphasized that the recipients of Paul's letters were Christ-believing groups that were in majority Gentile. Polemics against the law have to be understood in this context: they were written with the Gentile audience in mind. Paul argued that the Gentile Christ-believers do not have to take up the law, but he nowhere says that Jewish Christ-believers (such as himself) should recant the law. While the issue is outside the scope of this article, it appears that Paul was reacting to opponents (anonymous other Christ-believers of Jewish background) who, so the hypothesis goes, invoked Abraham to claim that the (male) Gentiles should undergo circumcision. Paul rejected this idea and adduced a different Abrahamic exemplary aspect: that of faith. On Paul and the Gentiles, see also Fredriksen 2017, in particular 105–6, 148–66; 2018, 23–29.

connected with the issues of circumcision, law,[19] belief (that is, belief in Jesus as the resurrected Messiah), and eschatology.

The pertinent chapter in Galatians, chapter 3, is too long to cite here in its totality. I will quote here the most relevant verses, namely, 6–14:

> Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,"[20] so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the Gentiles [or: peoples, *ethnē*] shall be blessed in you."[21] For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.
>
> For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law."[22] Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for "The one who is righteous will live by faith."[23] But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, "Whoever does the works of the law will live by them."[24] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"[25]—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

In this rather convoluted passage of his letter, Paul presents Abraham as a believer[26] first, before he was law-bound. All believers in Jesus

263

---

[19] My usage of the concept of "law" in this article always also covers aspects that fall under "ethics" in modern parlance.

[20] A reference to Genesis 15:6. "Righteousness" is an important term for Paul in this letter. See Esler 1998, 141–77 for an analysis.

[21] Cf. Genesis 22:18.

[22] Cf. Deuteronomy 27:26.

[23] Cf. Habakkuk 2:4.

[24] Cf. Leviticus 18:5; Ezekekiel 20:11.

[25] Cf. Deuteronomy 21:22–23.

[26] The Greek word translated as "belief" in NRSV is *pistis*. Fredriksen (2017, 36) forcefully argues that this is a wrong rendering since *pistis* means first and foremost "steadfastness," "fidelity toward," or "conviction." However, since the exact contours of the Pauline usage of *pistis* are not crucial for the arguments of my article, I will simply reproduce the NRSV translation as is.

are children of Abraham, and he functions in particular as a medium through which the Gentiles can and will receive the attributes of faith and the promise of the Spirit, since in Jesus the blessing of Abraham is manifested to them as well.

Esler has analyzed the relevant Pauline passages from a social identity perspective, utilizing the concept of prototypicality.[27] I will cite his analysis both here regarding Galatians 3 and below when I discuss Romans 4. In his reading of Galatians, Esler (1998, 173) submits that Paul sees Abraham's righteousness and blessing as stemming from fidelity toward God rather than obedience to the law. This juxtaposes Abraham and the Gentile believers. According to Esler, this is "an excursion into social creativity, an attempt by a subordinate in-group to improve its actual social location *vis-à-vis* the dominant outgroup with respect to their respective access to scarce resources and status. Paul is trying to reverse the position of the two groups on the salient dimension of Abrahamic ancestry" (1998, 173–174).[28]

In Galatians 3 and Romans 4, Abraham and the issue of the law are linked. This is clear, for example, in Galatians 3:15–18. The question of the law in the Pauline corpus is too broad a topic to pursue here, but I simply note how the Abraham discourse is linked to the issue of the law in Galatians 3.[29] Based on Esler's (1998, 191–94) interpretation, Paul's argumentation goes as follows: the Abrahamic covenant, stemming from faith (or fidelity, *pistis*) and righteousness, is the first and primary covenant that humankind has made with God. This covenant is still in effect, notwithstanding the later Mosaic covenant, which included the notion of the law. The arrival of Christ does not then nullify the primordial covenant, which is not, opines Paul in Galatians, the Mosaic but the

---

[27] Esler 1998, 2003. For prototypicality in the New Testament, see also Esler and Piper 2006.

[28] In addition to Esler, Nikki, for example, has analyzed Galatians 3 and Romans 4 from a social identity perspective, comparing them with Philippians. According to her interpretation, in Galatians and Romans Paul strives to articulate a Gentile Christ-believing ingroup that possesses an Abrahamic lineage. These letters are past-oriented texts. See Nikki 2016.

[29] For a treatment of the law in Galatians, see Esler 1998, 178–204.

Abrahamic one. Rather, only the secondary layer (the Mosaic covenant and law) is rendered redundant (for the Gentiles at least; see Fredriksen 2017). Indeed, Abraham's and Christ's covenants are one and the same. In this connection (Gal 3:16), Paul introduces a scriptural reference and a striking interpretation of it:

> The promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed. It [the scripture] does not say, "and to his seeds," as concerning many but as concerning one, "and to his seed," which is Christ.[30]

Referring to Abraham's descendants as his seed is common in Genesis.[31] The word functions there as a collective noun (Esler 1998, 173). However, Paul's reading of these passages is brazen. According to him, the word "seed" does not apply to all of Abraham's children but to one, Jesus Christ. The Mosaic law was only a phase in the history of humankind. With Jesus, (at least some of) the believers can revert to the original, Abrahamic, covenant in which the law plays only a limited role.[32] This Pauline argument, moreover, reinterprets the conventional Judean notions of ethnicity. The ethnic makings of Israel—Abrahamic lineage, the law, purity, and dietary regulations—lose some of their significance or (in the case of Abraham) are projected to the totality of the believers, whatever their origins.[33]

Let us discuss Romans 4 now. In this passage, many of the same themes are present as in Galatians 3. Paul emphasizes that Abraham was a believer even before undergoing circumcision. Hence, he is the

265

---

[30] Here, the translation is adapted from Esler 1998, 192, and not from the NRSV.

[31] For example, Genesis 12:7, 13:15.

[32] But cf. Fredriksen 2017, 108–30: she powerfully argues for a much more complex Pauline understanding of the law—as also regards the Gentiles. Once again, it has to be underscored that Paul was writing to Gentile Christ-believers. Paul was of the opinion (*pace* some other apostles working with the Gentiles) that they do not have to take up the law. His comments do not (at least not necessarily) affect how the Jews (e.g., Paul himself) should behave toward the law. As Fredriksen argues, it is more than likely that the Jewish Christ-believers continued to be Torah-observant.

[33] Buell calls this an argument "where the identifying practices of a group are linked to a common ancestor" (2005, 46).

father of both the circumcised (Jews) and the uncircumcised (Gentiles). He is the father of all. Jewish Christ-believers were already Abraham's children. Now, the Gentiles are also his adopted sons.[34]

In the community of Galatia, Paul faced opponents that demanded that the (male) Gentiles undergo circumcision and (both men and women) take up the Mosaic law (Esler 1998, 145). Paul's reply to these demands is that the Gentile believers are not bound by these requirements, since through faith in Christ they have already gained a place among the descendants of Abraham. What matters in the Abrahamic prototype is not circumcision but faith and obedience. In the letter to the Galatians, the law received mostly negative undertones as a prison of the past. Paul's opponents only possess a fleshly lineage to Abraham, whereas the social group that Paul champions are Abraham's true children through faith (Nikki 2016, 247). True, Paul says the Gentiles were idol worshippers before the coming of Jesus, but now they (or some of them) are true believers (Nikki 2016, 249).

In Romans, Paul's tone is much more conciliatory, and this letter contains many positive statements about the law. He is not reacting to a threat posed by some opponents that claimed that the Gentiles too are bound by the law. The law and circumcision are not negative attributes in Romans, but something that the Jewish believers can continue to practice,[35] while the Gentile believers are not bound by them. The existing ethnic identities are reinterpreted as accepted subidentities in the community of the believers (Nikki 2016, 250). Abraham's circumcision is mentioned as a somewhat positive symbol, but this is preceded by his righteousness (Rom 4:12; Nikki 2016, 250–51), which is an identity marker available to all peoples. Whereas Galatians is not very interested

---

[34] Hodge 2007, 26–36, 43–66; Fredriksen 2017, 106, 148–51.

[35] For example, Romans 3:1–4: "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much, in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!" And 3:31: "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law."

in the future, Romans pays special attention to eschatological expectations (Nikki 2016, 251).

The Gospel of John

Abraham as a means for the inclusion of the Gentile believers is most marked in the letters of Paul among the New Testament texts. Nonetheless, the theme pops up in other parts of the canon as well, in particular John 8 and Hebrews 11. I will only discuss the former case. Here, I am guided by Raimo Hakola (2005, 2015), who has interpreted the Gospel of John from the point of view of social identity.

The Gospel of John is a much later text than Romans and Galatians. The Gospel of John contains interesting and varying identity discourses as well as the most marked criticism of the Jews among the canonical Gospels. However, it would be wrong to say that the text articulates a clear, distinct Christian identity that is distinct from Judaism. The community in which the Gospel of John and other Johannine texts were produced and read had *begun* to view themselves as different from the Jews, but, in the context of the first- and second-century eastern Mediterranean, "it is conceivable that the boundary between those Jews who came to believe in Jesus and other Jews remained open and that it was possible for Jesus's followers to interact with synagogue communities and their members in various ways" (Hakola 2015, 30).

John 8:30–59 presents a narrative in which Jesus has a dispute about the possession of the Abrahamic lineage with a group of Jews. The passage plays with the word "father," which refers to both Abraham and God. In the beginning of the passage (verses 30 and 31), the Jews are presented as believers in Jesus, and Jesus first accepts that the Jews of the narrative are descendants of Abraham,[36] but their portrayal becomes increasingly grim as the story proceeds. To quote verses 39b–44:

> Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.

---

[36] This is an interesting facet in the narrative: these Jews are actually said to be Jesus-believers. For an analysis of the mixed boundaries, see Hakola 2015, 120–24.

267

You are indeed doing what your father does." They said to him, "We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

As the dialogue evolves, Jesus reveals who the real father of the group of Jews is: the devil himself. The Jews argue that they are Abraham's and God's children,[37] but the Johannine Jesus rejects both claims (Hakola 2015, 118–20). While John 8 does not really depict Abraham as a proto-type for Gentile believers, it is significant that the passage tries to appropriate him from the Jews. Implicitly, Abraham is the property of another group: those Jesus-believers who did not self-identify as Judean/Jewish.

Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew

Moving outside the New Testament canon, the Christian texts of late antiquity (roughly, 150–750 CE) sometimes adduce Abraham as a prototypical Gentile believer. In what follows, I discuss some of these examples.[38]

Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* was written around 160 CE in Greek. Justin was born around 100 in Flavia Neapolis, Judea, and died around 165 in Rome as a martyr. The work *Dialogue with*

---

[37] This has some interesting Quranic parallels, in particular Quran 5:18: "The Jews and the Christians say, 'We are the children of God and His beloved ones.' Say, 'Then why does He punish you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His creation: He forgives whoever He will and punishes whoever He will. Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to Him: all journeys lead to Him.'"

[38] In addition to the texts that I discuss in this article, one could adduce the writings of Prosper (fourth-century Gaul). Prosper made ample use of the Pauline conceptualization of Abraham; see Casiday 2011. However, since Prosper is a very unlikely candidate for a Quranic intertext (given the geographical distance), I will not discuss his work here.

Trypho the Jew utilizes the literary convention of a dialogue, in this case between Justin and a fictional Jew called Trypho. As Buell has shown, the discourse of ethnic reasoning was important to Justin, who is torn between presenting Christianity as universal, on the one hand, and, on the other, the original and true Israel, with a lineage going back to Abraham. The descriptions of Christians in the text are multifaceted and fluid, though Justin also attempts to ascribe fixity to the group.[39]

The Pauline notion of Abraham as a father of (also and perhaps primarily) Gentile believers is key for Justin, who claims the following lineage for the Christians:

> We, who have been led to God through this crucified Christ are the true spiritual Israel, and the descendants [or: the nation] (*genos*) of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham who, though uncircumcised, was approved and blessed by God because of his faith and was called the father of many *ethnē* [nations or Gentiles].[40]

The remark about Abraham as faithful before he was circumcised is of note here. Abraham is a paragon of a Gentile (in the sense: not required to follow the law) believer, whose lineage the Christians could participate in. Not only that, but they supersede the Jews, according to Justin. Later in the text, Justin continues this Abrahamic connection:

> For this [the nation of Christians] is the *ethnos* that God long since undertook to give Abraham, and promised to make him the father of many peoples (*polloi ethnē*), not saying father of Arabs or Egyptians or Idumaeans. For he also became the father of Ishmael, a great *ethnos*, and of Esau, and there are still a great number of Ammonites.
>
> And we shall inherit the holy land together with Abraham, receiving our inheritance for a boundless eternity, being children of Abraham because we have similar faith with him.[41]

Here, Justin emphasizes the purported universality of the Christian group, which, in theory at least, spanned different nations and

---

[39] Buell (2005, 94–115) discusses Justin's text from the point of view of ethnicity.

[40] *Dialogue* 11.5, trans. Buell 2005, 99. For the Greek text, see Marcovich 1997.

[41] *Dialogue* 119.4–5, trans. Buell 2005, 104–5.

269

ethnicities. These ethnic units formed the rainbow nation of Christians, Justin opined (Buell 2005, 105). Abraham cannot be claimed by a single entity, whether Arabians,[42] Egyptians, or Jews. In fact, Christians are the true spiritual descendants of Abraham (and this lineage, though spiritual, becomes flesh and blood through the notion of Abraham as the father of many peoples). The law (dietary or purity requirements and so on) is not imposed on Abraham's children, since he was already a believer when uncircumcised.[43]

Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

Eusebius (d. c. 340), the bishop of Caesarea Maritima (on the coast of the Mediterranean in the province of Syria Palaestina), was the author of the important *Ecclesiastical History*, a history from a Christian point of view written in Greek. It was translated into, and survives in, a number of languages, including Syriac (the importance of Syriac subtexts to the Quran is discussed in the next section).

The work includes an important passage on Abraham. Eusebius appears to be much affected by the Pauline interpretation of Abraham as a pious believer living before the Mosaic law and of Jesus (and, hence, Christians) as Abraham's true *sperma*. Not only that, but Abraham was a believer in Jesus (as the Logos of God):

> [It] must be clearly held that the announcement to all Gentiles [or peoples, *ethnē*], recently made through the teaching of Christ, is the very first and most ancient and antique discovery of true religion of Abraham and those lovers of God who followed him … It was by faith towards the Logos of God, the Christ who had appeared to him [Abraham], that he was justified, and gave up the superstition of his father, and his former erroneous life, and confessed the God who is over all to be one; and Him he served by virtuous deeds, not by the worship of the law of Moses, who came later … it is only among Christians throughout the whole world that the manner of religion which was Abraham's can actually be found in practice.[44]

---

[42] The Abrahamic (and Ishmaelite) connection to Arabians is discussed below.

[43] Circumcision is an issue that Justin comes back to time and again; see Buell 2005, 108–9.

[44] Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 1.4.10–14. On this passage, see also Reynolds 2010, 80.

270

This is a very notable passage by Eusebius, which underscores the figure of Abraham as a pre-Mosaic monotheist believer. The importance of Abraham and Jesus for the Gentiles is mentioned (if they in particular are who Eusebius meant by *ethnē*). Christianity is, according to Eusebius, the true way of Abraham, which in its original form did not include observance of the law. This passage shows that this interpretation of Abraham was alive and well in the late antique Near East. It was taken up and continued by the Quran.

The Syriac Bible Translations

The Syriac translation of the Bible is an important, perhaps the most important, piece of the puzzle. This is because it is generally conceived that the Bible in Syriac, rather than in any other language, was the best-known version of the scripture among Christians (and perhaps some non-Christians as well) in the Near East, including Arabia.[45] The Bible was not translated into Arabic or South Arabian languages before Islam (though oral, ad hoc, translations might have taken place in communal worship and other contexts; Griffith 2013). It is in particular in its Syriac, and perhaps also in some contexts Ethiopic,[46] translations that the Bible circulated and was known in and around Arabia. What is more, many non-canonical and exegetical Syriac texts seem to function as Quranic subtexts (Reynolds 2018).

There exist different versions of the Syriac Bible rendering. The Old Syriac Gospels are the oldest: manuscripts date from the fourth century CE; there are two different versions, known as the Syriac Sinaiticus and Curetonius. But, as the concept "Old Syriac Gospels" indicates, only the four Gospels are included. One should also note the Diatessaron, a Syriac Gospel harmonization that was produced perhaps in the second century but which does not survive in its original. More expansive than these, however, was the Peshitta, a Syriac translation of the whole Bible dated to the fourth–sixth centuries. There is also the Harklean version

---

[45] The Syriac connection has been explored in many studies in recent decades. See, e.g., El-Badawi 2009, 2014; Reynolds 2010; Zellentin 2013; Reynolds 2018.

[46] Dost 2017 emphasizes the importance of Ethiopic translations of canonical and non-canonical books as Quranic intertexts.

translated by Thomas of Harqel in the early seventh century (El-Badawi 2009, 5–6).

It is worth surveying some relevant passages in the Syriac Bible translations. It will be noted that the Syriac Bible, while being the most likely candidate for the dissemination of biblical Abraham discourse into Arabia, also evinces an important concept that is further elaborated in the Quran: that of *ḥanpā* (becoming *ḥanīf* in Arabic). While in Syriac the word *ḥanpā* has mostly negative meanings (and is not directly connected with Abraham), in the Quran *ḥanīf* is a word that appears categorically in positive contexts and is, for the most part, related to Abraham.[47]

The New Testament passages concerning Gentileness in the Syriac Bible translations have been analyzed in an article by François de Blois (2002), to which what follows is heavily indebted. The words used to refer to the Gentiles are *ḥanpē*, *ʿammē*, and *armāyē*. As mentioned below in some detail, the first two are reflected in the Quranic vocabulary.

The Syriac *ḥanpā* (singular of *ḥanpē*) has cognates and related words in many Semitic languages. The basic meaning of the verbal root in many forms of Aramaic is "to deceive." The Hebrew *ḥanēf* denotes "godless; hypocrite" or the like, while Mandaic *ḥʾnypyʾ* is used to refer to "false gods." A proto-Semitic meaning of "crooked," which is retained in the Arabic *aḥnaf*, is suggested for the root by de Blois (2002, 18–19).

In the Syriac Bible translations, the Greek word *ethnē* is rendered *ḥanpē* or *ʿammē*, whereas the word "Hellenes" becomes *ʿammē* or *armāyē* (literally, "Arameans"). De Blois notes that, in Syriac, the words *ʿammē* or *armāyē* are often used when the meaning of the text is neutral or positive (the Gentiles among the Jesus group). The word *ḥanpē*

---

[47]　In later stages of Arabic, the word *ḥanīf* often functions as a synonym for Muslims or pre-Muhammadan monotheist believers who are treated as quasi-Muslims. However, the word *ḥanīf* is sometimes used to denote non-Muslims or pagans as well. For example, the historian al-Yaʿqūbī (fl. the late ninth century) uses the plural *ḥunafāʾ* to refer to pagans such as the Philistines; see al-Yaʿqūbī 1883, I, 51. It could be mentioned that in post-Islamic Christian Syriac texts the Muslims are often called *ḥanpē* (which functions, as earlier in Syriac, in an overwhelmingly derogatory sense) (Penn 2015, 56–57). See also Mattila 2022.

mostly occurs in a negative sense for outsiders: those Gentiles who do not accept Jesus (de Blois 2002, 21). Hence, for instance, when Paul talks about the Judean and Gentile Jesus-believers in Galatians 3 (see the quotation above), the latter are referred to in the Peshitta with the word ʿ*ammē*.[48] But the division is not clear-cut in the Syriac Bible translations, and there are some interesting instances where *ḥanpā*/*ḥanpē* are used for ingroup members (or potential ones at least). Acts 18:4 describes Paul preaching in Corinth to both the Jews and Gentiles; this is rendered in the Peshitta as *l-īhūdāyē wa-l-ḥanpē*. In the Harklean version of Romans 1:16 ("For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile"), the word used for "the Gentile" is *ḥanpā* (de Blois 2002, 21–22).

I have noted that the Syriac translations of the Bible often use ʿ*ammē* as a word denoting Gentiles, including in the positive sense. The word *ḥanpē* is mostly negative, denoting the outgroup, but in some instances also a part of the ingroup (the Gentile Christ-believers). However, as far as I have been able to ascertain, in no instance of the Pauline discourse where the figure of Abraham is mentioned does the word *ḥanpē* appear. These are strictly ʿ*ammē* passages. However, in an original Quranic innovation, the (positive) word *ḥanīf* is intimately connected with Abraham, whereas Muhammad receives the attribute *ummī*. The Quran continues and echoes the late antique discussion and debate on ethnicity and Abraham but does it in novel and fascinating ways.[49]

Conclusions on the Christian Texts

The above survey has shown that some Christian texts from antiquity and late antiquity, written in various languages in the Near East, suggest that the Gentile believers can become part of the offspring of Abraham through their belief in Jesus. This is primarily a Pauline innovation but was carried on by some late antique writers (e.g., Prosper,

---

[48] See the Peshitta text at https://www.syriacbible.nl/galatians/3.htm. I thank Anna-Liisa Rafael for navigating the passage with me.

[49] For a suggested interpretation of the process by which the (mostly negative) *ḥanpē* became the (positive) *ḥanīf*, see the Conclusion.

Eusebius). According to Paul, through the seed of Abraham, Jesus, the Christ-believers of any ethnicity have received the attributes of faith and righteousness and become part of Israel.

In what follows, I will look into the Quran and argue that it, in effect, echoes this Christian Abraham/Gentile discourse. In the Quranic communication, the word "Gentile" (*ummī* or *ḥanīf* in Arabic) refers not only to non-Jews but also to non-Christians. This is naturally what one expects: the late antique Christians did not see themselves as Gentiles. The former ethnic subcategories of Jews and Gentiles among the Jesus-believers were of no importance to the majority of Christians, though this distinction might have been maintained among the so-called "Jewish Christian" groups in particular.

The Quran

Abraham and Muhammad as Gentile Prophets

Next, we will turn to the scripture of Islam, the Quran, consisting of revelations of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632 CE) collected into a single volume in all likelihood rather soon after his death (probably in the 650s).[50] In the text, both Abraham and Muhammad are called Gentile believers and prophets. For Muhammad, the word that was used is *ummī*, while Abraham received the attribute *ḥanīf*.[51] The Quranic social characterizations are rather multifaceted and sometimes contradictory. For instance, the Jews and Christians sometimes receive very positive portrayals and some of them are treated as members of the believer

---

[50] Sinai 2014; Déroche 2021. Recently, Stephen Shoemaker (2022) has challenged the consensus with a suggestion that the Quran contains much post-Muhammadan material (and perhaps pre-Muhammadan as well). However, his argument is based on a premise (which I disagree with) that there were (next to) no Christians in Mecca and Medina or their vicinity, so Quranic notions and narratives of Christian origins have to be post-Muhammadan. For a criticism of Shoemaker's views, see Lindstedt 2024, 14–22.

[51] For a lucid interpretation of Abraham as the Gentile monotheist in the Quran, see Reynolds 2010, 71–87.

group, while other verses castigate them and emphasize that only a small number of them are believers (Donner 2002–2003).

In the fully fledged, ninth-century CE and later, Islamic exegesis (*tafsīr*) of the Quran, the word *ummī* is understood as meaning "illiterate," while the attribute *ḥanīf*, in particular connected with Abraham, is deemed to mean something like "proto-monotheist; true believer."[52] The medieval Muslim scholars usually thought it derived from the Arabic verb *ḥanafa*, "to turn; to bend; to incline," understood to refer to the fact that Abraham turned away from idolatry and toward monotheism.[53] But modern scholars, operating with the methods of comparative linguistics and Semitic Studies, have suggested that the Prophet Muhammad and his contemporaries in all likelihood understood these words differently. The next two paragraphs explore the etymologies of the two words.

The word *ummī* is naturally derived from the Arabic word *umma*, which means "people, ethnos, community." However, in Quranic Arabic in particular the word *umma* appears to be similar in usage to the Hebrew *gōy* and ʿ*ammīm* and Greek *ethnos*, all of which refer not only to "people" but also to "Gentile people" (the plurals have more or less the same meaning as the singulars). Moreover, in Syriac the word ʿ*ammē* signifies "(Gentile) nations" (a borrowing from the Hebrew ʿ*ammīm*; de Blois 2002, 21). Looking at cognates for the Arabic word *umma* (root ʾ*-m-m*), Hebrew *ummōt hā-ʿōlām* means "the peoples of the world,"[54] while Syriac has *ūmtho* for "nation, people" (Payne Smith 1903, 6).[55]

It is unclear whether the Arabic *umma* is, etymologically speaking, a borrowing from a form of Aramaic to Arabic or whether, in late

---

[52] Goudarzi (2023) argues that the word *ḥanīf* denotes "a cultic worshipper" in Quranic Arabic. My interpretation differs from Goudarzi's understanding, though I deem his study well-argued and intriguing.

[53] These semantic developments are detailed in Shaddel 2016.

[54] Josef Horovitz (1926, 51) suggested that Arabic *ummī* derives from the Hebrew *ummōt hā-ʿōlām*.

[55] The meaning "Gentiles" is not given by Jessie Payne Smith (1903), however, and does not appear to be operative in Syriac.

antiquity, the Syriac ʿammē (or perhaps a cognate in another form of Aramaic) influenced the usage of the Arabic *umma* to acquire meanings of Gentileness. In any case, in the Quran Gentiles are mostly referred to with the word *ummī*, plural *ummiyyūn*. In the Quran, *ummī* refers to "one coming from the community, ethnos; a Gentile."[56] While the words *ummī*/*ummiyyūn* occur six times in the Quran, all with the meaning "Gentile(s)," I would suggest the word *umma* is more ambivalent, sometimes denoting the Gentile people, sometimes simply an ethnic group in general (an ambivalence that is present in the Greek *éthnos* and its equivalents in Hebrew and Aramaic too).[57] However, since the word is used to designate Muhammad's community (though not exclusively—other groups are also referred to with this word) and since Muhammad and many of his followers identified as "Gentile believers," the meaning "Gentile people" might be implicit in some verses. One example is Quran 3:110: "You are the best *umma* singled out for the people (*ukhkrijat li-l-nās*): you order what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God. If the People of the Book also believed, it would be better for them. For although some of them do believe, most of them are transgressors." In this verse, the word *umma* might perhaps be translated as "community of Gentiles," since they are here contrasted with the People of the Book.[58] Moreover, Quran 43:23 addresses the disbelievers, noting: "Whenever We [God] sent a messenger before you [the Prophet] to warn a township, those corrupted by wealth said, 'We saw our fathers ʿalā umma; we are only following in their footsteps.'"[59] Here, the phrase ʿalā umma is somewhat difficult, but appears to mean that the disbelievers are quoted as saying: "We saw our fathers to be

---

[56] The formulation by Gabriel Reynolds (2018, 112) is rather apt. He interprets *ummiyyūn* as meaning "'gentiles' in the sense of those people to whom God has not yet given part of the revelation." But, as I argue in this article, the Gentile identity that the Quran articulates is not limited to revelation.

[57] The word *umma* appears altogether fifty-one times in the Quran (Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2008, 47).

[58] But this sense of *umma* is not functional in many other occurrences. In Quran 2:128, it refers to the Israelites, for instance. Moreover, verse 2:213 reminisces about a primordial state of people, when they were all one *umma*.

[59] Here, I modify Abdel Haleem's (2010) translation somewhat.

276

Gentiles" or "to follow the Gentile way." The Quran asserts that the disbelievers use this reply to justify their disbelief, though the Quran itself claims that it is possible to combine being a Gentile and a believer.

The Arabic word *ḥanīf* is, quite often in modern scholarship, assumed to derive from the Syriac *ḥanpā*.[60] While in the extant Syriac texts this word refers to Gentiles mostly in a negative sense—non-Jewish but also non-Jesus-believer—in Arabic the usage is positive—a true believer, albeit of Gentile background. The word *ḥanīf* appears ten times in the Quran, while its plural *ḥunafāʾ* appears twice (Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2008, 239).

It is unclear why the Prophet Muhammad is associated with the term *ummī* (and not *ḥanīf*, except in verse 10:105) while Abraham is called *ḥanīf* and never *ummī*. Since the words are rather rare in the Quran, this division might be simply happenstance. In any case, the Prophet's audience and followers (or a part of them) are called both *ummiyyūn* and *ḥunafāʾ* (plurals of the words under discussion).[61] Here, it suffices to refer to some of the verses calling Abraham and Muhammad Gentiles. In the following sections, I will deal at length with the way the terms *ummī* and *ḥanīf* are tied to notions of religion and ethnicity, since the latter in particular appears quite often in connection with words such as *dīn* and *milla*, which are conventionally translated as "religion."

As stated above, it is Abraham in particular who receives the attribute *ḥanīf* in the Quran. Verses 3:67–68 state: "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was a devoted Gentile (*kāna ḥanīfan musliman*), not an associator, and the people who are closest to him are those who follow him: this Prophet and those who believe. God is close to the believers." In these verses, Abraham is contrasted with both Jews and Christians as well as the *mushrikūn*, "those who associate other beings

277

---

[60] Reynolds 2010, 80–87; Azaiez et al. 2016, 121; Reynolds 2018, 430; Sinai 2023, 242. Interestingly, some premodern Arabic authors also suggested a derivation from Syriac (see de Blois 2002, 20). François de Blois (2002) himself equates the Arabic *ḥanīf* with Greek *ethnikos*, though it seems to me that the word *ummī* is rather a calque on *ethnikos*.

[61] In the Appendix, I list all the instances from the Quran where the words *ummī*, *ummiyyūn*, *ḥanīf*, and *ḥunafāʾ* appear.

to God." Notably, verse 68 links Abraham explicitly with Muhammad ("this Prophet") and his community of believers.

Indeed, verses 3:95–97 note that the present-day believers should emulate Abraham the *ḥanīf*: "[Prophet], say, 'God speaks the truth, so follow [plural] the *milla* of Abraham *ḥanīfan*;[62] he was not an associator.' The first House [of worship] to be established for people was the one at Mecca. It is a blessed place; a source of guidance for all people; there are clear signs in it; it is the place where Abraham stood to pray; whoever enters it is safe." The Abrahamic prototypicality is not linked simply with the outlook of Muhammad's community as (for the most part) Gentiles but also adduced in connection with the sanctuary at Mecca, where Abraham once stood.[63]

The Abrahamic lineage of the present-day believers, that is, the followers of Muhammad, is cemented in these key verses. In Quran 2:127–129, Abraham and Ishmael are depicted as laying the foundations of "the sanctuary," which is not identified but is conventionally interpreted to refer to the Kaaba. At the same time, they address God, praying that the Lord will "make our descendants (*dhurriyyatinā*)[64] into a community (*umma*) devoted to You" and "make a messenger of their own rise up from among them." Although Muhammad is not named, it seems that the identification is clear.

---

[62] Here, the meaning could be understood in two ways: "follow the *milla* of Abraham as Gentiles" or "follow the *milla* of Abraham [who was] a Gentile." The syntax is difficult, since the imperative "follow" is in the plural, while the word *ḥanīfan* is singular. The word *milla* will be discussed in the next section.

[63] I am naturally far from being the first to suggest that the Abrahamic prototype is important for Quranic discourse. For instance, Neuwirth has noted: "At the same time that the biblical Abraham is appropriated as a prototype of the new believers, *al-muslimūn*, (Q 2:135–136), Abraham is installed as the founder of the fundamental rites of the Arabian pilgrimage that culminate with the slaughter of a sacrificial animal" (2009, 502).

[64] Though, as far as I know, none of the dictionaries of Classical Arabic gloss *dhurriyya* as "seed," it should be noted that the basic meaning of the verbal root *dh-r-ʾ* is "to create; to multiply" (al-Zabīdī 1975–2001, I, 233), which is not particularly far from the semantic field of the Greek *sperma*.

Quran 98:4–5 polemicizes against the Jews and Christians, saying that they would be better off if they followed God's *dīn* ("law") as *ḥunafāʾ*, Gentiles: "[Yet] those who were given the Scripture [before] became divided only after they were sent [such] clear evidence though all they are ordered to do is worship God, sincerely devoting the *dīn* to Him as *ḥunafāʾ*, keep up the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, for that is the true *dīn*." This polemical discourse appears to be connected with other Quranic passages, such as Quran 2:113[65] and 3:65,[66] where it is said that Jews and Christians argue with each other about, for example, who owns Abraham rather than simply being obedient to, and believing in, God. The Quran claims that Jews and Christians are more interested in group affiliations and designations than in being pious and worshipping God. Gentiles, *ḥunafāʾ*, are free of this historical baggage, according to the Quran.

This contrasting of the Jews and Christians (often grouped together as "the People of the Book" in the Quran) with the Gentiles is apparent in other verses as well. Verse 3:75 asserts: "There are People of the Book who, if you [Prophet] entrust them with a heap of gold, will return it to you intact, but there are others of them who, if you entrust them with a single dinar, will not return it to you unless you keep standing over them, because they say, 'We are under no obligation towards the *ummiyyūn*.' They tell a lie against God and they know it." Here, the Gentileness of (some of) the Prophet's followers is communicated with the word *ummiyyūn*. Quran 62:1–2 can be taken as an implicit reference to Muhammad—to his own Gentile background and that of many of his followers: "Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies God, the Controller, the Holy One, the Almighty, the Wise. It is He who raised a messenger, among the *ummiyyūn*, to recite His revelations to them, to make them grow spiritually and teach them the Scripture

279

---

[65] "The Jews say, 'The Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on,' and the Christians say, 'The Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on,' though they both read the Scripture, and those who have no knowledge say the same; God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences."

[66] "People of the Book, why do you argue about Abraham when the Torah and the Gospels were not revealed until after his time? Do you not understand?"

and wisdom—before that they were clearly astray." In verses 7:155–158, Moses is described as praying to God, who responds (verse 157) by declaring that He will send as a messenger "the *ummī* Prophet they find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel."

The words *ummī* and *ummiyyūn* function, for the most part, in a positive sense. However, in one instance (Quran 2:78) the reference is to disbelievers among the Gentiles: "Some of them [the disbelievers] are *ummiyyūn*, and know the Scripture only through wishful think-ing. They rely on guesswork."[67] Clearly, the Quranic conceptualization of Gentile ethnicity is, in itself, not automatically and categorically af-firmative. There are believers and disbelievers in different groups, be they Jews, Christians, or Gentiles (the main ethnicities in the Quranic communication).

In this section, I have argued that the Quran refers to the Prophet Muhammad's (and many of his followers') ethnic origins as being Gentile, though he and they are believers. The Arabic words *ummī* (plural *ummiyyūn*) and *ḥanīf* (plural *ḥunafāʾ*) can ultimately be traced to another Semitic language, Syriac in the case of *ḥanīf* and probably some form of Aramaic (but not necessarily Syriac) in the case of *ummī*. Since the words do not appear in the North Arabian epigraphic record, the exact time of borrowing cannot be established, and it could have taken place centuries before the Prophet Muhammad. The fact that the word *ḥanīf* operates with an Arabic broken plural *ḥunafāʾ* could indi-

---

67 Reynolds (2018, 54) understands this verse differently. According to him, the verse "seems to be accusing certain Jews (the larger context of this Sura involves the Israelites and their sins) of not knowing the word of God and therefore being *ummī*. This polemic is close to that of several New Testament passages (Mat 15:7–9; Mar 7:1–9; Luk 11:39–42)." But this reading is problematic in my opinion. *Surah* 2 (the longest one in the whole Quran) includes a myriad of topics, not just the Israelites and their misdeeds. It is perfectly possible to understand Quran 2:72–82 as referring to not (at least only) the Jews but discussing the disbelievers more generally. It should be noted, in any case, that the Quran does not categorize all Jews as disbelievers but rather a part of them; see Lindstedt 2021, 2024, 145–272.

cate that at least the word *ḥanīf* was already well known and widely used among Arabic-speaking communities.[68]

Occurrences of the word *ḥanīf* are somewhat rare in pre-Islamic poetry, but two cases from the poems attributed to the Medinese Abū Qays ibn al-Aslat should be discussed in this connection.[69] They support the idea that *ḥanīf* means a non-Jew and non-Christian, that is, a Gentile. The poems of Abū Qays do not survive in a medieval collection of his poems but have been, rather, collected by their modern editor, Ḥasan Muḥammad Bājūda. Hence, the authenticity of the poems cannot be taken for certain. However, they are interesting even if they were forgeries by later Muslim scholars, because in that case they would provide more evidence that the word *ḥanīf* was still understood by some authors in early Islamic times to denote a Gentile, rather than a Muslim or proto-Muslim, since according to the Islamic tradition Abū Qays did not convert to Islam. Below, I quote the relevant verses of these two poems:[70]

281
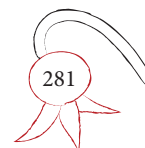
> And remember the account you must render, for God is the best
>   reckoner.
> The Lord of the people has chosen a law [for each group].
> So let none guard you but the Lord of heaven,
> and uphold for us the Gentile law (*aqīmū lanā dīnan ḥanīfan*).
> *

---

[68] Though, taking an analogue from modern Arabic dialects, this is not necessarily the case. Loanwords often start to function with a broken plural very soon after their borrowing. In the pre-Islamic Arabic poetic corpus, the word seems to indicate "Gentile" (de Blois 2002, 19).

[69] The first example is also discussed by Goudarzi (2023, 90), who interprets them as supporting his notion that *ḥanīf* means a "cultic worshipper." But this does not seem very plausible in this poem or in other instances adduced by Goudarzi, since they all contrast *ḥanīf*s to Jews and Christians. For other poems, see Sinai 2023, 241–42. He suggests that the word *ḥanīf* means "hermit, ascetic," in some of the early poems.

[70] Abū Qays ibn al-Aslat n.d., 68, verses 21–23; 87–88, verses 2–6; I adopt the translation of Guillaume (1955, 129, 201) with some changes. On the poem, see also Sinai 2023, 240.

Lord of humankind, if we have erred
Guide us to the good path (*maʿrūf al-sabīl*).
Were it not (*law lā*)[71] for our Lord we should be Jews,
But the law of Jews is not suitable [for us].
Were it not for our Lord we should be Christians
Along with the monks of Galilee.
But when we were created, we were created
Gentiles, our law distinct from other people (*ḥanīfan dīnunā ʿan kulli jīl*):
We bring the sacrificial camels walking in fetters
Covered with cloths but their shoulders bare.

In both poems—regardless of whether the verses are authentic vestiges from the pre-Islamic era or whether they are Islamic-era forgeries—the word *ḥanīf* can easily be translated as "Gentile." In the latter example, it is the only possible translation, since being a *ḥanīf* is contrasted to being a Jew or Christian. The end of the poem ("our law distinct from other people: / We bring the sacrficial camels walking in fetters / Covered with cloths but their shoulders bare") seems to refer to the idea that the Gentiles have their own law: they can, in contrast to Jews and Christians, perform animal sacrifices, for instance (on this, see more below).

Religion or Law: *Dīn* and *Milla*

Probing the Quran's understanding of ethnicity also entails investigating the words that are used in the context of the Quranic verses having to do with ethnic reasoning. Two Arabic words in particular are significant in this respect: *dīn* and *milla*. Both words are directly connected with Abraham too (Q. 6:161). In this section, I will trace how the Quran

---

[71] The editor notes that, in some attestations of this poem, this verse and the following (about Christians) begins *law shā* instead. The meaning then becomes "if God so willed, we would be Jews/Christians"; see Abū Qays ibn al-Aslat n.d., 87, nn. 4–5.

communicates these concepts. At first glance, the conceptual conundrums regarding ethnicity and religiousness that have been discussed in this article so far do not seem to apply to the study of the Quran or early Islam. There is, after all, much of a consensus that Islam formed a *religious* affiliation with rituals and a systematized structure of beliefs to worship God. Nowadays, Islam is thought to be a religion free of ethnic constraints, a religion that anyone willing can convert to, whatever her or his racial, ethnic, or cultural identifications happen to be. Moreover, there seems to be an Arabic word, already present in the Quran, namely *dīn*, which is customarily understood and translated into English as "religion."[72]

However, looking closer at the Quranic text, this becomes problematic. I will argue in what follows that questions of ethnicity and lineage are very relevant indeed in how the Quran addresses and articulates social categorizations. What is more, it is not quite clear if the word *dīn* should be translated as "religion" in most occurrences in the Quran— or at all in Quranic Arabic.[73]

To begin with, it should be noted that according to most scholars the Quranic Arabic *dīn* merges two etymologically different words. According to this view, the Quranic *dīn* fuses both a Semitic word denoting "judgment" and the Middle Persian *dēn*, which is usually translated as "religion."[74] However, a detailed study of the Middle Persian *dēn* would be needed to ascertain the semantic field and usages of the word. And, as I argue below, it is the meanings of "judgment" and "law" that dominate (perhaps exclusively so) in the Quranic *dīn* (*pace* Sinai 2023, 293–94).

---

[72] As Rushain Abbasi (2021) shows in great detail, in Classical Arabic the word *dīn* indeed acquires the sense of "religion."

[73] On *dīn* and *islām*, see also the interpretations put forward in Smith 1975; Cantwell-Smith 1991; Esack 1997, 126–34.

[74] For example, the Syriac *dīnā* denotes "judgment" (Reynolds 2018, 894; Sinai 2023, 292–93). For a detailed study discussing these words and issues related to them, see Donner 2018a. As regards the Persian derivation, see Abbasi 2021, 20–23.

The word *dīn* appears ninety-two times in the Quran (Kassis 1983, 382–83). Of these, thirteen times it occurs in the word pair *yawm al-dīn*, "judgment day."[75] In this expression, the word *dīn* translates effortlessly as "judgment." Translating the phrase as "the day of *religion*" would simply be nonsensical and wrong, since the context is the eschatological events that will happen on that day. In some other instances as well, we can see from the context that the meaning is "law" or "judgment" rather than "religion." In Quran 12:76, the words *dīn al-malik* quite clearly mean "the king's law." Moreover, verse 51:6 proclaims that "the judgment will come (*inna al-dīn la-wāqiʿ*)."[76]

In the rest of the cases—seventy-six in total according to my calculation—the word *dīn* is somewhat ambiguous in meaning. It could mean "law; judgment," but, as is commonly understood, it could mean "religion" as well. Medieval Arabic lexicographers adduce a further meaning for the word *dīn*, "habit, custom,"[77] which would also be appropriate in many of the Quranic contexts.

One of the notable aspects of this term's usage is that several verses state that *al-dīn* belongs to God or is God's.[78] Moreover, the disbelievers try to prevent the believers from following this *dīn* by fighting them.[79] Verse 98:5 explains that the true *dīn* consists of worshipping God alone, keeping up the prayer, and paying the alms. A crucial part of *al-dīn* is obedience (*al-islām*).[80] These two words often go together

---

[75] Verses 1:4, 15:35, 26:82, 37:20, 38:78, 51:12, 56:56, 70:26, 74:46, 82:15, 82:17, 82:18, 83:11.

[76] Similarly, in the eschatological context of verse 24:25 the word means "judgment" or perhaps "due recompense." Abdel Haleem (2010) translates: "On that Day, God will pay them their just due in full—and they will realize that God is the Truth that makes everything clear."

[77] See Lane 1863–1893, s.v., giving for instance the following meanings in this connection: "custom," "habit," "business," "a way, course, mode, or manner, of acting, or conduct."

[78] For example, Quran 2:193, 3:19, 3:83. The lexicographers state that *al-dīn lillāh* can be understood as "*obedience* is to God."

[79] Quran 2:193, 2:217.

[80] Quran 3:19, 3:85, 4:125, etc. I would understand the phrase *inna al-dīn ʿinda allāh al-islām* in 3:19 and elsewhere as "the true obedience in the sight of God

in the Quranic discourse. Furthermore, the word *ḥanīf* is often used to explain how the correct *dīn* should be pursued.[81] As mentioned above, I agree with the modern scholarly efforts to connect *ḥanīf* etymologically with the Syriac *ḥanpā*, meaning "Gentile." What the Quran articulates, then, is a distinct sense of "Gentile believerness" and obedience to the law. People like the Prophet and his followers, many of them coming from a Gentile background, could be believers despite their ethnicity.

There are quite a few instances where the word *dīn* is usually understood to convey the sense of a reified, bounded religious group, but this is unlikely in my opinion. One occurrence of such a use is verse 6:159, which states: "As for those who have divided (*farraqū*) their *dīn* and broken up into factions (*wa-kānū shiyaʿan*), have nothing to do with them. Their case rests with God: in time He will tell them about their deeds." I think it might make perfect sense to render the expression "their *dīn*" (*dīnahum*) as "their custom" or "their law"; the reference would be to people who have become divided in their understanding of the law or, perhaps, are portrayed explicitly as law-breakers.

Verses 3:19, 3:85, and 5:3 are often cited as Quranic prooftexts for the idea that the Quran already names the religion of the ingroup as "Islam" and, furthermore, that this religion is characterized as the best one (see, e.g., Abbasi 2021, 17–19). But I suggest another reading, translating *al-islām* as "obedience" (to God and the law) and (*al-*)*dīn* as "(the) law" (by law, I also mean matters of diet and purity and, moreover, ethics).

Let us begin with verse 5:3, where God is portrayed as saying, *inter alia*: "Today I have perfected your *dīn* for you, completed My blessing upon you, and favored *al-islām dīnan* for you" (all "you" pronouns are in the plural here).[82] This verse and other similar ones (e.g., 3:85) have been at the forefront in Islamic exegesis and theology as proof-

285

---

is devotion" or perhaps "the judgment of God is to be submitted to" (not: "the religion of God is Islam").

[81] Quran 10:105 (*aqim wajhaka li-l-dīn ḥanīfan*), 30:30 (*aqim wajhaka li-l-dīn ḥanīfan*).

[82] I have modified the translation of Abdel Haleem (2010) in this part, which reads: "Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and chosen as your religion *islam* [total devotion to God]."

texts for the conventional exclusivist interpretation of other religions (Sirry 2014, 65–99).[83] However, it is hard to see *al-islām* signifying a reified and distinct religion, Islam, in Quranic Arabic. The word, after all, simply means "submission" or "obedience" to God and the law.[84] Nor should we translate *dīn* as "religion" here, but rather use the suggested Quranic meanings of "law" or "judgment." Indeed, the rest of verse 5:3 (a verbose verse indeed!) has to do with dietary and other regulations. The accusative form *dīnan* can be explained grammatically as a *tamyīz* accusative, which determines or restricts the predicate (Wright 1896–1898, II, 122). In such Arabic expressions, the accusative noun should be translated into English as "in/with/as regards (noun)." Thus, I suggest that, given the usual meanings in Quranic Arabic of the words *islām* and *dīn*, the most natural translation for this passage would be: "Today, I have perfected your law for you, completed My blessing upon you, and favored for you obedience as regards law." Similarly, I would render 3:85 (*wa-man yanbaghi ghayra l-islām dīnan fa-lan yuqbala minhu wa-huwa fī l-ākhira mina l-khāsirīn*) as: "Whoever pursues non-obedience (*ghayra l-islām*) as regards law (*dīnan*)—it will not be accepted from her/him, and she/he will be among the losers in the hereafter."[85]

---

[83] Classical exegesis often supplies the plural for the reading of the text; see, e.g., al-Bayḍāwī 2008, I, 255, who suggests that 5:3 means that God has chosen Islam as *the* religion "over all other faiths" (ʿalā al-adyān kullihā). The goal of these premodern exegetes was to solidify the hegemonic understanding of Islam as the best (indeed, the only authentic) religion.

[84] This is indeed how some classical exegetes understand this as well: see, e.g., the view of al-Ṭabarī, who explains that in verse 5:3 the phrase *al-islām dīnan* means "submission to My [God's] command, holding onto My obedience, according to what I have decreed of limits and ordinances" (2001, VIII, 84). He then doubles down and paraphrases *dīnan* as *ṭāʿatan minkum lī*, "in your obedience toward Me." Clearly, al-Ṭabarī's understanding of *dīn* relates the word to the law, and *al-islām* does not refer to the name of a religion, but to obedience toward God and the law. For another interpretation of the word *al-islām*, see Cole 2019.

[85] Quran 3:85 relates to 3:83, which states: "Do they pursue other than the law of God? Everyone in the heavens and earth submits to Him, willingly or unwillingly; they will all be returned to Him."

286

Examples of similar usage of the word *dīn* as "law" are rather manifold in early Islamic-era Arabic poetry (Farrukh 1937, 86–87, 93). For instances, in a verse ascribed to one Ḥārith ibn ʿAbd Kilāl, it is stated: "And your law is the law of truth, in it there is purity (*wa-dīnuka dīnu l-ḥaqqi fī-hi ṭahāratun*)" (Farrukh 1937, 110). Here, as well as in Quran 5:3, the word *dīn* is explicitly connected with purity and dietary rules.

Moreover, it is significant, I think, that the plural of the word *dīn* never appears in the Quran, though it exists in later stages of Arabic (*adyān*).[86] Thus, the Quranic *dīn* is, as it were, uncountable. The uncountable nature of the noun *dīn* in the Quran seems to be corroborated by Quran 9:33 and other instances (48:28, 61:9) where the expression *al-dīn kullihi*, "the law in its totality," appears. However, almost all translators interpret this in the plural,[87] even though the Arabic noun is in the singular. For example, Abdel Haleem translates: "It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to show that it is above all [other] religions (*al-dīn kullihi*), however much the idolaters may hate this." The *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* also glosses *al-dīn kullihi* as *jamīʿ al-adyān al-mukhālifa lahu* as "all other religions."

All in all, it is probable that translating *dīn* in most cases as "religion" (e.g., Sinai 2023, 293) clouds our understanding of the Quranic connotations of the word. I believe that there would be no unease in translating the word as "law," "judgment," or "custom" in all or most of its occurrences in the Quran. In any case, in the Quranic understanding religiousness and law are intertwined.[88]

---

[86] Mun'im Sirry notes insightfully: "Even the word 'al-dīn' is never used in the Qur'ān in its plural form, *adyān*, which indicates that religious life at the time was not yet fully reified" (2014, 98). This had earlier been noted by Farid Esack (1997, 145).

[87] The different translations can be browsed at https://quran.com/9/33.

[88] See Zellentin 2013, 2018, 2019 for detailed discussions of how the Quran continues the legal cultures of Judeo-Christian groups by adopting the ritual laws meant for Gentiles in Acts 15:29 and late antique Near Eastern religious literature. Though in this article I discuss Quranic Arabic, it should be noted that the word *dīn* sometimes clearly means "law" in later stages of Arabic as well, such as in some Prophetic traditions, as noted by Pavel Pavlovitch (2023, 84). For a discussion of Arabic poetry ascribed to pre-Islamic figures, see the prooftexts adduced in Sinai

287

It needs to be emphasized that by "the law" I do not mean to say that the Quran is or that the Quran is to be understood as a law book (which is an old Orientalist stereotype). Rather, the Quranic concept of law includes understandings of ethics and a way of life that is more general than what people might today associate with the word "law." Indeed, "the law" encompasses moral teaching, ethical discourse, ritual requirements and purity, food regulations, and so on—not unlike the later concept of *al-sharʿ* (this was naturally the understanding of the law that, for example, Paul and other Jews held as well).

Quran 6:161 connects the word *dīn* with something called *millat ibrāhīm*, "the *milla* of Abraham."[89] The word *milla* is often understood to be synonymous with *dīn* and, accordingly, translated as "religion" in English (or, sometimes, "creed"). However, this Quranic concept, too, requires some probing.[90]

Like *dīn*, the word *milla* never appears in the plural in the Quran, though the plural (*milal*) exists in Classical Arabic. The word *milla* appears fifteen times in the Quran. In seven of these instances, the *milla* is mentioned in connection with Abraham, who is said to have pursued it as a *ḥanīf*, as a Gentile believer, not as a Jew or Christian. Related to this is Quran 16:120, which states that Abraham was not only *ḥanīf* but also *umma*. Both words probably convey the same meaning of Gentile believerness.[91] Here, the word *umma* is connected with the word *ummī*,

---

2023, 295–98. However, in my opinion the texts do not for the most part support Sinai's understanding of *dīn* as "religion" but often have to do with "law."

[89] Interestingly, the Quran never uses the word pair *dīn ibrāhīm*, though it is common in later Arabic literature (Hawting 2011, 480). Note, however, Quran 6:161, which juxtaposes *dīn* and *millat ibrāhīm*: "Say, 'My Lord has guided me to a straight path, an upright *dīn*, the *milla* of Abraham, as a *ḥanīf*, he was not an associator.'"

[90] For an overview of these verses, see Tottoli 2002, 7–11.

[91] Though it might also echo Genesis 18:18, where it is stated that "Abraham will become a great and powerful nation." Reynolds notes: "The Qurʾān here calls Abraham a 'nation' (Ar. *umma*), a term which expresses the way a people would be descended from him, and thus reflects Genesis 18:[17–18]" (2018, 429). Also, regarding 16:120, Reynolds notes aptly: "In fact this description [Abraham as an *umma*] is meaningful in two ways. First, it reflects the Biblical description

meaning "Gentile," which is one of the attributes of Muhammad in the Quranic communication.[92]

How should *milla* be rendered in English? It should be noted that the Arabic exegetes and lexicographers give varying meanings to the word. In addition to understanding it as "religion" (often in the countable sense), they also proffer the meanings "custom" and "way of conduct."[93] Interestingly, Angelika Neuwirth has suggested a more technical meaning for the word *milla*. She argues that the word pair *millat ibrāhīm* can be traced to the Hebrew expression *berit millah*, "covenant of circumcision." The idea of male circumcision would then be included in—indeed central to—the Quranic notion of "the *milla* of Abraham" (see Neuwirth 2008, 502). However, I wonder how this interpretation functions in the context of verse 2:135, where *millat ibrāhīm* is contrasted with Jews (who practiced circumcision) and Christians (who in some cases might have) (Crone 2015, 2016a). Understanding the Quranic concept *milla* as denoting exclusively or primarily male circumcision seems problematic for this reason.

Indeed, a Syriac derivation seems preferable. As for Arthur Jeffery (1938, 268–69), he suggests a derivation from the Syriac *meltā*, literally "word," which often renders the Greek *logos*. Juan Cole (2020, 626) notes that in "late antiquity, with the vast influence of Greek, a 'word' or λόγος [*logos*] implied a system of religious belief." But, as noted by Milka Levy-Rubin (2011, 24, 31), in the context of war and peace the Syriac *meltā* also translates the Greek *pistis*, the basic meaning of which is "conviction, allegiance, faithfulness," but which also means "a guarantee or promise of security or protection." Sometimes, the Greek *logos* also signifies "promise" in a similar context. Might we have here a clue about the signification of the Quranic *milla*? I deem it probable—that is, the Quranic *milla* is derived from the Syriac *meltā*, itself translating the

---

of Abraham as a nation (*gōy*; Gn 18.18), itself an epithet that reflects the divine promise of blessing. Second, it separates Abraham from the Jews and Christians, making him—like the Qurʾān's own prophet—a prophet of the gentiles" (2010, 85).

[92] For more on this, see Shaddel 2016.

[93] See Lane 1863–1893, s.v. *milla*.

Greek *logos* and *pistis*. Hence, I would suggest that *millat ibrāhīm* is to be understood as the "faithfulness" or "steadfastness" (*pistis*) that Abraham showed toward God,[94] or, more precisely, the "word" or "promise" of that fidelity.[95] The Quran underlines that this *milla* can be pursued as a *ḥanīf* and, by doing this, the Arabian Gentiles too can become part of the biblical pedigree and community of believers. The crucial passage in understanding the Quranic concept of *milla* is, in my opinion, verses 2:126–132, which are adduced in what follows in this article and in which Abraham and Ishmael are portrayed as laying the foundation of the shrine (*al-bayt*) and praying to God to make them (Abraham and Ishmael) obedient and their descendants obedient. Moreover, in verse 2:132 Abraham is said to have "bequeathed it (*waṣṣā bi-hā*, scil. the *milla*) to his sons, as did Jacob, [saying]: 'My sons, God has chosen for you the law (*al-dīn*); do not die except as obedient [to God and the law].'"[96] The *milla* is, then, the word of promise of being obedient and faithful to God.

Gentile Law in the Quran

If the arguments of the preceding two subsections are accepted, what does it mean for those verses in the Quran that state that the *dīn* is to

---

[94] Abraham's *pistis*, often translated as "faith," is a significant motif for Paul. See, e.g., Romans 4:13: "For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of *pistis*."

[95] This is not to say that this meaning is operative in the Quranic word *milla* in all its contexts. In Quran 38:7, the opponents of Muhammad are portrayed as rejecting his message because they have not "heard of this in the last *milla*," in which the word appears to denote "discourse," "proclamation," or the like, significations that are also operative in the Syriac *meltā*. See Payne Smith 1903, 274–75, for the diverse meanings of the word *meltā*.

[96] Cf. Abdel Haleem 2010: "And commanded his sons to do the same, as did Jacob: 'My sons, God has chosen [your] religion for you, so make sure you devote yourselves to Him, to your dying moment.'"

290

be followed *ḥanīfan*, "Gentilely"?[97] What is the Gentile way of following the law? Though this might sound surprising, even bizarre, at first blush, it is exactly this detail that provides more evidence for my case.

Holger Zellentin (2013, 2018, 2019) has studied the issue of the Quran's legal discourse and its connections with Jewish and Christian literature impressively. He points out that the Quranic dietary and purity regulations resemble what some Jewish and Christian texts of antiquity and late antiquity put forward as regards the Gentiles. In Christian literature, the starting point is the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:19–21, ultimately echoing Leviticus 17),[98] which mentions the requirements for Gentiles:

> Therefore I [James] have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues.

To summarize, the Apostolic decree forbids (1) food offered to idols (and perhaps idolatry more generally); (2) sexual "depravity"; (3) meat coming from animals that are not properly slaughtered ("whatever has been strangled"); and (4) blood. It is important to note that the category of "strangled" was understood more broadly to mean meat that was improperly slaughtered (Zellentin 2018, 131, 136–37). "Things strangled" signified, to many Christians, all sorts of carrion.

As Zellentin shows with an impressive amount of evidence,[99] the Gentile dietary and purity regulations were upheld in much of early Christianity, and the classification of Christ-believers into those of Jewish and Gentile background functioned "in most forms of Christianity" for at least a few centuries (Zellentin 2018, 117). This was, then, the majority position (at least according to the texts of the

---

[97] For example, Quran 10:105: "[Prophet], set your face towards the *dīn* as a *ḥanīf*."

[98] Zellentin 2018, 130: "While the text [of the Acts] does not 'cite' Leviticus in our sense of the word, it can be shown to take knowledge of the laws for granted."

[99] See the texts cited and analyzed in Zellentin 2018, 132–48.

Fathers of the Church). Zellentin suggests that the fourth century CE represents a watershed moment when the Gentile regulations start to be downplayed or rejected in the surviving evidence. But even after this, the Gentile laws are still very much present in some late antique texts, such as the *Clementine Homilies* and the *Didascalia* (Zellentin 2018, 147).[100] Interestingly, these texts add pork and wine as illicit items in the viewpoint of some Christian groups. And this is exactly what we find in the Quran.

The Quran, then, follows what the Christians[101] of the early era and late antiquity viewed as the Gentile purity and dietary regulations. Important passages in the Quranic communication on dietary regulation are 2:173, 5:1–5, 6:145–146, and 16:115.[102] The Quran forbids carrion, pork, blood, and idol meat, and is skeptical toward wine.

The goal of this subsection is not to claim that Quranic legal discourse and reasoning lacks originality or is fully borrowed from the Jewish understanding of the Gentile Noahide laws or the Christian Apostolic decree. There are varied legal ordinances and arguments in the Quran that cannot be traced back to a Jewish or Christian exemplar. And, in any case, the Quran presents a unique combination of injunctions. However, the point remains that the Quranic prohibitions and instigations come close to Jewish and Christian understandings of those laws that the *Gentiles* should follow. The Quran prompts, for example, "Say, 'My Lord has guided me to a straight path, an upright *dīn*, the *milla* of Abraham, as a *ḥanīf*, he was not an associator'" (6:161). That the law should be followed *both* "Abrahamicly" *and* "Gentilely" is not, in fact, incongruous. It is the very point.

---

[100]   The text of the *Clementine Homilies* was redacted in the fourth or fifth century, while the *Didascalia* stems from the fifth century in its Latin version and the eighth century in its Syriac one.

[101]   Interestingly, Zellentin (2018, 155) suggests that the Quran is more in dialogue with Leviticus than with late antique Christian literature.

[102]   These passages are dealt with in Zellentin 2018, 149–58.

Ethnicity in the Quran

Let us start this section by discussing what the Quranic discourse of ethnicity does *not* entail. It is not Arab identity, though this has customarily been supposed and claimed in premodern and modern scholarship. True, the Quran states that its language is Arabic, ʿ*arabī*, but the concept of Arabness or Arab group identity never surfaces in the Quran. Peter Webb (2016, 2020) has analyzed—and deconstructed—the ethnicity discourse in early Islam, and, according to his thesis, Arab ethnogenesis is a post-Muhammadan phenomenon. I am inclined to agree with that view. Webb (2021) notes that, according to evidence such as South Arabian epigraphy and Arabic poetry, the principal ethnic (or tribal) identification in western and central Arabia before and during early Islam was the tribal group Maʿadd, not ʿ*arab*, though in Mecca and Medina other affiliations might have been dominant.

What is the Quranic classification of ethnicity, then, if it is accepted that its discourse does not categorize people into, for example, Arabs, Persians, and so on? I would call the ethnic (ingroup) discourse of the Quran as *Gentile Abrahamic*. Just as the Apostle Paul argued in his letters that the Christ-believers are the actual heirs of Abraham, so too the Quran contends that the followers of Muhammad are the true descendants of the patriarch (Hawting 2011, 485). Quran 22:78 reiterates this, calling Abraham the "father" of the community of the believers. Both Abraham and Muhammad were Gentiles, the Quran asserts. But this does not mean that they could not be righteous, monotheist believers.

What the Quran is doing, then, is continuing, expanding, and rearticulating this ethnoreligious communication prevalent in the ancient and late ancient worlds. Muhammad's believers are a Gentile ethnos, in Arabic *umma*, consisting of Abraham's descendants, *dhurriyya* (Q. 2:128).[103] Through and with Abraham, the community of the believers partakes in the whole lineage of the patriarchs. The sixth *surah* of the Quran, verses 83–87, adduces an astounding catalogue of these figures of sacred history: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zechariah, John, Jesus, Elijah, Ishmael, Elisha,

---

[103] The descent is based on belief and Gentileness.

Jonah, and Lot. The first man, Adam, is naturally added to the list in other passages of the Quran. Moreover, we should not forget Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is an important figure in the Quran. These patriarchs and Mary form the lineage of Muhammad's community.[104]

Let us have a look at how this Gentile Abrahamic identity functions in the context of the six dimensions of ethnicity formulated by Hutchinson and Smith (1996).

First, the proper name of the group. The most common ingroup appellation is quite clearly "believers," *muʾminūn*, occurring hundreds of times in the Quran. However, other, more rarely used, names and attributes, such as *ḥunafāʾ* and *ummiyyūn*, emphasize the Gentile ethnicity of (perhaps the majority of) the group. The word *muʾminūn* functions on two levels: as a broader category including (also) some Jews and Christians (e.g., Q. 3:110, 199), and, at the same time, restricted to the Gentile faction in the community of the believers.[105]

Second, a mythic common ancestry. As I have argued, this ancestry is most significantly connected with the figure of Abraham, whose children the believers are. However, other patriarchs and Mary explicitly feature in the genealogy as well.

Third, shared memories of a common past. In the Quranic communication, the common memories consist mainly of the sacred history in which the patriarchs as well as Jesus and Mary act as exemplars and heroes. The Quranic conception of history includes recurring features:

---

[104] In the Quran, the lineage is often created through listing practices.

[105] That the same word, or category, can be used to denote different levels or factions of the group (or even different groups) appears to me to be common. Note how in modern political and other societal discourses different ethnonyms/nationalities function to refer to, often in a tense fashion, (1) a (putative) ethnic group; (2) speakers of a language; and (3) holders of a passport or other form of national ID. I also remark that the designation "believers" occurs in different contexts, and with different meanings, in the New Testament. For instance, Luke-Acts, in addition to employing the word to denote the Jesus movement more generally, "uses believer-designations on five occasions to emphasise different types of believers within the wider Christian movement or to designate ethnicity" (Trebilco 2011, 104).

the patriarchs, one after another, communicate the divine message to their people, most of whom do not believe.

Fourth, common culture. This is conveyed in the Quran with concepts such as *dīn*, which indicate shared religiousness, law, norms, and a way of conduct. The fact that the Quran is expressed in Arabic—and the Quran underscores that it is expressed in Arabic[106]—forms one of the aspects of these shared cultural traits, supposing that most of the believers used Arabic as their main vehicle of communication.

Fifth, a link with a homeland, symbolic or more actual. Here, the Quran is surprisingly quiet. No overarching sense of Arabia- or Hijaz-centeredness arises. Mecca and Medina are mentioned a few times only. However, the text mentions the sacred precinct, *al-ḥarām*, as well as the sanctuary, *al-bayt*, that Abraham and Ishmael built. It is important to note that the figure of Abraham is adduced not only for the mythic common ancestry and shared memories of the past but also for a link with Mecca.

Sixth, a sense of intragroup solidarity. This is of the utmost importance in the Quranic articulation of group identity and group behavior. The members of the group should assist and defend each other (Quran 2:216, 4:77, 47:20). They should help the needy and orphans among them with alms and other means (Quran 2:277). The free-riding hypocrites, *munāfiqūn*, form a subgroup among the believers that should be rejected and expelled (Quran 3:176). Their offense is that they do *not* act for the benefit of the group but constitute a fifth column, so to speak.

Ishmael as the Forefather of the Arabians

Above, I mentioned that Quran 2:127–129 portrays Abraham and Ishmael as building the foundations of *al-bayt*, "the sanctuary," probably a reference to the Kaaba,[107] and praying that God will make their

---

[106] See Hoyland 2022; but cf. Webb 2016, which suggests that, in the Quran, ʿ*arabī* means "clear, lucid," rather than "Arabic."

[107] However, see Witztum 2009 for an identification of this word with the altar (in Syriac, *baytā*) mentioned in Genesis 22:9.

descendants devoted (*muslimīn*) to God and send a messenger, probably a reference to Muhammad, from among them to recite the scripture. Hence, the idea of Muhammad and his community belonging to the lineage of Abraham through Ishmael is palpable. Was this idea entertained in Arabia in pre-Islamic times as well?[108] This is certainly how Arab identity and the Prophet's biography was articulated after the life of Muhammad. For instance, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya* (*The Biography of the Prophet*) by Ibn Hishām (d. 833), begins by putting forward a lineage for Muhammad.[109] It runs through a series of "Arab," mythic, forefathers (Muḍar, Nizār, Maʿadd, and ʿAdnān), until aligning with a biblical genealogy at Ishmael, through whom the Prophet's purported lineage reaches all the way to Adam.[110]

When we look at earlier evidence, the notion of Arabians[111] descending from Ishmael seems to have been present in Arabia already before the Prophet's time. The Quran, and other Arabic literature after it, seems to be tapping into an old idea.[112] The Ishmaelite connection surfaces in a few texts, such as Flavius Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews* and the Jubilees. Josephus's work was written in the 90s CE and contains the idea in passing that Arabians (or more specifically the Nabataeans) descend from Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar.[113] The same idea

---

[108] For an important, detailed treatment of this question, see Goudarzi 2019. See also Millar 1993.

[109] Ibn Hishām 1858–1860, 3–9; Savant 2013, 32–34. The similarities to the Gospel of Matthew are obvious.

[110] On this, see Varisco 1995 and Savant 2013, 33.

[111] I use the English word "Arabians" instead of "Arabs" to draw attention to the fact that the Arab ethnogenesis was still underway, as has been argued at length and in detail by Webb (2016).

[112] The fact that the Ishmaelite lineage was portrayed negatively in Genesis 21 and its Pauline interpretation in Galatians 4:21–31 (Penn 2015, 61) is not, naturally, mentioned in the Quran. The Quran portrays this genealogy in a completely positive sense, and there is no reason to think that the pre-Islamic Arabians, some of whom adopted the idea of being Ishmael's descendants, would have deemed their assumed lineage to be anything other than positive.

[113] Lans 2011; Cole 2018, 21–22. A similar idea is found in Galatians 4:24–25: "One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery.

is present in Jubilees, which is in all likelihood an earlier work than *Antiquities of the Jews*.[114] As in the latter, the Ishmaelite–Arab link is merely a sidenote in Jubilees. It occurs in verses 20:12–13, which read: "Ishmael, his sons, Keturah's sons, and their sons went together and settled from Paran as far as the entrance of Babylon—in all the land toward the east opposite the desert. They mixed with one another and were called Arabs and Ishmaelites" (trans. VanderKam 1989, 119).

The same idea appears in a text from late antiquity, namely the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*. The Syriac version of the text (1.33.3) notes that from Abraham's sons Ishmael and Eliezer "the tribes of Arabs and Persians descended." The Latin version renders this as follows: "From [Ishmael] the barbarian nations descend, while from [Eliezer] the peoples of the Persians descend."[115]

It has recently been convincingly demonstrated by Suleyman Dost (2017) that Jubilees was an important subtext to the Quran and known as a written text (in all likelihood in its Ethiopic rendering) or orally in late antique Arabia. For example, the Abraham figure of the Quran shares similarities with that of Jubilees, in particular when it comes to the smashing of idols (2017, 203–10). If stories and ideas from Jubilees—if not the text itself—circulated in Arabia, would it not then make sense that the Ishmael–Arabia connection was also known to Arabians? The Syriac Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* makes this even more probable. Nicolai Sinai's (2019) recent research on Arabic poetry suggests that pagan monotheism was an emerging phenomenon on the eve of Islam.[116] Might it have included ethnic reasoning and discourse adducing this mythic Ishmaelite connection as well?

Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia." However, Paul develops this into novel interpretations, equating Hagar with Jerusalem, the law ("Mount Sinai"), and the flesh. But behind his argument seems to be the idea that the descendants of Hagar, and probably those of her son Ishmael as well, were located in "Arabia," though it should be admitted that Sinai is naturally quite far removed from, say, Mecca and Medina.

[114] For the history of this text and its translations, see Dost 2017, 187–88. The Ethiopic text is actually titled *Maṣḥafa Kufālē*, the "Book of Division."

[115] Trans. Buell 2005, 72. For the text, see Jones 1995.

[116] See also Athanassiadi and Frede 1999.

This does not mean that there was a shared notion of ethnic Arab identity or that it would have been universally accepted that Arabians descended from Ishmael. Webb (2016, 60–109) has demonstrated the implausibility of both ideas before Islam. Rather, the appellation "Arab" carried a multitude of meanings before Islam. Not only that, but there were many "Arabias," some of them rather far in the north from what we nowadays call the Arabian Peninsula (Macdonald 2009). Epigraphic evidence and pre-Islamic poetry show that the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula self-identified in many ways as regards their tribal and ethnic affiliations, but the word "Arab" is almost completely lacking. What is more, a great number of languages were written and spoken in an around the Peninsula. Arabic was one of them, but it existed as a plethora of dialects with no written standard. The Quran itself refers to the possibility that there were non-Arabic-speaking people among the close circle of Muhammad: "We [God] know very well that they say, 'It is a man who teaches him [scil. Muhammad],' but the language of the person they allude to is foreign (aʿjamī), while this [revelation] is in clear Arabic" (verse 16:103). While at first glance this verse reads as defensive and polemical, with not much historical information, on further consideration one can distill an interesting conclusion on the basis of it: there were not only multiple languages spoken in Arabia more generally, but also in the immediate context of the Prophet Muhammad's community (aʿjamī would in all likelihood denote a form of Aramaic in the west Arabian context; Hoyland 2022). Not only that, but the Prophet himself was in conversation with this person.[117]

It is not until the eighth century CE that we have more evidence of an ethnos with an endonym "the Arabs" and with a notion of a shared language, Arabic (with a written standard emerging around the year 800). There were some curious developments in this Arab identity articulation, when South Arabians, most of whom did not speak Arabic before

---

[117] Also of interest is the beginning of Quran 41:44: "If We had made it a Quran [or: passage of revelation] in a foreign language (qurʾānan aʿjamiyyan), they would say, 'If only its verses [or script: āyātuhu] were clear! [Is it both] foreign language and Arabic (aʿjamiyyun wa-ʿarabiyyun)?'" This verse seems to suggest that the majority of the audience of the Prophet's revelations were Arabic-speaking.

Islam, were categorized as part (and sometimes the primordial source) of the Arab ethnos (Webb 2016, 177–239). And though early Islamic identity contained an emphasis on the settled nature of the people participating in that affiliation, with notable stereotyping of the nomads,[118] the formatted Arab ethnic identity harkened back to an imagined nomadic past (Webb 2020).

All this would mean that we should not place too much weight on the Ishmaelite connection. There were a number of ethnolinguistic groups in Arabia (or the Arabias) before Islam, and not all, perhaps, accepted or emphasized the idea of being Ishmaelites. However, it makes sense to assume that the connection to Abraham and Ishmael is not a Quranic novelty but an idea that was disseminated among at least some Arabians before Muhammad's revelations. Even Gentiles might have biblical pedigrees. Indeed, they should have had such if they wanted to be considered a community of believers.

299

Recategorization in the Quran

Gentile ethnicity and the Abrahamic prototype are key to understanding early Islamic identity articulation. Though this has not become the new consensus, scholars such as Fred Donner (2002–2003) have suggested that distinct Islamic identity (in the sense of being different from Judaism, Christianity, and other faiths) was not articulated during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. Rather, it appears to have been a much slower, piecemeal process.

This process could be clarified with the concept of *recategorization*, as theorized by scholars writing about the social identity framework. Recategorization is a process that entails "changing the basis of categorization … [which] can alter who is a 'we' and who is a 'they'" (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000, 15). This is often done by increasing "the level of category inclusiveness" (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000, 43). The hoped-for result of this process is a common ingroup identity that is shared by groups that did not, in the past, categorize themselves under a shared

---

[118] Athamina 1987; Crone 1994; Lindstedt 2015.

label. Since calls to relinquish former identities often raise opposition, it is best if the former identities can instead be reinterpreted as subidentities under a big-tent identity (the recategorized common ingroup identity). This is called the "dual-identity model" (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000, 49).

It can be argued that the identity that the Quran and the so-called "Constitution of Medina" put forward is a recategorized, superordinate believer identity (Lindstedt 2021). In these texts Jews, Christians, and Gentiles who believe in God and His Prophets (including Muhammad) are recategorized as one group, the believers. It should be noted that this does not mean that the Quran and the "Constitution" accept all Jews and Christians (or, on the other hand, Gentiles) as believers. Rather, the Quran states: "Among them are believers, but most of them are transgressors" (3:110).
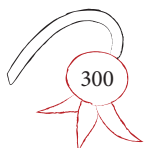
Jews and Christians of western Arabia (and recent research suggests that there were rather many of them)[119] were proud possessors and readers of scriptures and traced their lineage to patriarchs such as Abraham. Their identities were ethnoreligious in the sense that they often conceived (what we would call) their religious identity as having (what we would call) an ethnic component. Nonetheless, there were a multitude of others present in the Arabian milieu as well. The Jews and Christians would pejoratively call these others "Gentiles" (or "pagans"; *ummiyyūn* in Arabic, *ḥanpē* and *ʿammē* in Aramaic, etc.). This (originally derogatory) word was not rejected by the Prophet Muhammad but adapted and repurposed. He himself is called the "Gentile Prophet" in the Quran (7:157), who was sent to the Gentiles in particular (Q. 62:2), and, it would seem, many of his early followers came from this group of non-Jews and non-Christians (though they included Jews and Christians as well, as mentioned explicitly in verses such as Q. 29:46).

One can hypothesize that the idea of a prophet arising amid a Gentile *ethnos* was met with criticism from some Jews and Christians. To answer the criticism, the prototypical figure of the *ḥanīf* Abraham was put to use. Like the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet Abraham was not a Jew or Christian but a Gentile submitting to God according

300

---

[119] Nehmé 2017; Sinai 2019; Lindstedt 2024.

to the Quranic reasoning. This Abrahamic prototype was one that was known to Christians too and actually present in their scripture, and one that also had some analogues in other Christian texts. In the Quran, Abraham functions as a rhetorical device for the Gentiles to be accepted as believers alongside "those who have been reading the Book before you [scil. Muhammad]" (Q. 10:94). Abraham is the pathway for the Gentiles to be(come) believers. Like Paul, who made the (in his time probably outrageous) claim that the Christ-believers are Abraham's true children, the Quran puts forward the idea that it is Muhammad and his community of believers that are closest to Abraham (Q. 3:68) and his progeny, *dhurriyya* (2:128). This Gentile believer Abraham figure of the Quran functions as an exemplar from the past for the Gentile believers of the Quranic present.[120] In verse 2:128, which contains Abraham and Ishmael's prayer, they implore God to make their progeny into an *umma muslima*. As argued in this article, the word *umma* (and not just the word *ummiyyūn*) sometimes carries the connotation of "Gentile people" in the Quran. The word pair *umma muslima* might then be rendered into English as "an obedient community of Gentiles."

Though the Quran engages in social competition about the proprietorship of Abraham and claims that the Jews or Christians do not possess him, this does not mean that the People of the Book would automatically be outside the community of the believers. Rather, the Quran (3:20) instructs the Prophet Muhammad: "Ask those who were given the Book as well as the Gentiles, 'Do you submit [to God]?' If they do, they will be guided, but if they turn away, your only duty is to convey the message. God is aware of His servants."

Conclusion

In this article, I have endeavored to explore notions of ethnic legitimization in the Quran, which invokes Gentile Abrahamic ethnicity as an

---

[120] This has already been noted by Zellentin: "The 'gentile' self-identity of the Qurʾān is actually reflected in its use of the Arabic term *ḥanīf* to depict the original gentile form of worship, going back to Abraham" (2013, 10).
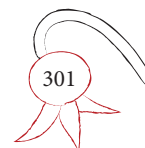
identity that the believers participate in.[121] This ethnicity discourse in the Quran is often overlooked in modern scholarly literature. The underscored Gentile affiliation did not automatically mean that, at least some, Jews or Christians could not become part of the community of the believers. There are early and late Quranic passages that accept some Jews and Christians as believers (for example, 3:110: *minhum al-muʾminūn*, "among them are believers"). However, the emphasis on Gentileness in the Quran probably points toward the hypothesis that the majority of the believers came from a Gentile background. This does not mean that the identification "Gentile" (*ḥanīf* or *ummī*) was the only or salient affiliation that many of them accepted and cherished. Rather, it was a categorization that worked on the same conceptual level as "Christian" or "Jew." People identify with multiple groups at any point of their lives and emphasize different identities in different contexts. For example, the ethnoreligious identities "Jew," "Christian," and "Gentile believer" were reconcilable with ethnotribal identities such as Kinda, Maʿadd, Aws, Khazraj, Lakhm, Ghassān, Ṭayyiʾ, and Quraysh that were present in northern, central, and western Arabia.[122] The so-called "Constitution of Medina" explicitly mentions that there was a Jewish component among the Aws and other tribal groups of Medina, the immediate context of the Prophet and the Quran.[123] In addition to this, individuals

---
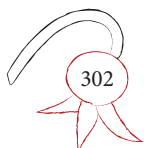
[121] To quote Joane Nagel, ethnicity is the "result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual's self-identification and outsiders' ethnic designations—i.e. what *you* think your ethnicity is, versus what *they* think your ethnicity is" (1994, 154).

[122] Webb 2021, 72. See Sinai 2019 for a suggestion (based on Arabic poetry) that pagan monotheism was on the rise on the eve of Islam. Cole (2018) also interprets the Prophet's movement as one of Gentile monotheists (for the most part), as does Crone (2016, 315–39). Both Cole and Crone suggest that they might have been, at least partly, so-called "God-fearers." In contrast, Sinai sees Arabian pagan monotheism as a local phenomenon.

[123] See Ibn Hishām 1858–1860, I, 342–43; Abū ʿUbayd 1986, II, 469; Donner 2021, 24. On the text, see Lecker 2004. Most historians take this to be an authentic document stemming from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, though it might have undergone some changes during its transmission (it does not survive as an original document but is quoted in literary sources).

would have put forward a number of identities related to, for example, gender, family, professional roles, and societal status. The Quran's identity parlance endeavored to put forward a novel believer identity in which the different followers of Muhammad were accepted as part of the same group regardless of their existing identities (which could be understood as subidentities) as Jewish, Christian, or Gentile. And, later, in the eighth century CE or so, the ethnotribal identities mentioned above were recategorized as part of a broader Arab ethnos.

In the social identity approach, much interest has recently been put on prototypicality in categorization and group formation (e.g., Haslam et al. 2011). Seen in this way, categories are created not through borders and oppositionality but through prototypes, and group members are assessed in accordance with how well they fit the group prototype. A Gentile monotheist group invoking a Gentile monotheist Abrahamic prototype is credible.

Why would Gentileness be invoked as a *positive* marker of identity?[124] How did the Syriac *ḥanpā*, often with negative meanings of outsiderness in the texts that are extant, become the positive insider term *ḥanīf* in Quranic Arabic? In this article, I have argued that we should conjecture a reinterpreting of this term by the community of the Quranic believers. We can speculate that some Jews and Christians in and around the communities where Muhammad lived described his followers pejoratively as mere Gentiles, *ḥunafāʾ* and *ummiyyūn*. The Quran appropriates these terms as labels with a positive dimension of belonging to the group, arguing that whereas the believers are, for the most part, of Gentile background, so was Abraham.

For an analogue from antiquity, it is quite commonly accepted in modern scholarship that the Jesus-believers were first called "Christians" by their opponents, not themselves (Trebilco 2011, 272–97). The word *christianos* is a Latinism, rather than Greek or Aramaic (which the early Jesus-believers themselves would have used) and was probably coined by outsiders and used pejoratively at first: it denoted "partisan adherence to" or "being a client of Christ." However, it was at some point

---

[124] This issue is also discussed in Sinai 2023, 243–44, with rather similar conclusions.

adopted by the Christ-believers themselves (already during the composition of the New Testament, as reflected in 1 Peter 4:16, but gaining ground only later) and received positive meanings.[125] I would suggest that something similar occurred with the (mostly negative) Syriac word *ḥanpā* in its Arabic garb as *ḥanīf*.[126] Though it was, I would suggest, first used as a slur by the opponents of the Prophet ("you are mere Gentiles," one can imagine his adversaries as saying), it was soon reappropriated by Muhammad and his followers. The phenomenon is probably also connected with the rise of Gentile monotheism in Arabia in the sixth century CE, as evidenced by Arabic poetry: perhaps those Gentiles believers living before the Prophet Muhammad were also called (and called themselves) *ḥanīf*s. Perhaps they had already projected positive attributes onto being a Gentile believer and connected their Gentile identity with Abraham (a notion that the Jews and Christians would have understood well).

I reiterate that the ethnic communication of the Quran is not, in my opinion, connected with Arabness or other such ethnoracial groups often mentioned in modern scholarship as inhabiting the late antique Near East. The moving boundaries and changing arguments

---

[125] For other analogues, this process can be compared with some modern cases where words that were used derogatively by outgroup members, such as "queer" or "fat," have been adopted by activists and ingroup members (the LGBTQ+ community and fat acceptance movement, in these examples). These terms are then used to promote positive self-esteem and to fight bias. These efforts to reinterpret hitherto derogatory words in a positive sense is not always successful, of course. Though there is an academic journal titled *Fat Studies* (a sign that there has been some popular attempts to reinterpret the word), the word "fat" is still employed as a common slur. However, endeavors to repurpose the word "queer" as a positive ingroup label have been very effective and, as far as I know, "queer" is rarely used by the outgroup as a pejorative word nowadays (that is not to say that there are not other slurs that are used to insult and target the LGBTQ+ community).

[126] In fact, Horovitz (1926, 56–59) suggested, almost one hundred years ago, a semantic development of the word *ḥanīf* that is similar to mine. However, he discusses this in a different context, the mythic stories about pre-Islamic Arabian *ḥanīf*s (a group about which there is no historical evidence). See also Reynolds 2010, 81–83.

in early-Islamic-era ethnic discourse can be demonstrated by the fact that, around one century after the death of the Prophet, early Muslims had recanted the identity based on Gentileness and, instead, began to emphasize their budding Arab identity. Arab identity itself was linked with Abraham through the idea that the Arabs are Abraham's progeny through Ishmael. Quranic concepts such as *ummī* and *ḥanīf* were re-interpreted. The word *ummī* was taken to mean "illiterate," while *ḥanīf* supposedly conveyed the general senses of monotheism, devoutness, and uprightness.

Appendix

In this Appendix, I list for reference the instances in the Quran where the words *ummī*, *ummiyyūn*, *ḥanīf*, and *ḥunafāʾ* appear.[127]
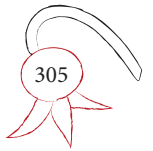
ummī
Q. 7:157, 158

ummiyyūn
Q. 2:78, 3:20, 3:75, 62:2

ḥanīf
Q. 2:135, 3:67, 3:95, 4:125, 6:79, 6:161, 10:105, 16:120, 16:123, 30:30

ḥunafāʾ
Q. 22:31, 98:5

Bibliography

[Note: The Arabic definite article *al-* is not taken into account in the alphabetization].

---

[127] Identified on the basis of Kassis 1983.

Abbasi, Rushain. 2021. "Islam and the Invention of Religion: A Study of Medieval Muslim Discourses on *Dīn*." *Studia Islamica* 116, no. 1: 1–106. https://doi.org/10.1163/19585705-12341437.

Abdel Haleem, Muhammad, trans. 2010. *The Qurʾan: English Translation with Parallel Arabic Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Abū ʿUbayd. 1986. *Kitāb al-Amwāl*. Ed. Shākir Dhiʾb Fayyāḍ. 3 vols. Riyadh.

Abū Qays ibn al-Aslat. n.d. *Dīwān*. Edited by Ḥasan Muḥammad Bājūda. Cairo: Dār al-Turāth.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Editions.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2018. *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*. London: Profile Books.

Armstrong, John A. 1982. *Nations before Nationalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Athamina, Khalil. 1987. "Aʿrāb and Muhājirūn in the Environment of Amṣār." *Studia Islamica* 66: 5–25. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1595909.

Athanassiadi, Polymnia and Michael Frede, eds. 1999. *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Azaiez, Mehdi, Gabriel Said Reynolds, Tommaso Tesei, and Hamza M. Zafer, eds. 2016. *The Qurʾan Seminar Commentary / Le Qurʾan Seminar: A Collaborative Study of 50 Qurʾanic Passages / Commentaire Collaboratif de 50 Passages Coraniques*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Badawi, Elsaid M. and Muhammad Abdel Haleem. 2008. *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qurʾanic Usage*. Leiden: Brill.

Barton, Carlin A. and Daniel Boyarin. 2016. *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities*. New York: Fordham University Press.

al-Bayḍāwī. 2008. *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-taʾwīl*. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya.

Berzon, Todd S. 2016. *Classifying Christians: Ethnography, Heresiology, and the Limits of Knowledge in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Blois, François de. 2002. "*Naṣrānī* (Ναζωραῖος) and *Ḥanīf* (Εθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65, no. 1: 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X02000010.

Boyarin, Daniel. 1999. *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Boyarin, Daniel. 2004. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Boyarin, Daniel. 2018. *Judaism: The Genealogy of a Modern Notion*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Brubaker, Rogers. 2004. *Ethnicity without Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Buell, Denise Kimber. 2005. *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cantwell-Smith, Wilfred. 1991. *The Meaning and End of Religion*. New York: Mentor Books.

Casiday, Augustine. 2011. "The Call of God and the Response of Abraham." In *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*, edited by Martin Goodman, George H. van Kooten, and J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, 449–63. Leiden: Brill.

Cole, Juan. 2018. *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace amid the Clash of Empires*. New York: Bold Type Books.

Cole, Juan. 2019. "Paradosis and Monotheism: A Late Antique Approach to the Meaning of *Islām* in the Quran." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 82, no. 3: 405–25. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X19000685.

Cole, Juan. 2020. "Infidel or Paganus? The Polysemy of *Kafara* in the Quran." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 140, no. 3: 615–36. http://dx.doi.org/10.7817/jameroriesoci.140.3.0615.

Crone, Patricia. 1994. "The First-Century Concept of 'Hiğra.'" *Arabica* 41: 352–87. https://doi.org/10.1163/157005894X00029.

Crone, Patricia. 2015. "Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾān I." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74, no. 2: 225–53. https://doi.org/10.1086/682212.

Crone, Patricia. 2016a. "Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾān II." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 75, (1): 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1086/684957.

Crone, Patricia. 2016b. *The Qurʾānic Pagans and Related Matters*. Leiden: Brill.

Déroche, François. 2021. *The One and the Many: The Early History of the Qurʾan*, translated by Malcolm DeBevoise. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Donaldson, Terence L. 2007. *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Donner, Fred M. 2002–2003. "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community." *Al-Abhath* 50–51: 9–53. https://www.academia.edu/1013487/From_Believers_to_Muslims_Confessional_self_identity_in_the_early_Islamic_community_2003_.

Donner, Fred M. 2018a. "Dīn, islām, und muslim im Koran." In *Kritische Koranhermeneutik: Günter Lüling in Memoriam*, edited by Georges Tamer, 129–40. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Donner, Fred M. 2018b. "Talking about Islam's Origins." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 81, no. 1: 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X17001409.

Donner, Fred M. 2021. "Living Together: Social Perceptions and Changing Interactions of Arabian Believers and Other Religious Communities during the Umayyad Period." *The Umayyad World*, edited by Andrew Marsham, 23–38. London: Routledge.

Dost, Suleyman. 2017. "An Arabian Qurʾān: Towards a Theory of Peninsular Origins." PhD diss., University of Chicago.

El-Badawi, Emran I. 2009. "Divine Kingdom in Syriac Matthew and the Qurʾān." *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 61, no. 1: 1–42. https://doi.org/10.2143/JECS.61.1.2045829.

El-Badawi, Emran I. 2014. *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*. London: Routledge.

Enloe, Cynthia. 1996. "Religion and Ethnicity." In *Ethnicity*, edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, 197–202. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Esack, Farid. 1997. *Qurʾān, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*. Oxford: OneWorld.

Esler, Philip F. 1998. *Galatians*. London: Routledge.

Esler, Philip F. 2003. *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Settings of Paul's Letter*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Esler, Philip F. and Ronald Piper. 2006. *Lazarus, Mary and Martha: Social-Scientific Approaches to the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Eusebius. 1949. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Trans. K. Lake. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Farrukh, Omar. 1937. *Das Bild des Frühislam in der arabischen Dichtung*. Leipzig: Druck der August Pries.

Fonrobert, Charlotte. 2001. "The Didascalia Apostolorum: A Mishnah for the Disciples of Jesus." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 4: 483–509. http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/earl.2001.0056.

Fredriksen, Paula. 2017. *Paul: The Pagans' Apostle*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Fredriksen, Paula. 2018. *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gaertner, Samuel L. and John F. Dovidio. 2000. *Reducing Intergroup Bias: The Common Ingroup Identity Model*. New York: Psychology Press.

Goudarzi, Mohsen. 2018. "The Second Coming of the Book: Rethinking Qurʾanic Scripturology and Prophetology." PhD diss., Harvard University.

Goudarzi, Mohsen. 2019. "The Ascent of Ishmael: Genealogy, Covenant, and Identity in Early Islam." *Arabica* 66, no. 5: 415–84. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700585-12341543.

Goudarzi, Mohsen. 2023. "Unearthing Abraham's Altar: The Cultic Dimensions of *Dīn*, *Islām*, and *Ḥanīf* in the Qurʾan." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 82, no. 1: 77–102. https://doi.org/10.1086/723646.

Grasso, Valentina. 2021. "The Gods of the Qurʾān: The Rise of Ḥijāzī Henotheism during Late Antiquity." In *The Study of Islamic Origins: New Perspectives and Contexts*, edited by Mette Bjerregaard Mortensen, Guillaume Dye, Isaac W. Oliver, and Tommaso Tesei, 297–324. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Griffith, Sidney H. 2013. *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Guillaume, Alfred, trans. 1955. *The Life of Muhammad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hakola, Raimo. 2005. *Identity Matters: John, the Jews and Jewishness*. Leiden: Brill.

Hakola, Raimo. 2015. *Reconsidering Johannine Christianity: A Social Identity Approach*. New York: Routledge.

Haslam, S. Alexander, Stephen D. Reicher, and Michael J. Platow. 2011. *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence and Power*. New York: Routledge.

Hawting, Gerald. 2011. "The Religion of Abraham and Islam." In *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*, edited by Martin Goodman, George H. van Kooten, and J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, 475–501. Leiden: Brill.

Hodge, Caroline E. Johnson. 2007. *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Horovitz, Josef. 1926. *Koranische Untersuchungen*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Hoyland, Robert. 2022. "ʿArabī and Aʿjamī in the Qurʾān: The Language of Revelation in Muḥammad's Ḥijāz." In *Scripts and Scripture: Writing and Religion in Arabia circa 500–700 CE*, edited by Fred Donner and Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee, 105–15. Chicago: Oriental Institute.

Hutchinson, John, and Anthony Smith. 1996. "Introduction." In *Ethnicity*, edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, 3–16. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ibn Hishām. 1858–1860. *Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*. Edited by F. Wüstenfeld. 2 vols. Göttingen: Dieterichsche Universitäts Buchhandlung.

Jaffee, Martin S. 1997. *Early Judaism*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice.

Jeffery, Arthur. 1938. *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾan*. Baroda, India: Oriental Institute.

309

Jones, F. Stanley, trans. 1995. *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.

Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*. See Marcovich, ed.

Kassis, Hanna E. 1983. *A Concordance of the Qur'an*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lane, Edward W. 1863–1893. *Arabic-English Lexicon*. 8 vols. London: Williams and Norgate.

Lans, Birgit van der. 2011. "Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham's Household in Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae*." In *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*, edited by Martin Goodman, George H. van Kooten, and J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, 185–99. Leiden: Brill.

Lecker, Michael. 2004. *The "Constitution of Medina."* Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

Lecker, Michael. 2005. "Was Arabian Idol Worship Declining on the Eve of Islam?" In *Peoples, Tribes and Society in Arabia around the Time of Muhammad*, 1–43. Aldershot, UK: Surrey.

Levy-Rubin, Milka. 2011. *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lieu, Judith. 2016. *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity*. 2nd ed. London: T&T Clark.

Lindstedt, Ilkka. 2015. "*Muhājirūn* as a Name for the First/Seventh Century Muslims." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74, no. 1: 67–73. http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/679624.

Lindstedt, Ilkka. 2021. "'One Community to the Exclusion of Other People'—A Superordinate Identity in the Medinan Community." In *The Study of Islamic Origins: New Perspectives and Contexts*, edited by Mette Bjerregaard Mortensen, Guillaume Dye, Isaac W. Oliver, and Tommaso Tesei, 325–76. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Lindstedt, Ilkka. 2024. *Muḥammad and His Followers in Context: The Religious Map of Late Antique Arabia*. Leiden: Brill.

Macdonald, M. C. A. 2009. "Arabs, Arabias, and Arabic before Late Antiquity." *Topoi* 16, no. 1: 277–332. http://dx.doi.org/10.3406/topoi.2009.2306.

Marcovich, Miroslav, ed. 1997. *Iustini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis: Iustini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Margoliouth, D. S. 1903. "On the Origin and Import of the Names *Muslim* and *Ḥanīf*." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 35: 467–93. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0035869X00030744.

Mattila, Janne. 2022. "Sabians, the School of al-Kindī, and the Brethren of Purity." In *Religious Identities in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Walking Together & Parting Ways*, edited by Ilkka Lindstedt, Nina Nikki, and Riikka Tuori, 92–114. Leiden: Brill.

Millar, Fergus. 1993. "Hagar, Ishmael and the Origins of Islam." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 44: 23–45. https://doi.org/10.18647/1678/JJS-1993.

Nagel, Joane 1994. "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture." *Social Problems* 41, no. 1: 152–176. https://doi.org/10.2307/3096847.

Nehmé, Laïla. 2017. "New Dated Inscriptions (Nabataean and Pre-Islamic Arabic) from a Site near al-Jawf, Ancient Dūmah, Saudi Arabia." *Arabian Epigraphic Notes* 3: 121-64. https://hdl.handle.net/1887/54231.

Neuwirth, Angelika. 2009. "The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism." In *The Qurʾān in Context*, edited by Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, 499–532. Leiden: Brill.

Nickelsburg, George. 1998. "Abraham the Convert: A Jewish Tradition and Its Use by the Apostle Paul." In *Biblical Figures outside the Bible*, edited by Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren, 151–75. Atlanta: Trinity Press.

Nikki, Nina. 2016. "Contesting the Past, Competing over the Future: Why Is Paul Past-Oriented in Galatians and Romans, but Future-Oriented in Philippians?" In *Social Memory and Social Identity in the Study of Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, edited by Samuel Byrskog, Raimo Hakola, and Jutta Jokiranta, 241–56. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Pavlovitch, Pavel. 2023. *Muslim al-Naysābūrī (d. 261/875): The Sceptical Traditionalist*. Leiden: Brill.

Payne Smith, Jessie. 1903. *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Penn, Michael P. 2015. *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Reynolds, Gabriel Said. 2010. *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*. London: Routledge.

Reynolds, Gabriel Said. 2018. *The Qurʾān and the Bible: Text and Commentary*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Savant, Sarah Bowen. 2013. *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shaddel, Mehdy. 2016. "Quranic *Ummī*: Genealogy, Ethnicity, and the Foundation of a New Community." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 43: 1–60. https://www.academia.edu/8811286/Qur%CA%BE%C4%81nic_umm

311

%C4%AB_Genealogy_Ethnicity_and_the_Foundation_of_a_New_
Community_Jerusalem_Studies_in_Arabic_and_Islam_43_2016_
pp_1_60_.

Shoemaker, Stephen J. 2022. *Creating the Qurʾan: A Historical-Critical Study*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Sinai, Nicolai. 2014. "When Did the Consonantal Skeleton of the Quran Reach Closure? Parts I–II." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 77, no. 3: 273–92, 509–21. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X14000111.

Sinai, Nicolai. 2019. *Rain-Giver, Bone-Breaker, Score-Settler: Allāh in Pre-Quranic Poetry*. New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society.

Sinai, Nicolai. 2023. *Key Terms of the Qurʾan*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sirry, Munʾim. 2014. *Scriptural Polemics: The Qurʾan and Other Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smith, Jane. 1975. *A Historical and Semantic Study of the Term "Islam" as Seen in a Sequence of Qurʾan Commentaries*. Montana: University of Montana Press.

Al-Ṭabarī. 2001. *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*. 26 vols. Cairo.

Tottoli, Roberto. 2002. *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature*. London: Routledge.

Trebilco, Paul R. 2011. *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

VanderKam, James C., trans. 1989. *The Book of Jubilees*. Leuven: Peeters.

Varisco, Daniel Martin. 1995. "Metaphors and Sacred History: The Genealogy of Muhammad and the Arab ʿTribe.'" *Anthropological Quarterly* 68 (3): 139–56. https://doi.org/10.2307/3318071.

Watt, William M. 1971. "Belief in a 'High God' in Pre-Islamic Mecca." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 16, no. 1: 35–40. https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/XVI.1.35.

Webb, Peter. 2016. *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Webb, Peter. 2020. "Cry Me a Jāhiliyya: Muslim Reconstructions of Pre-Islamic Arabian Culture—A Case Study." In *Islam at 250: Studies in Memory of G.H.A. Juynboll*, edited by Petra Sijpesteijn and Camilla Adang, 235–80. Leiden: Brill.

Webb, Peter. 2021. "Ethnicity, Power and Umayyad Society: The Rise and Fall of the People of Maʿadd." In *The Umayyad World*, edited by Andrew Marsham, 65–102. London: Routledge.

Witztum, Joseph. 2009. "The Foundations of the House (Q 2:127)." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72, no. 1: 25–40. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X09000020.

312

Wright, William. 1896–1898. *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*. 2 vols. London: Williams and Norgate.

al-Yaʿqūbī. 1883. *Taʾrīkh*. Edited by M. Th. Houtsma. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill.

al-Zabīdī. 1975–2001. *Tāj al-ʿArūs*. Edited by ʿAbd al-Sattār A. Farrāj. 40 vols. Kuwait: Maṭbaʿat ḥukūmat al-Kuwayt.

Zellentin, Holger. 2013. *The Qurʾānʾs Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Zellentin, Holger. 2018. "Judaeo-Christian Legal Culture and the Qurʾān: The Case of Ritual Slaughter and the Consumption of Animal Blood." In *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam*, edited by Francisco del Río Sánchez, 117–59. Turnhout: Brepols.

Zellentin, Holger. 2019. "Gentile Purity Law from the Bible to the Qur'an: The Case of Sexual Purity and Illicit Intercourse." In *The Qur'anʾs Reformation of Judaism and Christianity: Return to the Origins*, edited by Holger Zellentin, 115–215. London: Routledge.

313

AABNER