



# The Use of Slaves in Early Christianity: Slaves as Subjects of Life and Thought

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**The Use of Slaves in Early Christianity:  
Slaves as Subjects of Life and Thought**

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Faculty of Harvard Divinity School

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Early Christianity emerged within an empire built on the backs of slaves. Christians likewise participated in the slaveholding practices of the Roman Empire. Christians owned slaves, were slaves, and made use of enslaved labor, even if some in antiquity, including Christians, resisted slavery.

Yet, current interpretations of slavery language in New Testament texts—and in particular in its earliest writings, namely the letters of the apostle Paul—are often abstracted from the social and material conditions of enslavement within the Roman Empire. Paul’s self-identifications as a “slave of Christ” and “slave to all” are frequently treated as metaphorical, bifurcated from “real” slavery.

This dissertation examines slavery language in the letters of Paul alongside material, literary, and legal evidence evincing the social-material functions of Roman enslavement. I argue that Paul’s writings are dependent upon, not set apart from, practices of slaveholding. When Paul calls himself a slave, it is not “merely metaphorical” but reflects the presence and influence of the enslaved.

I propose strategies for reading in ways that foreground the enslaved, making explicit their exploitation but also their vitality. I do so by drawing upon black feminist historiography, feminist rhetorical analysis, and queer frameworks that elaborate both the material and discursive mechanisms by which social hierarchies are enforced, and the tactics used by subjugated people to navigate and resist their constraints. By analyzing Roman and early Christian sources through these lenses, I demonstrate how Paul’s self-representation as a slave and his discussions of the

role of the enslaved largely reflect prevailing Roman attitudes and practices regarding the use of slaves. At the same time, I highlight evidence for slaves' capacities to work toward their best advantage and cultivate relationships that resisted their alienation and dehumanization. Reading Paul's letters in light of such a dynamic interplay between slaves and freepersons, this dissertation concludes that language of slavery in the letters of Paul is not divorced from the realities of enslavement but contains traces of enslaved life.

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One of the modes for thinking about the production of ancient texts that I have found most intellectually stimulating was introduced to me in a doctoral seminar on authorship led by Professor Karen King. Following insights from literary criticism on the so-called death of the author, it has been exciting to think beyond an author's intentions to the social and material processes for producing and disseminating texts. By recognizing the intellectual and physical contributions toward writing from a whole range of human and nonhuman sources, from conversation partners and scribes, to outside ideas and inspiration from the material world, I have begun to see in more vivid ways how texts are never the product of singular genius but are both produced and received in dynamic, variegated social-material settings. The role of the enslaved scribe, for instance, matters right alongside that of the named author.

This dissertation is hardly the product of my intellect alone. While written in my name, which signals primarily my responsibility for any shortcomings, this work has many coauthors who have variously inspired me, informed my thinking, and impacted my life in significant and tangible ways. I can hardly even begin to express how grateful I am for the positive influence of my advisor, Professor Laura Nasrallah. She has been the consummate mentor, offering feedback and encouragement that has sharpened and animated my thought and writing, while modeling in her own life and work the power of combining intellectual rigor and concern for human life, past and present. The entwined commitments to writing and pedagogy of Professors Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mark Jordan, each in their own important ways, have been instrumental in motivating my desire to pursue this work, especially as a matter of justice. I am thankful to both particularly in this moment for their generous support as members of my dissertation committee. Other faculty members have also contributed substantially to my work through

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## Introduction

Slaves and slavery have been central to the development of Christian thought and practice,<sup>1</sup> from the slaves who were among the early *ekklēsiai* in Christ, to frequent figurative and literary uses of the enslaved in the writings of Paul and the parables of Jesus, to late antique debates over the place of slaves in Christian communities, as well as to the modern role of Christian churches in buttressing and resisting enslavement in the United States and around the world. In the United States, chattel slavery may have ended long ago, but the legacies of slavery, including competing Christian discourses over slavery and abolition, continue to exhibit pervasive effects in religious and social-political life. The slavery that finds repeated recitation through public readings and private meditations on New Testament texts can never be a mere metaphor of righteous obedience or a quaint historical fact beyond which we, having been enlightened, have emerged.<sup>2</sup> Slavery haunts.<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation reckons with slavery's hauntings by elaborating more precisely the relationship between the earliest writings of the New Testament, namely the letters of the apostle

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<sup>1</sup> See Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery as Moral Problem: In the Early Church and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> On the entanglement of ideology and hermeneutics, see Katie Geneva Cannon, "Slave Ideology and Biblical Interpretation," *Semeia* 47 (1989): 9–23.

<sup>3</sup> On haunting, and particularly the ways in which slavery haunts, see Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, new ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), esp. 137–90. On the lingering effects of enslavement in the United States and critical discussion of how slavery is remembered and represented, see Soyica Diggs Colbert, Robert J. Patterson and Aida Levy-Hussen, eds., *The Psychic Hold of Slavery: Legacies in American Expressive Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016). On the creative and critical social, political, and personal energies that can be generated through engaging with the ghosts of slavery, as illuminated by the work of Toni Morrison, see Juda Bennett, *Toni Morrison and the Queer Pleasure of Ghosts* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014). For scholarship that addresses race and haunting within Early Christian Studies, see Denise Kimber Buell, "God's Own People: Specters of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Early Christian Studies," in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies*, ed. Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 159–90.

Paul, and the social and material practices of enslavement in the Roman world. Early Christian literature evinces the utility of slaves and slavery for both use and reflection. On the one hand, there is a clear expectation among at least some writers that slaves should continue to serve their masters.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the language of slavery is deployed figuratively to describe entanglement in sin (e.g., Rom 6:15–23)<sup>5</sup> and the law from which “Christ has set us free” (e.g., Gal 5:1). What is especially striking, though, is that enslavement is not identified only as a problematic state, but it also stands at times to represent an ideal position vis-à-vis Christ, God, and the community.<sup>6</sup> For Paul, slavery serves as a model of proper relationship with Christ and God. He calls himself a “slave of Christ” (Phil 1:1; Gal 1:10; Rom 1:1) and slave to the *ekklēsia* in Christ (1 Cor 9:19; 2 Cor 4:5), as well as describing the faithful as “slaves of righteousness” (Rom 6:18) and “enslaved to God” (Rom 6:22). Moreover, Christ is imagined as “taking the form of a slave” (Phil 2:7). What is perhaps most perplexing about the use of slavery language within early Christian literature is the ostensible tension between slavery as a deep problem and obstacle and enslavement as sometimes aptly representing an exemplary state.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The so-called household codes (Col 3:18–4:1, Eph 5:21–6:9, and Titus 2), for instance, include instructions for slaves to be obedient to their masters. In a startling example, the *Acts of Andrew* presents a slave offered as a surrogate body for a recently converted Christian woman who commits to celibacy and so resists the sexual demands of her husband. See Christy Cobb, “Hidden Truth in the Body of Euclia: Page duBois’ *Torture and Truth* and *Acts of Andrew*,” *Biblical Interpretation* 25 (2017): 19–38.

<sup>5</sup> See Chris de Wet, “Sin as Slavery and/or Slavery as Sin? On the Relationship between Slavery and Christian Hamartiology in Late Ancient Christianity,” *Religion & Theology* 17 (2010): 26–39.

<sup>6</sup> This is not to suggest that such a positive deployment of slavery language is unique to early Christian literature. Indeed, early Christian materials ought to be read alongside other literary and theological traditions that articulate enslavement to gods and others as ideal.

<sup>7</sup> This has led to such works concerned with Paul’s use of slavery language as Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); John Byron, *Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline Christianity: A Traditio-Historical and Exegetical Examination* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). See also Sheila Briggs, “Can an Enslaved God Liberate? Hermeneutical Reflections on Philippians 2:6–11,” *Semeia* 47 (1989): 137–53.

The majority of scholarship has explored these images of slaves as a metaphor that has to do with submission to a divine force. But such language of slavery must be taken seriously in the context of an empire built on the backs of slave labor. To divide “real slaves” from metaphorical uses of slavery is to misunderstand how discursive representations and material practices of enslavement are tied up in one another. My dissertation thus explores how scholarship, in turning so quickly to naming many references to slavery as metaphorical, has obscured the material-discursive force of enslavement and its legacies, from the first century CE to the present. I seek to make more vivid the dynamic world of enslavement that shaped early Christian thought and practice so to highlight not only the pervasive and persistent deleterious effects of slavery but also the potential for slaves themselves to resist and simply to exist. My desire is that, by paying attention to the historical interplay of subjugation and resistance, we might also attune our critical consciousness to complex social-political and ecclesial collusions that sustain forces of domination today. I hope that this critical and historical exploration also has present-day effects, aiding myself and others to unlearn the logic of enslavement and to insist upon the freedom of all. In this way, I am concerned about history, as well as historiography.

One of the primary interests of this dissertation is how the story of slavery and early Christianity is told. I am concerned not only to bring the enslaved more clearly into focus,<sup>8</sup> but also to examine critically the effects and implications of representing slaves in particular ways.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Perhaps no single scholar has contributed more significantly to the practice of noticing slaves in ancient materials than Keith Bradley. In addition to the work discussed below in my review of scholarship, see esp. his collection of allusions to slaves in Seneca’s moral writings, underscoring how slaves’ presence and roles were and are taken for granted: Keith R. Bradley, “Seneca and Slavery,” in *Seneca*, ed. John G. Fitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 346–47. For a recent example of work that calls attention to the integral roles of the enslaved, see Katherine A. Shaner, *Enslaved Leadership in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> For instance, on the range and complexity of historical and scholarly interests behind treatments of slavery and Christianity, see Sheila Briggs, “Engaging the Work of Keith Bradley,” *Biblical Interpretation* 21

An illustration from the context of my own writing is helpful for elaborating these concerns. I have completed most of the research and writing for this dissertation while living in Andover, Massachusetts. The history of slavery in the United States usually brings to mind the South, but slaveholding flourished for some time in New England as well.<sup>10</sup> Upon moving to Andover, I learned almost immediately of one particular slave from the town's past: Pompey Lovejoy (fig. 1). The pond where he built a cabin and, upon being freed, made a life with his wife is now named after him. Pomp, as he was called, is memorialized not only in the name of his pond, but his memory is sometimes still invoked around the occasion of town meetings. Pomp was well-known and beloved in his day for making ginger root beer and "lection cake" for civic gatherings, and he is remembered fondly for this even today.<sup>11</sup>

We can contrast the remembrance of Pomp Lovejoy with another Andover slave of the same name. This other Pomp, enslaved to Captain Charles Furbush, was hanged in 1795 for murdering his owner. He was described a few years later in a sketch of early settlers of Andover in this way: "This man had been subject to fits of insanity, and kept at times under guard; but the community was shocked at the act and its circumstances of horror, and the negro was sentenced to the extreme penalty of the law."<sup>12</sup> The primary concern of the townspeople, it seems, was

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(2013): 515–23. My thinking on questions of who is represented in historical narratives and how is informed especially by work in feminist historiography, as discussed below.

<sup>10</sup> On the background of slavery in Massachusetts and the struggle for black citizenship that followed abolition, see Stephen Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic, 1829–1889* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Pam Smith, "Andover Stories: Pompey Lovejoy – 'lection cake and ginger root beer," *Andover Townsman*, August 25, 2011, [http://www.andovertownsmen.com/news/local\\_news/andover-stories-pompey-lovejoy---lection-cake-and-ginger/article\\_5aacf294-af14-5a3a-a8ee-99be38255ff2.html](http://www.andovertownsmen.com/news/local_news/andover-stories-pompey-lovejoy---lection-cake-and-ginger/article_5aacf294-af14-5a3a-a8ee-99be38255ff2.html).

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Loring Bailey, *Historical Sketches of Andover, (Comprising the Present Towns of North Andover and Andover), Massachusetts* (Boston: Houghton, 1880), 43.

ensuring their protection against the potentially deadly whims of the enslaved, accomplished in this case through execution.<sup>13</sup> Never mind that Pomp’s “fits of insanity” may have stemmed from his enslavement, the originating “circumstances of horror.” But this is not the story of slavery featured when recounting Andover’s past.<sup>14</sup>

On the one hand, it is not surprising that the Pomp who is still dotingly remembered is the one known for his gregariousness. On the other hand, we might also consider more critically how the representations of slavery function in this case. Pompey Lovejoy enables civic pride, symbolizing the romanticized idea that, although Andover, and New England more broadly, may have been complicit in the nation’s “original sin,” slavery was not so bad in New England.<sup>15</sup> This is accomplished not only by glossing over the manifold forms of violence inherent to slavery but by highlighting the social graces and intellectual achievements of at least some among the enslaved, a narrative befitting a town that is home to one of the nation’s most elite private high schools, Phillips Academy.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> We might consider this akin to the logic and mechanisms for controlling slaves in the Roman world, motivated by fears over slaves’ own lethal responses to their circumstances and the potential always for slaves to revolt (see the overview of Roman slavery below). On slave resistance and elite response, see Keith R. Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140 B.C.–70 B.C.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> I did find one instance in local press, however, recalling how “another slave named Pompey didn’t fare so well,” though this was immediately followed by the columnist’s assertion that he has found no record of slaves being mistreated in Andover. Bill Dalton, “Slaves in Andover,” *Andover Townsman*, February 14, 2013, [http://www.andovertownsman.com/community/dalton-column-slaves-in-andover/article\\_e23cfd7e-48e7-521e-b666-78b036d10025.html](http://www.andovertownsman.com/community/dalton-column-slaves-in-andover/article_e23cfd7e-48e7-521e-b666-78b036d10025.html).

<sup>15</sup> This is not like unlike treatments of slavery by scholars in the classics (and likewise Christianity), who, for a long time, characterized Greek and Roman slavery as milder in form than slavery in the United States. Such an approach served to perpetuate, whether consciously or not, the notion of an enlightened, liberal intellectual heritage inherited and sustained through classical studies (see my review of scholarship below, as well as esp. the seminal critique of Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, ed. Brent D. Shaw, exp. ed. [Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1998]). Likewise, the notion of New England as the “cradle of liberty” has long obfuscated the struggles for freedom and belonging of the enslaved and their free(d) black counterparts and progeny; see Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*, 41–83.

<sup>16</sup> Take, for example, this representation of slavery in Andover from the town newspaper: “Although there may be local stories about the mistreatment of Andover slaves, I’ve found none in the records. There is evidence

The story of the Pomp notorious for killing his owner is not simply less pleasant to tell. Investigating it further brings attention to the violence that Pomp himself endured at the hands of the free. In fact, Pomp conveyed numerous harrowing experiences to Jonathan Plummer, a white Yankee peddler, who wrote and published Pomp's account of his life and the circumstances leading to the murder of Captain Furbush (fig. 2).<sup>17</sup> Pomp attributed his own "convulsion fits" to extreme uncertainty, brutal treatment, and the mercurial nature of his various owners, especially the captain.<sup>18</sup> To tell this narrative has potential not only to indict the slaveholders and complicit freepersons of the past<sup>19</sup> but also the foundational myths of enlightenment and liberty that continue into the present.<sup>20</sup> The horror the Andover townspeople felt at Pomp's act of killing compared with the relative lack of dismay at the abuses Pomp endured, exacerbated as they were

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there that Andover's slaves were treated well and many were taught to read and write. Some slaves were treated more like servants than slaves and may have been paid for their work. There is, on record, the writing a slave once owned [*sic*] by Rev. Samuel Phillips that is articulate and sensitive, showing loyalty to his masters" (Dalton, "Slaves in Andover"). Cf. Elaine Clements, "Andover Stories: Slavery did exist in early Andover," *Andover Townsman*, July 26, 2012, [http://www.andovertownsman.com/news/local\\_news/andover-stories-slavery-did-exist-in-early-andover/article\\_781f6965-4bfd-5bf9-b0f8-f676a8b03389.html](http://www.andovertownsman.com/news/local_news/andover-stories-slavery-did-exist-in-early-andover/article_781f6965-4bfd-5bf9-b0f8-f676a8b03389.html).

<sup>17</sup> "Dying Confession of Pomp, A Negro Man, Who Was Executed at Ipswich, on the 6th August, 1795, for Murdering Capt. Charles Furbush, of Andover, Taken from the Mouth of the Prisoner, and Penned by Jonathan Plummer, Jun." (Newburyport, MA: Jonathan Plummer, 1795), <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/pomp/pomp.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Ironically, it was in prison where these fits ceased. There, Pomp describes being well cared for by clergy and the jailkeeper and his family.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Plummer followed his recounting of Pomp's words with his own interpretation, explicitly denying Pomp's reasoning and lamenting what he saw as an inability for "poor Pomp" to engage in moral discernment. As William Andrews writes, "Like many in the nineteenth century whose ontological and semiological assumptions were contradicted by slave narrators, Plummer preserved his world view by denying Pomp's" (William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865* [Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986], 51).

<sup>20</sup> For one example of the tendency to avoid and obfuscate slavery's role in building institutions revered ostensibly for their liberal ideals, see Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013). Likewise, for a reinterpretation of U.S. history that acknowledges the utter pervasiveness and enduring impacts of slavery, see Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

by freepersons,<sup>21</sup> calls into question the extent to which the generic ideal of freedom for all is ever embodied in practice by those who proclaim it, even now.<sup>22</sup>

I offer this illustration from Andover's history both because it speaks to slavery's hauntings in my own context and because it underscores how the telling of history matters and is never value neutral.<sup>23</sup> In their public recitation, the basic sketch of facts of the two Poms' lives may be reasonably accurate, but the ideological and rhetorical underpinnings of these representations and their effects go uninterrogated. When I read about free people's terror in 1795 at the violent response of someone long terrorized by the violence of enslavement, I am reminded of the discursive and material practices for controlling slaves in the Roman world. The

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<sup>21</sup> In fact, Pomp describes appealing to the Andover selectmen, or board of town officers, when he could no longer endure his treatment by a prior owner. This was the time when Pomp's convulsions began. The selectmen advised Pomp to stay longer, even as Massachusetts courts had begun issuing rulings in the early 1780s declaring that the state's new constitution, which stated that "All men are born free and equal," made slavery illegal (Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*, 7, 16). Sometime after, Captain Furbush determined to have a slave for himself. He applied to the selectmen, and they consented for Pomp to be his. We see plainly how liberal ideals embedded in social and legal discourse, and even affirmed by courts, do not always comport with widespread beliefs and practices.

<sup>22</sup> Such tensions, and even hypocrisy, have long been the subject of critique by those legally and socially marginalized. Take, for example, the poignant poetry of Langston Hughes: "Let America be America again./ Let it be the dream it used to be./ Let it be the pioneer on the plain/ Seeking a home where he himself is free./ (America never was America to me.)" (Langston Hughes, "Let America Be America Again," in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel [New York: Vintage Classics, 1995], 189).

<sup>23</sup> My understanding has been significantly shaped and inspired by work in feminist historiography that insists upon critical attention to the frameworks and presuppositions of the historiographer, seeks to uncover and illuminate anew the stories and voices of those who have traditionally been subjugated and marginalized, and makes explicit the material-discursive practices that enforce complex social-political hierarchies that value some lives and bodies over others. Such influences include, among many others, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1995); Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *Church History* 67 (1998): 1–31; Briggs, "Can an Enslaved God Liberate?"; Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996); Clarice J. Martin, "'Somebody Done Hoodoo'd the Hoodoo Man': Language, Power, Resistance, and the Effective History of Pauline Texts in American Slavery," *Semeia* 83–84 (1998): 203–33; Renita J. Weems, "Reading *Her Way* through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 57–77. See also Shelly Matthews, "Feminist Biblical Historiography," in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 233–48.

discursive construction of slaves as simultaneously useful and threatening was entwined with social-material mechanisms for constraining slaves, maximizing their value while constricting their capacity to rebel or in any ways disrupt the desires and ideals of the free.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, I see foreshadowed the pervasiveness of attitudes enabling the state killings and mass incarceration of black and brown people today, sustained by insidious notions that some people must be brought under control, even violently, lest they disrupt the desires and ideals of white supremacy.<sup>25</sup>

To draw these connections is not to erase important historical distinctions across time and place. Instead, it is to challenge the extent to which we can ever stand apart from the histories about which we write, as well as to understand historiography as a practice of and for the present.<sup>26</sup> I wonder about the present-day implications of scholarly arguments that it is unproductive and inappropriate to make moral-ethical judgments of slaveholders from the ancient past.<sup>27</sup> Contextual specificity is integral to writing a good history. Yet, insofar as history

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<sup>24</sup> In his influential, if contentious, comparative study of slave societies throughout world history, Orlando Patterson argues that slavery ought to be interpreted fundamentally “as a relation of domination rather than as a category of legal thought” (Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982], 334). As such, Patterson describes slavery as “social death” defined by “the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons” (ibid., 13). While this definition is problematic especially for the ways it occludes a view of slaves as persons still who think, act, and forge bonds even if under severe constraint, it does well to highlight the repetitive logic of dehumanization made manifest in practices that alienate, dishonor, and brutalize the enslaved.

<sup>25</sup> On the links between slavery, mass incarceration, and the degradation and depredation of black communities, see Loïc Wacquant, “Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh,” *Punishment and Society* 3 (2001): 95–133.

<sup>26</sup> In addition to the work on feminist historiography cited in note 23 above, on historiography as the use of history to organize the present, see Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., J. Albert Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 3: “We must avoid a kind of ethnocentrism that does not recognize the diversity of forms, attitudes, and circumstances surrounding human chattel bondage in ancient and modern times. It is both methodologically

is proffered for and in relationship to the present—e.g., to explain, or assert, a distinction between social-political ideologies in the Roman world and the contemporary United States—it suggests as much, or even more, about its writers as about its historical subjects.<sup>28</sup> The claim that we are set apart from the people of antiquity because we reject slavery, and they did not, conveys an attitude of liberal enlightenment that belies the repetitive logics of enslavement which linger insidiously still today.<sup>29</sup> It also ignores the anti-slavery work of some people in antiquity. Do we cordon ourselves off through the expanse of time in order to reserve judgment of peoples long gone or in hopes that we might be granted the same grace?<sup>30</sup>

My point is not to collapse temporal and spatial difference, though it is to resist drawing distinctions too starkly. I am not interested in making moral-ethical judgments of early Christians who colluded in slaveholding as if it were possible to correct injustices of the past. Instead, I am concerned to sharpen the critical lenses through which slavery is viewed. Elaborating as clearly

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anachronistic and intellectually inappropriate to hold ancient people to modern standards of morality, although the modern person can and should reject certain features of ancient morality, including slavery.”

Cf. Allen Dwight Callahn, Richard A. Horsley, and Abraham Smith, “Introduction: The Slavery of New Testament Studies,” in “Slavery in Text and Interpretation,” ed. Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley, and Abraham Smith, special issue, *Semeia* 83–84 (1998): 3: “But terror, mutilation, sadism, unchecked perversity and homicidal rage, the ‘circumstances surrounding chattel bondage,’ are no less reprehensible because they took place in antiquity. [...] Ancient Greek and Roman social critics saw these as reprehensible and did not wait for modern liberal sensibilities to denounce the rampant sexual exploitation of slaves.”

<sup>28</sup> This is an idea that has a long history in studies of the historical Jesus but has not taken hold in the study of slavery. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery, 3rd ed. (London: A. and C. Black, 1954); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2000); Kwok Pui-lan, “On Color-Coding Jesus: An Interview with Kwok Pui-lan,” in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 176–88.

<sup>29</sup> For example, many contemporary Christian prison ministries reinforce a notion of some people’s inability to engage in moral deliberation without proper (i.e., white, Christian) instruction, functioning to prop up the prison industrial complex. See Tanya Erzen, *God in Captivity: The Rise of Faith-Based Prison Ministries in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017). This is starkly reminiscent of Jonathan Plummer’s moralizing response to Pomp’s narrative, reflecting a worldview that long functioned to maintain slavery.

<sup>30</sup> I pose this question with sincerity, not to suggest that I can know the motivations of other scholars or even to know my own fully, nor to excuse myself from such critical examination.

as possible the material-discursive practices of enslavement enables attention to the variety of ways they are made manifest, not only in the past but in new forms still today.<sup>31</sup> In this way, my dissertation proposes a framework that is simultaneously historical and historiographical. That is, I seek to elaborate the history of slavery and early Christianity in a way that demonstrates as precisely as possible how discourses of slavery were intrinsically tied up with social and material practices of enslavement. At the same time, I aim to take seriously the constructive nature of historiography and its organization of the past for the present, examining critically how scholarly discourses are themselves tied up with the ideological, rhetorical, and social-material legacies of slavery.

## Slavery in the First and Second Centuries CE

Someone enslaved under the Roman Empire was considered in Roman legal codes a thing (*res* in Latin).<sup>32</sup> Such classification codified the basic concept expressed much earlier in the work of Aristotle,<sup>33</sup> for whom the slave was a thing (*ktēma* in Greek) as well as a tool (*organon*) (*Pol.* 1.1253b30–32).<sup>34</sup> Aristotle’s clear articulation of slaves as objects and instruments for use

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<sup>31</sup> For a project that examines the legacies of slavery with the aim of moving beyond them, see Bernadette J. Brooten, ed., *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> On slavery in Roman law, see Jane F. Gardner, “Slavery and Roman Law,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, ed. Keith Bradley et al., vol. 1, *The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 414–37; Alan Watson, *Roman Slave Law* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); William Warwick Buckland, *The Roman Law of Slavery: The Condition of the Slave in Private Law from Augustus to Justinian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908).

<sup>33</sup> For an overview and analysis of Aristotle’s writings on slavery, see Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 107–27.

<sup>34</sup> Within the structure of Aristotle’s *polis*, some people’s bodies naturally are tools made for service to others; they are strong and hunched over in subservience (*Pol.* 1254b28–34). Others stand upright with reasoning capacities fit for politics. Yet, Aristotle admits that this “naturalness” is not always evident from bodies and can even be deceiving. Even so, he explains that it is natural and proper for some to be ruled over by others because they lack the full capacity for reason (*Pol.* 1254b21–24), while natural rulers are those who are free (*Pol.* 1260a7–14).

typifies a notion pervasive throughout classical antiquity that those who were enslaved were *things* useful for doing certain kinds of work.<sup>35</sup> Such labors are primarily identified as physical. Indeed, the fact that the Greek word for body, *sōma*, was used frequently as a term for slaves underlines this reduction of the enslaved to the functions of their corporeality.<sup>36</sup>

The sources of slaves were multiple and shifted over time,<sup>37</sup> including capture in war,<sup>38</sup> birth by enslaved mother,<sup>39</sup> abandonment of newborns,<sup>40</sup> kidnapping, punishment for certain crimes, and limited instances of self-sale.<sup>41</sup> The work that slaves performed also varied

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Page DuBois, *Slaves and Other Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 189–205, critiques the ways “natural slavery” is taken as fundamental in Aristotle, arguing that attention to slaves is merely incidental to Aristotle’s primary interest in masters.

<sup>35</sup> Even while it is contested how widely Aristotle’s *Politics* was known in the Roman period (see Kyle Harper, “Review Article: Knowledge, Ideology, and Skepticism in Ancient Slave Studies,” *American Journal of Philology* 132 [2011]: 167), this type of instrumental understanding and use of slaves remained pervasive under the Roman Empire. However, prevailing Roman ideology did exhibit a fundamental shift away from Aristotle’s biological basis for enslavement. Romans did not necessarily hold slavery to be unnatural, and in fact some extant legal sources declare slavery to be contrary to nature (*Dig.* 1.5.4.1; *Inst.* 1.3.2). Instead, slavery was frequently understood as a consequence of fate, rooted in the capture of conquered peoples. In place of a biological imperative, one key mechanism of control was to animalize the enslaved, discursively constructing and corporeally treating slaves as animals to be domesticated and controlled. See Keith Bradley, “Animalizing the Slave: The Truth of Fiction,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000): 110–25; J. Albert Harrill, “Slavery and Inhumanity: Keith Bradley’s Legacy on Slavery in New Testament Studies,” *Biblical Interpretation* 21 (2013): 506–14.

<sup>36</sup> See esp. Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Glancy argues that even moral and theological articulations of slavery depend upon and remain rooted in “the somatic configuration of first-century slavery” (*ibid.*, 38). On the slave as a technology for certain kinds of work, see also Sheila Briggs, “Gender, Slavery, and Technology: The Shaping of the Early Christian Moral Imagination,” in *Beyond Slavery*, ed. Brooten, 159–76.

<sup>37</sup> Interpretations of the limited extent data are still debated. For an overview, see Walter Scheidel, “The Roman Slave Supply,” in *Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1, *Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Bradley and Cartledge, 287–310; cf. William V. Harris, “Demography, Geography and the Sources of Roman Slaves,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 62–75.

<sup>38</sup> On slaves originating as captives, see Walter Scheidel, “Quantifying the Sources of Slaves in the Early Roman Empire,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 87 (1997): 156–69; Keith R. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 31–56; Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, 151–54.

<sup>39</sup> See esp. Ulrike Roth, *Thinking Tools: Agricultural Slavery between Evidence and Models* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> William V. Harris, “Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994): 1–22.

<sup>41</sup> Harris, “Demography, Geography, and Sources.”

significantly.<sup>42</sup> Some were enslaved to carry out demanding physical labors on large agricultural estates and in mines.<sup>43</sup> Others were put to work in urban settings, doing domestic chores, engaging in commerce on behalf of slaveholders, working in shops and baths, acting as civil servants, and serving as religious functionaries, among other tasks.<sup>44</sup> The circumstances of enslavement were thus variegated according to a wide set of unskilled to specialized labors. Slaveholders sometimes appointed an enslaved manager (οἰκονόμος) to oversee their households or businesses. Such managerial roles could include authority over other slaves, access to estate resources, and some level of prestige as a representative of the master.<sup>45</sup> In these ways, slavery was not a static experience, and while all slaves were subjected to slaveholders' power over life and death, there was fluidity of roles within the category of the slave.

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<sup>42</sup> John Bodel, "Slave Labour and Roman Society," in *Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1, *Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Bradley and Cartledge, 311–36. On material evidence for the lives of slaves in both urban and rural settings, see Sandra R. Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> See the agricultural manuals of Columella, *de Re Rustica*; Varro, *Res Rusticae*; Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*. See also Roth, *Thinking Tools*. On women's labors in particular, see Walter Scheidel, "The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labour and Women's Life in the Ancient World (I)," *Greece & Rome* 42 (1995): 202–17; Scheidel, "The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labour and Women's Life in the Ancient World (II)," *Greece & Rome* 43 (1996): 1–10. On mechanisms for managing the labors of the enslaved, including potential resistance, see Ross Samson, "Rural Slavery, Inscriptions, Archaeology and Marx: A Response to Ramsay Macmullen's 'Late Roman Slavery,'" *Historia* 38 (1989): 99–110; Enrico Dal Lago and Constantina Katsari, "Ideal Models of Slave Management in the Roman World and in the Ante-bellum American South," in *Slave Systems: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Dal Lago and Katsari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 187–213.

<sup>44</sup> Sandra R. Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome: A Study of the Occupational Inscriptions* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma University, 1992); Sandra R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 161–214; Turgut H. Zeyrek, *House Slaves in the Greek and Roman World* (Berlin: Phillip & Phillip, 2006); Michele George, "Repopulating the Roman House," in *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space*, ed. Beryl Rawson and Paul Weaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 299–319. On the religious functions of the enslaved, see Katherine A. Shaner, "The Religious Practices of the Enslaved: A Case Study of Roman Ephesos" (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 2012); Shaner, *Enslaved Leadership in Early Christianity*; J. Albert Harrill, "Servile Functionaries or Priestly Leaders? Roman Domestic Religion, Narrative Intertextuality, and Pliny's Reference to Slave Christian *Ministreae* (Ep. 10,96,8)," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 97 (2006): 111–30.

<sup>45</sup> Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 113–15; Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 15–22.

Not only was slave status complex, it was mutable. Slaves could hold out hope for manumission, which was practiced with relative frequency in the Roman world.<sup>46</sup> Manumission might be granted after a certain period of service, frequently at the age of 30, through an owner's last testament, or it could be purchased individually or corporately. The appeal of manumission to slaveholders may have been as an enticement to slaves to be obedient and work hard so that they might earn their freedom.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, it produced an additional category of persons with their own sets of obligations and social-political limitations. Freedpersons were yoked to their prior owners through a system of patronage.<sup>48</sup> Some freedpersons garnered a measure of prestige through this perpetual connection to their former owner and performed significant civic benefactions. Yet, a person freed from enslavement still carried the *macula servitutis*, or "stain of slavery," a social stigma that continued to mark them as suspect and servile.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, though freedpersons could become citizens, they were barred from holding particular public offices and were largely prevented as a class from attaining political power.<sup>50</sup> The spectrum

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<sup>46</sup> Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 99–132; Henrik Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Lauren Hackworth Petersen, *The Freedman in Roman Art and Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Keith R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 81–112; Harrill, *Manumission of Slaves*.

<sup>47</sup> Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 131.

<sup>48</sup> Mouritsen, *Freedman in the Roman World*, 36–65; Petersen, *Freedman in Roman Art*, 1; Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 47–48.

<sup>49</sup> Mouritsen, *Freedman in the Roman World*, 10–35; Petersen, *Freedman in Roman Art*, 18. See also Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 12–14, on the stigma of the enslaved body as open to abuse.

<sup>50</sup> Mouritsen, *Freedman in the Roman World*, 66–119.

spanning slavery to freedom was variegated, characterized both by generally fixed discourses conveying strict status distinctions and by relative fluidity in and among categories in practice.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to their physical labors and utility, slaves were also useful for doing certain kinds of intellectual work. Some slaves famously taught Greek or were engaged as scribes or attained to philosophical fame, as with Epictetus. But here I am referring to the idea of slaves as tools about and with which to think.<sup>52</sup> The very existence of slaves and slavery provided productive analogies for philosophical reflection and argumentation. Many Stoics, for instance, taught that “true slavery” was not a function of legal status or physical reality but inner orientation.<sup>53</sup> Anyone free in terms of social and legal status might actually be enslaved to passions and to desires for political and social gain.<sup>54</sup> In this way, playing with the fluidity of categories inhering within the social-material practices of enslavement was productive for sharpening philosophical categories. Even as some philosophers displayed an amount of

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<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press), argues that the construction of race and ethnicity in Greco-Roman antiquity occurred in the interplay between fixity and fluidity of categories.

<sup>52</sup> Foucault’s account of the subject in classical antiquity is especially compelling in this regard (esp. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-82*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005]). Foucault writes that subjectivity was generated through care of the self, which he describes as a “privilege; it is the mark of a social superiority, as against those who must attend to others in order to serve them or attend to a trade in order to live. The advantage afforded by wealth, status, and birth is expressed by the fact that one has the possibility of attending to oneself” (ibid., 95). To be a subject is to produce knowledge through attending to oneself. Slaves enable the production of knowledge not only through attending to the elites who can then attend to themselves but also as tools with which to think about the self and world in terms of free and unfree.

<sup>53</sup> See Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery*, 128–52; John T. Fitzgerald, “The Stoics and the Early Christians on the Treatment of Slaves,” in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, ed. Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Ismo Dunderberg (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 141–75.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Epictetus, *Diss.* 4.1. Also, Philo of Alexandria argues against the idea that anyone who is sold can inherently be called a slave, just as one who purchases another is not necessarily a master (*Quod omnis* 6.38). This philosophical distinction is articulated through a dramatic reversal: a slave might be owned, but s/he can ensnare a master in his passions, thus making him a true slave (*Quod omnis* 6.38–39).

sympathy toward the enslaved, Seneca chief among them,<sup>55</sup> slavery and slaves' corporeal vulnerabilities were generally taken for granted.<sup>56</sup> Put starkly, slaves—as *things*, as mere *bodies*—were tools for both physical labor and thought.<sup>57</sup>

In both Roman and early Christian sources, then, slavery is taken not only as essential to the functioning of households and Roman economies more broadly,<sup>58</sup> but also, in varying ways, to philosophical and theological systems of thought. It matters that there are slaves who do work in the world. Yet, it is not entirely clear how the discourses that depend upon slaves actually matter for the enslaved themselves. If enslavement in early Christian discourse is somehow sometimes exemplary—as Christ himself is depicted as a slave—and if, as Paul writes, “there is no longer slave or free” (Gal 3:28), then faith in Christ might be both spiritually and socially liberating.<sup>59</sup> The enslaved might not just be tools of thought but rather subjects of knowledge, possessing and conveying vital characteristics of life in Christ. They might also literally be freed.<sup>60</sup> However, the fact that slavery persisted within early Christian communities and

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<sup>55</sup> Miriam T. Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 256–85.

<sup>56</sup> Bradley, “Seneca and Slavery,” 335–47; Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 30–34.

<sup>57</sup> DuBois, *Slaves and Other Objects*, troubles scholarly idealizations of ancient Greece by exposing ways ancient texts and materials bear the marks of slavery with their need to clarify and reinforce the distinction between free and slave or, perhaps, between subject and object.

<sup>58</sup> On the emphasis placed on maintaining an orderly household through proper control of slaves, see esp. Aristotle, *Politics*, the agricultural manuals cited above, and the New Testament household codes. See Clarice J. Martin, “The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes) in African American Biblical Interpretation: ‘Free Slaves’ and ‘Subordinate Women,’” in *Stony the Road We Trod*, 206–31.

<sup>59</sup> But see Stanley K. Stowers, “Paul and Slavery: A Response,” *Semeia* 83–84 (1998): 295–311, on the problem of importing modern liberal notions of liberation.

<sup>60</sup> There is evidence for the widespread practice among early Christians of using communal funds to purchase slaves' manumission. See J. Albert Harrill, “Ignatius, *Ad Polycarp*. 4.3 and the Corporate Manumission of Christian Slaves,” in *Manumission of Slaves*, 158–92. However, this might not always have been for humanitarian reasons, since freed slaves could then owe obligations to the community just as they would to former owners. See also, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Slave Wo/men and Freedom: Some Methodological Reflections,” in

continued to be used to denote abjection stands in tension with any liberative and empowering potentials within early Christian discourses about slavery, leaving in doubt the implications of such discourse for the lives of those literally enslaved.

## Historiography of Roman Slavery

The history of scholarship on Roman slavery can be charted along a spectrum ranging from depictions of Roman slavery as relatively benign to enslavement as utter abjection with slaves having no agency. Such disparate views can be attributed, at least in part, to different ideological presuppositions, as well as to divergent perspectives on the moral valuation of slavery in antiquity.<sup>61</sup> On the one hand, some have argued that Greek and Roman slavery were not particularly harsh, with slaves and masters sharing fairly positive relations with one another.<sup>62</sup> Joseph Vogt asserts that examples of self-sale indicate greater economic stability for slaves than for freepersons of low status.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, beginning especially with Moses Finley, many scholars have emphasized that interactions between slaves and slaveholders were fundamentally characterized by corporal brutality and fear, even for slaves of higher standing.<sup>64</sup>

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*Postcolonial Interventions: Essays in Honor of R. S. Sugirtharajah*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 123–46.

<sup>61</sup> For a critical survey of the historiography of ancient slavery and reflection on the need for scholars to be attentive to their own ideological commitments, see Niall McKeown, *The Invention of Ancient Slavery?* (London: Duckworth, 2007).

<sup>62</sup> See esp. Joseph Vogt, *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man*, trans. Thomas Wiedemann (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1974). See also John A. Crook, *Law and Life of Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

<sup>63</sup> Vogt, *Ancient Slavery*. See also Peter Temin, “The Labor Market of the Early Roman Empire,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34, no. 4 (2004): 513–38.

<sup>64</sup> Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery*; Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*; Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*; DuBois, *Slaves and Other Objects*.

While underscoring this latter perspective, Keith Bradley posits a more dynamic interplay: slavery as a mutually reinforcing system of control defined by both respectful and manipulative modes of relationality among slaves and masters.<sup>65</sup>

Studies of slavery within early Christianity have largely reproduced these general trajectories. Some scholars have taken a view of slavery among early Christians as relatively benign. Scott Bartchy, for instance, follows Vogt in arguing that slaveholders treated their slaves with decency, and slaves were in turn content, even more so with benevolent Christian masters.<sup>66</sup> Another approach, advanced by Dale Martin, reads slavery as taking on a positive valence in early Christian writings through the notion that enslavement could provide social mobility for a small number of people.<sup>67</sup> Throughout his work, Martin acknowledges the complexity of Greco-Roman slavery and notes explicitly that the possibilities for social mobility through enslavement existed only for some, not all.<sup>68</sup> While presenting a plausible reading of slavery language, the risk of Martin's approach is that it ultimately emphasizes an understanding of what it means to be a "slave of Christ" that would have resonated with very few, perhaps only those for whom social mobility was a real possibility.<sup>69</sup> Others have insisted upon a Jewish background as the

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<sup>65</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*. See also Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*.

<sup>66</sup> S. Scott Bartchy, *ΜΑΛΑΚΟΝ ΧΡΗΣΑΙ: First-Century Slavery and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:21* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1973); Bartchy, "Slavery (Greco-Roman)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, ed. David Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 65–73.

<sup>67</sup> Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*. Contrary to the assumed immutable degradation of the slave position, slavery to Christ makes sense within a Greco-Roman context wherein a slave's status is linked to the status of the master and slavery can be a means of social mobility for some persons (ibid., xxii).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 15–49.

<sup>69</sup> While Martin's reading may be plausible, it can also serve too easily to support the veneration of Paul as a theologically liberating hero, occluding attention to the perpetuation of systems of exploitation. DuBois, *Slaves and Other Objects*, 10, warns against the "fetishizing of antiquity as a site of origin for Western culture," which aptly extends to the danger of fetishizing Paul's letters a site of origin for (Western) Christianity. See also Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre and Laura Nasrallah, "Beyond the Heroic Paul: Toward a Feminist and Decolonizing Approach

touchstone for understanding Paul's positive use of slavery language, drawing out a link from the motif of Hebrew prophets as "slaves of God."<sup>70</sup> These approaches share the tendency of abstracting slavery discourses from the social-material circumstances of enslavement, reading slavery merely as metaphorical.

Following the shift marked by Moses Finley, a significant strand of scholarship on slavery and early Christianity has sought to underscore the exploitative and dehumanizing nature of enslavement's hierarchies.<sup>71</sup> Against this grim depiction of Roman enslavement, scholars such as Richard Horsley have argued that early Christians, and Paul in particular, resisted such brutality, envisioning and seeking instead to practice a new form of egalitarianism.<sup>72</sup> This heroization of Paul glosses over debates and struggles within the communities to which he wrote<sup>73</sup> and belies the indeterminate witness of Paul's attitude toward social hierarchies.<sup>74</sup> In

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to the Letters of Paul," in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. Christopher Stanley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 161–74.

<sup>70</sup> See John Byron, *Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline Christianity: A Tradition-Historical and Exegetical Examination* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). According to Byron, Paul presents Christ as the paradigmatic slave of God. Christ exemplifies what Byron identifies as a typical Jewish pattern of *Humiliation-Obedience-Exaltation*, which is to be imitated by Christians through "enslavement" to others. This will in turn serve as an example more broadly, ultimately showcasing how faith in Christ engenders obedience to God, which is to live as God's slaves and not slaves to the world (ibid., 258–63). Byron is right to bring forward Jewish motifs as relevant for understanding the context of the Pauline text and its interpretation. However, Byron's reading remains abstracted from the physical realities of slavery, which can only be sustained at the level of elite discourse wherein slavery can be a tool of thought and not subjugation.

<sup>71</sup> As representative of this shift in early Christian studies, see esp. Allen Dwight Callahan and Richard A. Horsley, "Slave Resistance in Classical Antiquity," in "Slavery in Text and Interpretation," ed. Allen Dwight Callahan, Richard A. Horsley, and Abraham Smith, special issue, *Semeia* 83–84 (1998): 133–51.

<sup>72</sup> Richard A. Horsley, "Paul and Slavery: A Critical Alternative to Recent Readings," *Semeia* 83–84 (1998): 153–200.

<sup>73</sup> See esp. Johnson-DeBaufre and Nasrallah, "Beyond the Heroic Paul"; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Slave Wo/men and Freedom"; Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets*.

<sup>74</sup> Stowers, "Paul and Slavery," offers a strong rebuke of Horsley's position as difficult to sustain. For a blistering critique of scholarship promoting Christian exceptionalism, see Hector Avalos, *Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Ethics of Biblical Scholarship* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011). But see also the review of Avalos's work by J. Albert Harrill, *Biblical Interpretation* 21 (2013): 547–49, which highlights the obscuring effects of

contrast, Albert Harrill reads Paul's letters and other New Testament texts as largely replicating the discursive construction of slavery evident in Greek and Roman literary works.<sup>75</sup> He argues that such writings do not necessarily reflect reality but function to shore up elite ideologies and social control. The problem for reconstructing the lives of slaves, of which Harrill is aware, is that extant literary sources do not explicitly preserve the voices and experiences of the enslaved but in general use stereotypes and stock characters to justify and perpetuate slavery.<sup>76</sup>

Jennifer Glancy likewise emphasizes how discourses of slavery shore up the dominance of free elites.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, her study stands as a corrective to work that focuses primarily on theological and discursive dimensions of slavery language. Glancy directs attention to slave corporeality and the implications of thinking about and with slavery on the actual bodies of the enslaved.<sup>78</sup> Understanding the language of slavery in texts as more than literary convention, she reads discursive deployments of the figure of the slave as dependent upon and rooted in "the somatic configuration of first-century slavery."<sup>79</sup> In turn, Glancy urges recognition of the impact of slavery discourses on the bodies and lives of the enslaved. When Paul gives instructions prohibiting *porneia*, for instance, he invokes Roman practices often involving the use of slaves,

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Avalos's own avowed ideological presuppositions. For a measured, concise overview of the range of early Christian responses to slavery, including both accommodation and resistance, see Sheila Briggs, "Engaging the Work."

<sup>75</sup> J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 35–57. See also Kathleen McCarthy, *Slaves, Masters, and the Art of Authority in Plautine Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 22–25.

<sup>77</sup> Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., esp. 9–38.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 38.

whose bodies were ever vulnerable to nonconsensual sexual service.<sup>80</sup> Yet, Paul does not consider the social and theological implications for slaves. Glancy's attention to this incongruence highlights lack of concern among ancient writers and many modern interpreters for the lives of the enslaved, if not the outright exclusion of slaves from the ability to participate fully within Christian *ekklēsiai*.<sup>81</sup>

While their work exhibits important overlaps regarding the pervasiveness of slaveholding ideologies in early Christian writings, Glancy's and Harrill's differing frameworks and emphases demonstrate crucial historiographical challenges across studies of ancient slavery.<sup>82</sup> With extant materials skewed almost exclusively toward the perspectives of freepersons, whether and how it is possible to reconstruct the lives of slaves remains a vexing question.<sup>83</sup> Harrill concludes that literary conventions thoroughly evince elite attitudes toward slaves, while Glancy presses further to ask how ideologies of slaveholding affected slaves in practice. Reconstructing slave narratives is a historiographical problem across time and place, not just for antiquity. However, this is not because the enslaved do not have dynamic lives and thoughts of their own but because free(d)persons have constructed their own narratives—socially, philosophically, materially, and literarily—in no small part through their objectification and exploitation of slaves, which has itself depended especially on the erasure of slaves' humanity—socially, philosophically,

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<sup>80</sup> 1 Thess 4:3–8, 1 Cor 5:1–13, and 1 Cor 7:1–24. See Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 49–50, 57–69.

<sup>81</sup> Jennifer A. Glancy, "Obstacles to Slaves' Participation in the Corinthian Church," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 481–501.

<sup>82</sup> See the public debate between Glancy and Harrill over historiographical implications. Jennifer A. Glancy, "Slavery, Historiography, and Theology," *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007): 200–11; J. Albert Harrill, "The Slave Still Appears: A Historiographical Response to Jennifer Glancy," *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007): 212–21; Glancy, "Response to Harrill," *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007): 222–24.

<sup>83</sup> Keith Bradley, "Roman Slavery: Retrospect and Prospect," *Canadian Journal of History* 43 (2008): 477–500.

materially, and literarily.<sup>84</sup> But traces of slaves remain if we inquire after them, revisit materials that are often too quickly set aside or discarded out of prejudice for elite remains, and cast familiar evidence in a different light.<sup>85</sup>

To do this work of inquiring after the traces of slaves, I begin with two fundamental assumptions. First, treatments of slaves and slavery in early Christian writings are not “merely” theological, metaphorical, or rhetorical but are embedded in the social-material practices of Roman enslavement.<sup>86</sup> That is, they depend upon, draw from, and have implications for a world in which there are slaves, masters, and free(d)persons relating to one another within social, legal, philosophical, and material frameworks and practices whereby some human beings are owned as property. Any theological implications or rhetorical effectiveness of the discursive treatments of slaves within early Christian literature derive first from the legibility of these discourses within the social-material world of their writing and early reception.<sup>87</sup>

Second, agency may be differently construed and constrained in varied contexts, but those who are marginalized and oppressed are subjects in their own right. That is, short of inflicting death—a power that certainly ought to be taken seriously<sup>88</sup>—domination is never

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<sup>84</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*; William Fitzgerald, *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

<sup>85</sup> On looking beyond canonical texts of slavery and filling in gaps in the archive, see Nicole N. Aljoe and Ian Finseth, ed., *Journeys of the Slave Narrative in the Early Americas* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014); Nicole N. Aljoe, *Creole Testimonies: Slave Narratives from the British West Indies, 1709–1838* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>86</sup> See esp. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, with her attention to slave bodies, especially their corporeal treatment and rhetorical uses.

<sup>87</sup> On discursive legibility, see Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>88</sup> Michel Foucault considers the elite privilege of determining the life and death of subordinates to be a distinctive marker of antiquity, with the site of the Roman family typifying such power. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 133–59.

absolute,<sup>89</sup> and there are always possibilities for subjected subjects to make sense of their circumstances and act toward their best advantage, if not outright freedom.<sup>90</sup> While we lack clear evidence from antiquity for subtle enslaved strategies for survival and even to undermine slaveholders' authority,<sup>91</sup> the assumption that slaves actively negotiated their social-material situations is grounded in broader persistent histories of people resisting their oppression.<sup>92</sup> For chattel slavery in the modern period, particularly in the United States, we have first-hand accounts from slaves who documented their use and abuse, as well as their efforts at maintaining dignity, asserting familial ties and histories, working their sale toward more advantageous situations, claiming the power of religious thought and practice, and sometimes outright resisting their masters' power.<sup>93</sup>

Within early Christian literature, we do catch glimpses of the contingencies of slave and free identities. This becomes evident especially in the divergent trajectories of interpretation of Paul's letters. Already for those writing in Paul's name in the deuterio-Pauline and Pastoral

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<sup>89</sup> Butler, *Excitable Speech*; see also eadem, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>90</sup> See Saba Mahmood on the privileging of Western secular-liberal articulations of freedom, especially within feminist discourses. Mahmood argues for forms of agency that are not necessarily synonymous with resistance to relations of domination. Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16 (2001): 202–36.

<sup>91</sup> But see Joshel and Hackworth Petersen, *Material Life of Roman Slaves*, on reading material remains alongside literary evidence to imagine more vividly the tactics by which slaves navigated and resisted the pernicious effects of their enslavement. See also Callahan and Horsley, "Slave Resistance in Classical Antiquity."

<sup>92</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>93</sup> Vincent Brown, "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery," *American Historical Review* 114 (2009): 1231–1249; Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Martin, "Somebody Done Hoodoo'd"; Robert M. Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

epistles, there appears a need to reassert distinctions of status, which feminists have read against the grain to aver that some among the early followers of Christ were disrupting traditional roles, including those of slave and free status.<sup>94</sup> The command “slaves, obey your masters” suggests that at least some slaves were resisting their masters’ commands.<sup>95</sup> By the second century, there is evidence for Christians using communal funds to purchase the manumission of slaves within their communities of fellow believers.<sup>96</sup> While this practice was not unique to Christians,<sup>97</sup> forms of Christian resistance to and even rejection of slavery persisted such that John Chrysostom’s fourth-century preface to his homilies on Philemon betrayed anxieties over Christianity being perceived as “having been introduced into life for the overthrow of everything, masters having their slaves taken away from them.”<sup>98</sup>

This later data evinces divergent early Christian treatments of and responses to slavery. Seeing the outlines of these different trajectories, I ask in what ways the earliest evidence from Paul may have played a role, or reflected discourses already underway, to set into motion a variety of reactions to practices of enslavement among Christ followers. I do not assume that these disparate paths would have emerged flatly and steadily from two basic, opposing options:

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<sup>94</sup> Martin, “The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes)”; Schüssler Fiorenza, “Slave Wo/men and Freedom.”

<sup>95</sup> See also the discussion of *Life of Aesop* in chapter 1, particularly on how slaves’ activities and ingenuity can confound the response of their masters.

<sup>96</sup> Harrill, “Ignatius, *Ad Polycarp*. 4.3.” Freedom may have been tempered, though, through the expectation of engaging in the regular system of patronage upon manumission.

<sup>97</sup> E. Leigh Gibson, *The Jewish Manumission Inscriptions of the Bosporus Kingdom* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

<sup>98</sup> *Hom. Phlm., Argumentum*. ἐπὶ ἀνατροπῇ τῶν πάντων ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς εἰς τὸν βίον εἰσενήνεκται, τῶν δεσποτῶν ἀφαιρουμένων τοὺς οἰκέτας (PG 62:704; translation modified from NPNF<sup>1</sup> 13:546). This is discussed in greater depth in chapter 2.

either support for or rejection of slavery. Instead, I understand enslavement itself as constituted in the dynamic relationships among slaves, masters, and other free(d)persons.<sup>99</sup>

### **Feminist and Queer Frameworks of Analysis**

One challenge of foregrounding slaves in early Christian writings is the problem of ferreting out the relationship between discourses and historical subjects.<sup>100</sup> Discourses of slavery should not be confused with direct access to historical slaves.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, most extant evidence of Roman slavery is mediated through the perspectives of the relatively elite and free. I draw upon black feminist thought on history and slavery's legacies, studies of rhetoric, and questions in the sciences about things and our perceptions of them in order to rethink the relationship between slavery discourse and slaves themselves.

#### *Learning from Black Feminists to Look Differently*

In rethinking how dominant representations of slaves correspond to the lives of the enslaved, I take inspiration from black feminist and womanist scholars who juxtapose analysis of slavery's utter dehumanization with narratives foregrounding the subjectivity of the enslaved and

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<sup>99</sup> On the identities as forged through contingent, dynamic relationality, see Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

<sup>100</sup> See, e.g., Clark, "The Lady Vanishes."

<sup>101</sup> By way of analogy, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza says of gender: "Women are neglected in the writing of history although the effects of their lives and actions are a reality in history. Ideas of men *about* women, therefore, do not reflect women's historical reality, since it can be shown that ideological polemics about women's place, role, or nature increase whenever women's actual emancipation and active participation in history become stronger" (Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 85).

their progeny. As Saidiya Hartman writes of her project to illuminate the entanglement of terror and resistance in the constitution of black identity:

The intervention made here is an attempt to recast the past, guided by the conundrums and compulsions of our contemporary crisis: the hope for social transformation in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, the quixotic search for a subject capable of world-historical action, and the despair induced by the lack of one. In this regard, it is hoped that the instances of insurgency and contestation narrated herein and the relentless proliferation of small acts of resistance perhaps offer some small measure of encouragement and serve to remind us that the failures of Reconstruction still haunt us, which in part explains why the grand narratives continue to hold sway over our imagination.<sup>102</sup>

In the failure of grand narratives to overthrow oppressive systems, it is best to look at historical evidence of resistance as an opening point for continued work toward freedom.<sup>103</sup> Attentiveness to the subjectivity of the exploited, marginalized, and oppressed demands attention to the forging of identities in the spaces and struggles between absolute subordination and freedom.

Kimberly Juanita Brown turns to writers and visual artists who highlight the wounds of slavery's brutality that are passed down and re-presented on the broken bodies of black women.<sup>104</sup> This is not somehow to glorify abjection or to leave the impression that black women's bodies are primarily characterized by vulnerability. Rather, it is to correct narratives that eschew acknowledgment of such vulnerabilities as real and important. "In the contemporary," Brown writes:

there can be no accounting for the total enclosure of slavery and its aftermath without being attuned to the aural and imagistic mandates that locate themselves at the site of the

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<sup>102</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 14. See also Brown, "Social Death and Political Life," who argues against Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, that the social death of slavery is not totalizing but that we can view slave agency in everyday acts of resistance and survival.

<sup>103</sup> On dealing also with the loss of historical memory, see Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

<sup>104</sup> Kimberly Juanita Brown, *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

event. There can be no telling of this story without making black women central, no way to see the indexical force of the horrendous event of transnational slavery unless the way of seeing, the sight and the sound of it, is rearticulated and black women are at the center of the frame.<sup>105</sup>

This “emphasis of black feminist articulation gives us a totality of vision attuned to the visual properties of slavery’s memory. The resonant echoes of slavery’s memory have a genealogy that is repetitive, and rituals and gestures that are cadent and fluid. They allow us to see how black women must occupy the center of the frame of a system that literally gave birth to modernity.”<sup>106</sup> Brown demonstrates how legacies of enslavement are visually re-presented on the bodies and in the lives of black women today, especially in art that seeks to ground contemporary subjects in the history of ancestors forced literally to bear the burdens of birthing and building a nation.

While materially and discursively figured as incidental to the achievements of the white elites who are recognized as founding and advancing the U.S.’s putatively lofty ideals, shifting the view to black women, now and then, enables a more complete vision of history and its effects. For example, Brown analyzes what it means for artist and activist Carrie Mae Weems to represent historical figures and situations through portraits of black women today, including of herself. In one, Weems appears as Sally Hemings, slave of Thomas Jefferson (fig. 3). Brown observes:

Weems-as-Hemings represents self-portraiture’s resurrecting possibilities within a black Atlantic self-reflective imperative. She is a figure of both mystery and mastery. Arms crossed in front and with her head facing the direction of a window the viewer cannot see, the faint appearance of light the only indication of a reprieve from total enclosure, Weems offers the slight inference of a failure of communication between the two. Not just quill against gesture, Jefferson is illustrated as fully clothed while Hemings’s shoulders and arms are bare, an errant shoulder strap either absentmindedly or purposely drawn down, illustrating the framing mechanism’s perspective of choice. If, as Saidiya

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 8.

Hartman claims, ‘the discourse of seduction obfuscates the primacy and extremity of violence in master-slave relations,’ Weems-as-Hemings delineates this concept as a failure of the archive, or an available archive that others refused to see.<sup>107</sup>

How do we know when an archive has failed or when we have failed to see it? Weems does not erase the tortured power relations that have valued certain bodies and histories over others but seeks to make visible those long obscured. As Brown writes, “That Hemings’s body is the text upon which democracy stands and modernity forms allows Weems the ability to perform a postemancipation declaration of slave visibility.”<sup>108</sup> With Jefferson dominating the scene, it appears that his story is the one demanding to be told. But this may be what Hemings knows, that she does not have to look back, that she controls her narrative within herself, undistracted, not like him. Perhaps she knows something of the power of her own body.

To visualize slavery as repeated on contemporary bodies that are legally free is not to forget the pernicious legacies of slavery’s atrocities. At the same time, this insistence on not forgetting in black women’s literary and artistic representations underscores the extraordinary capacities of black women’s bodies to be redeployed and re-presented toward black flourishing. Turning to Brown again: “It also allows a space for a visual legacy of slave testimony to signal regeneration to future generations of slave women’s progeny with the promise held within her body. The framing of fabric and image around a like image of the author implicates while it liberates and complicates a story of captivity and survival.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 55.

## *Intersectional Analysis of Kyriarchy*

To elucidate the material-discursive uses of slaves in early Christianity, I begin by following Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's call to work toward a mode of "reframing representation." "This mode generates sociohistorical questions of survival, justice, and well-being, not in order to get the answers from the bible [*sic*] in an uncritical fashion, but in order to study whether and how the bible [*sic*] shapes Christian history and imaginary in terms of radical equality, justice, and well-being for all wo/men in the *cosmopolis*."<sup>110</sup> In this mode, it is not enough simply to ask what is said *about* slaves, or even how these representations work to privilege and sustain slaveholding ideologies, but to read "texts as rhetorical arguments that engage actual problems and opinions."<sup>111</sup>

Toward this end, my project is grounded in critical feminist intersectional analysis of kyriarchy as expounded by Schüssler Fiorenza.<sup>112</sup> The analytic of kyriarchy moves beyond the narrower conception of patriarchy to delineate a complex pyramidal social structure in which elite propertied men—those who are *kyrioi*, lords or masters—rule over the many. *Intersectional* analysis of kyriarchy calls attention, then, to the variety of aspects of one's identity and social standing—including gender, ethnicity, and status—that enable or constrain, to differing degrees, a person's options and freedoms (or not) in life. This builds upon the concept of intersectionality

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<sup>110</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 26. See *ibid.*, 25–26, for Schüssler Fiorenza's response to Elizabeth Clark's articulation of the relationship between discourse and historical subjects.

<sup>111</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, "Slave Wo/men," 131.

<sup>112</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 111–16.

first introduced and developed by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.<sup>113</sup> The various subordinations one might face are not additive—as if, for example, the social and material limitations of being a slave are simply added onto the social-material limitations of being a woman; instead, they are multiplicative.<sup>114</sup>

Kyriarchy is perpetuated not just through social-material practices but through discourses that advance and seek to “naturalize” its logic.<sup>115</sup> Thus, I follow Schüssler Fiorenza also in cultivating a critical feminist rhetoric of inquiry.<sup>116</sup> Texts and the discourses they engage are rhetorical in the fundamental sense that they seek to persuade. To read discourses of slavery in terms of the ways they engender kyriarchal domination is not to assume that texts are descriptive of slaves’ reality but to recognize that they seek to be productive of it within particular historical-rhetorical situations.<sup>117</sup> As such, a critical feminist rhetoric of inquiry does not only underscore the persuasive aims of texts but inquires after the perspectives of those who are meant to be persuaded to think and do otherwise.<sup>118</sup> Hence, Schüssler Fiorenza lays out a methodological argument for “envisioning the struggles of slave wo/men for freedom” by reading against the

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<sup>113</sup> Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991): 1241–99.

<sup>114</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Power of the Word*, 14–15. Moreover, within specific contexts, the various aspects of a person’s position vis-à-vis kyriarchal structures amplify potentials either for subordination or control. See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies*, 113–15, on contextual constellations of kyriarchy.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 110, 113–14.

<sup>116</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 85–96.

<sup>117</sup> On Paul addressing matters of slavery and freedom, not abstractly but for certain situations and toward certain ends, Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “The conflicts in Galatia or Corinth were not debates about abstract the\*logical concepts but about different ways of viewing the world and about rhetorical struggles to define the self-understanding and life of the *ekklēsia*” (Schüssler Fiorenza, “Slave Wo/men and Freedom,” 135).

<sup>118</sup> “A shift of theoretical attention from Paul to slave wo/men as historical agents,” Schüssler Fiorenza explains, “requires a shift from a history of ideas to a history of struggles, from text to context” (*ibid.*).

grain of rhetoric aimed at the (re)subordination of slaves in the face of resistance and collective commitments to liberation.<sup>119</sup>

### *Feminist New Materialism*

I too shift attention from Paul, especially theology abstracted from its social-material conditioning, to the enslaved. What is discursively construed is not necessarily fixed materially. Here I take cues from feminist new materialist frameworks that seek to deconstruct binaries between human and nonhuman, words and matter. As Karen Barad frames the problem, “there are assumed to be two distinct and independent kinds of entities—representations and entities to be represented.”<sup>120</sup> That is, there is an assumed distinction between things—bodies, matter—and what is said about those things. Often, humans (some more than others) are thought to have unique and autonomous capacities for representing the world through discourse, with these ideas shaping the ways that humans understand themselves and the world and the ways they interact with each other and matter. Yet, Barad argues that

To think of discourse as mere spoken or written words forming descriptive statements is to enact the mistake of representationalist thinking. Discourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said. Discursive practices define what counts as meaningful statements. Statements are not the mere utterances of the originating consciousness of a unified subject; rather, statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities. This field of possibilities is not static or singular but rather is a dynamic and contingent multiplicity.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 136–41.

<sup>120</sup> Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (2003): 804.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 819.

Rather than understanding discourse as comprised of discrete thoughts and expressions, we might think instead about discursive practices in terms of *performativity*.<sup>122</sup> Ideas are not merely inscribed on bodies—both human and nonhuman—but are enacted in dynamic relationality. Moreover, conceptions of bodies are not limited by singular ideals but are shaped in the interplay of thoughts, practices, affects, and effects of bodies upon one another.

As such, discourses of slavery might not contain slave flesh and blood, but they impinge upon and move through bodies, both slave and free(d), wherever slavery is performed and (re)generated. Slaves are not merely discursively construed and then perfectly controlled, but their very representations as slaves are sustained through social-material practices that are always ever responsive to and informed by how slaves act in the world.<sup>123</sup> It can be said, then, that discourse shapes social-material practices, which constrain the lives of slaves, as well as free(d)persons.<sup>124</sup> In turn, slaves and their ways of being and acting in the world constitute, in part, social-material practices, which inform and shape discourse. There is no slavery discourse, then, apart from the lives of the enslaved. To read against the grain of slavery discourses is to recognize the ways these discourses are always ever contingent upon their enactments by slaves and free(d)persons in the social-material world.

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<sup>122</sup> Barad proposes a “posthumanist materialist account of performativity” in part as a way of thinking through and beyond Judith Butler’s account of performativity: “A crucial part of the performative account that I have proposed is a rethinking of the notions of discursive practices and material phenomena and the relationship between them. On an agential realist account, discursive practices are not human-based activities but rather specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted. And matter is not a fixed essence; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency. And performativity is not understood as iterative citationality (Butler) but rather iterative intra-activity” (ibid., 828). Cf. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*.

<sup>123</sup> See Butler, *Excitable Speech*, esp. 10–16, on the potentials for interpellations to be resisted. The responses provoked belie elite fantasies of absolute control, evincing the contingencies inhering in dynamic human relations.

<sup>124</sup> Mayra Rivera Rivera, “A Labyrinth of Incarnations: The Social Materiality of Bodies,” *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 22 (2014): 187–98.

## *Queer Frameworks*

Throughout the dissertation, I draw also on queer thought and practice that sustain life on the edges of otherness. More precisely, I make use of queer theoretical frameworks operating on three intertwined registers. First, I read queerness as constitutive, in part, of the slave. Queer does not stand only as a marker of sexual identity, though the sexual use of slaves is a significant mechanism by which slaves are rendered incapable of embodying Roman ideals of self-mastery.<sup>125</sup> Instead, as Stephen Moore articulates, queer “is a supple cipher both for what *stands over against* the normal and the natural to oppose, and thereby define, them, and what *inheres within* the normal and the natural to subvert, and indeed pervert, them—this opposition and subversion privileging, but by no means being confined to, the mercurial sphere of the sexual.”<sup>126</sup> Slaves are construed as queer in the ways they are characterized and treated as not fully human, as things to be controlled.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, material-discursive mechanisms for constraining slaves evince the idea that, left to their own devices, slaves would subvert the ideals of freedom. At the same time, I follow Jasbir Puar in articulating queerness as not only resistant to but also complicit in the reification of dominant ideologies.<sup>128</sup> That is, for slaves to be queer is

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<sup>125</sup> On slaves’ sexual availability as a potential barrier to slaves being counted as fully Christian, see Jennifer A. Glancy, “Obstacles to Slaves’ Participation in the Corinthian Church,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 481–501.

<sup>126</sup> Stephen D. Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 18.

<sup>127</sup> See chapter 1 for discussion of how more precisely queerness can be read as operative in Roman slavery.

<sup>128</sup> While I press here upon the possibilities for resistance, I do not lose sight of the complicities with dominant formations that can perpetuate certain kyriarchal ideals as queer arrangements variously resist and align with prevailing norms and ideals. On the interplay of resistance and complicity, see Jasbir K. Puar, “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” *Social Text* 84–85, vol. 23, nos. 3–4 (2005): 121–39.

not for them only ever to undermine their slaveholders. The enslaved have some incentives to conform to their master's will, the prospect of manumission chief among them. The queerness of slavery, then, is characterized by the interplay of resistance and complicity within the dynamic and contingent relations between slaves and free(d)persons.<sup>129</sup>

Second, I emphasize the ways queerness can become a space for cultivating alternative forms of kinship. To be discursively named as queer is to be identified as monstrously other, even as unworthy of life. But it is also to be identified, and that identification has become a site for socially and materially enacting and celebrating non-normative subjectivities and relationality.<sup>130</sup> In slavery, denying legal recognition of familial relationships among the enslaved, as well as disrupting enslaved families in practice, functions to dehumanize slaves and exhibit a master's control over all facets of slaves' social and material lives.<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, slaves can seek to maintain meaningful relationships as families and friends.<sup>132</sup> Giving attention to queer kinship, i.e., claims to intimate relationality where such has been denied, resists seeing slaves only ever as defined by the terms of their masters. While the historical record may not make obvious how slaves navigated their circumstances, I work from the assumption that the

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<sup>129</sup> On such contingency, see Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ* 1 (1993): 18: "Indeed, I can only say 'I' to the extent that I have first been addressed, and that address has mobilized my place in speech; paradoxically, the discursive condition of social recognition *precedes* and *conditions* the formation of the subject: recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject. Further, the impossibility of a full recognition, that is, of ever fully inhabiting the name by which one's social identity is inaugurated and mobilized, implies the instability and incompleteness of subject-formation. The 'I' is thus a citation of the place of the 'I' in speech, where that place has a certain priority and anonymity with respect to the life it animates: it is the historically revisable possibility of a name that precedes and exceeds me, but without which I cannot speak."

<sup>130</sup> Butler, "Critically Queer," 17–32.

<sup>131</sup> Natal alienation is one of the key constitutive elements of slavery leading Orlando Patterson to define slavery as "social death" (Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5–8).

<sup>132</sup> I discuss this in greater depth in chapter 2.

queerness of slavery was not only constraining but also enabling, typified by queer kinship among the enslaved.

Finally, my work takes inspiration from and contributes to queer historiography, which underscores contingent relationships across temporal and spatial boundaries, seeking tangible connection with the past.<sup>133</sup> Queer historiography self-consciously takes seriously the desire to touch across time, to cultivate relationships with history's queer, non-normative subjects in ways that are mutually informative.<sup>134</sup> The past and present are resources for understanding one another. This is not to imply the expectation of exact parallels across divergent contexts but to recognize the contingencies and contradictions between discursive representations and social-material life at any given time.<sup>135</sup> What queer historiography means for studies of slavery, for instance, is moving beyond the basic use of later data to fill in gaps in the ancient record, as some scholars have proposed particularly for imagining slave resistance. While in many ways commendable, such approaches can function to reinforce notions that the modern period is paradigmatic for enlightened subjects exercising agency. Instead, I propose bringing contemporary conceptions of queerness into contact with the remains of ancient slavery in order

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<sup>133</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). See also the forum on Dinshaw's work in *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10 (2001): 165–212.

<sup>134</sup> As Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 1, writes, "I follow what I call a queer historical impulse, an impulse toward making connections across time between, on the one hand, lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then and, on the other, those left out of current sexual categories now. Such an impulse extends the resources for self- and community building into even the distant past."

<sup>135</sup> Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 12, puts it this way with regard to histories of sex: "One thing that makes this history queer is its view that sex is heterogeneous and indeterminate—not the view that we can never know what really happened sexually in past cultures because their immediacy is lost, but the view that sex (sex acts, sexual desire, sexual identity, sexual subjectivity, sexuality, all of which I shall analyze as inflected by other cultural phenomena, and all of which, here for convenience only, I lump under the rubric 'sex') is at least in part contingent on systems of representation, and, as such, is fissured and contradictory."

to feel out, so to speak, the contingent relationality, resistance, and complicity inhering within practices of Roman enslavement.

For example, the forced sexual availability of slaves meant that they could be prostituted by their owners.<sup>136</sup> This may have caused a problem for slaves who sought to participate in Christian *ekklēsiai* in light of Paul's teaching to shun, or more literally to flee (φεύγετε) *porneia*.<sup>137</sup> Slaves would not have had the right to refuse their sexual exploitation. However, slaves were known to flee from their masters for any number of reasons.<sup>138</sup> We may not have evidence for slaves responding to Paul's teaching by literally fleeing *porneia*, but such potential is brought to light by reading the text as embedded in its social-material context. Whether Paul had slaves in mind when penning his letter, the world of *porneia* that he invoked and engaged was tied up, at least partially, with enslavement. To recognize the queerness of slavery, and so the dynamic possibilities for slaveholding ideologies and practices to be resisted, confirmed, or subtly reconfigured, is to acknowledge that textual representations may conceal their provisional nature but cannot guarantee a singular response. A queer historiography touches upon the possibilities for slaves' alternative, queer responses to their social-material circumstances.

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<sup>136</sup> On slaves as prostitutes, see Thomas A. J. McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 55–77.

<sup>137</sup> On the meaning of *porneia* and the shift from the morally neutral classical Greek sense of sex that does not violate a free woman's honor, generally with a prostitute or slave, to a catch-all for condemned sexual behavior in Paul's writing and Second Temple Jewish texts, see Kyle Harper, "Porneia: The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131 (2012): 363–83; Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), esp. 86–93. On the problem of *porneia* for slaves, see Glancy, "Obstacles to Slaves' Participation."

<sup>138</sup> On evidence for concerted efforts to prevent slave flight and apprehend fugitive slaves, see Christopher J. Fuhrmann, "'Arrest me, for I have run away': Fugitive-Slave Hunting in the Roman Empire," chap. 2 in *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administrations, and Public Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

## *Looking Differently at Blandina*

This dissertation struggles to disrupt scholarly conversations that bifurcate “real slaves” from their representations. Without first-hand accounts from slaves themselves, we are left to excavate the traces of slaves’ presence in sources that primarily reflect the interests and perspectives of freepersons. But one of the salient implications of feminist and queer work for (re)examining the images—textual and visual—of enslavement in antiquity is to look differently. Where we do find slaves, and especially slave women, we can reframe the ancient images so to bring the enslaved into the center. And where the slave body is already at the fore but in a kyriarchal frame, we can look differently, as Kimberly Juanita Brown avers, to see how the image “implicates while it liberates and complicates a story of captivity and survival.”<sup>139</sup> I begin here with the representation of Blandina, an enslaved woman and Christian martyr. Her body is not abstracted from social-material enslavement but bears the repetitions of slaveholding’s material-discursive force. Simultaneously, though, she “signal[s] regeneration to future generations of slave women’s progeny with the promise held within her body.”<sup>140</sup>

Blandina’s story is recounted in the *Ecclesiastical History* of the fourth-century bishop and historian Eusebius, who claims to be citing a letter written in the second century.<sup>141</sup> Blandina is one of a group of Christians who faced trial and eventual death for insistence upon faith in Christ. According to Eusebius, these particular persecutions occurred in Gaul in 177 CE under

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<sup>139</sup> Brown, *Repeating Body*, 55.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Translations in this section are modified from Roy J. Deferrari, trans., *Ecclesiastical History: Books 1–5* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005). My overview benefits also from the historical contextualization, commentary, and insights in Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Elizabeth A. Goodine and Matthew W. Mitchell, “The Persuasiveness of a Woman: The Mistranslation and Misinterpretation of Eusebius’ *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.1.41,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 13 (2005): 1–19.

the reign of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. The martyrs are held up as models of ultimate endurance in faith. Eusebius explains that their stories come in the form of a letter sent from churches in Lyons and Vienne, two prominent cities in Gaul.

Blandina is presented as especially exemplary among those who suffered. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that Blandina was a slave. Since her role as a slave was subsumed under the authority of her master,<sup>142</sup> it is striking that the account of Blandina's martyrdom shows a remarkable reversal. Blandina's mistress is included with her among those named as facing trial and torture, and yet it is Blandina whose resolve is remarkable. In contrast, Blandina's mistress herself fears that she will not be able to persist in confessing that she is a Christian:

All the wrath of the mob and of the governor and of the soldiers beyond all measure fell upon... Blandina, through whom Christ pointed out that the things among humans which appear mean and obscure and contemptible are deemed before God worthy of great glory because of the love for him shown in power and not boasted of in appearance. For, while we all feared, and her mistress in the flesh, who was herself also one of the contenders among the martyrs, was in distress lest she be not able even to make her confession boldly because of weakness of body, Blandina was filled with so much strength that she was released and those who tortured her in relays in every manner from morning until evening became exhausted, even confessing of their own accord that they were beaten, since they had nothing further to do to her, and that they marveled at the fact that she was still alive, for her whole body was broken and opened, and that they testified that one form of torture was enough to drive out life, to say nothing of the different nature and number of the tortures. But the blessed woman, like a noble athlete, renewed her strength in the confession, and her comfort and rest and release from the pain of what was happening to her was in saying: "I am a Christian and nothing wicked happens among us." (*Hist. eccl.* 5.1.17–19)<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Since a slave's good work would not so much reflect her own abilities but would have been conceptualized, at least among elites, as demonstrating an owner's effective mastery over her or his property.

<sup>143</sup> ὑπερβεβλημένως δὲ ἐνέσκηπεν ἡ ὀργὴ πᾶσα καὶ ὄχλου καὶ ἡγεμόνος καὶ στρατιωτῶν... Βλανδῖναν, δι' ἧς ἐπέδειξεν ὁ Χριστὸς ὅτι τὰ παρὰ ἀνθρώποις εὐτελεῖ καὶ ἀειδῇ καὶ εὐκαταφρόνητα φαινόμενα μεγάλῃς καταξιούται παρὰ θεῷ δόξης διὰ τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀγάπην τὴν ἐν δυνάμει δεικνυμένην καὶ μὴ ἐν εἰδὲι καυχωμένην. ἡμῶν γὰρ πάντων δεδιότων καὶ τῆς σαρκίνης δεσποίνης αὐτῆς, ἣτις ἦν καὶ αὐτὴ τῶν μαρτύρων μία ἀγωνίστρια, ἀγωνιώσης μὴ οὐδὲ τὴν ὁμολογίαν δυνήσεται παρρησιάσασθαι διὰ τὸ ἀσθενὲς τοῦ σώματος, ἡ Βλανδῖνα τοσαύτης ἐπληρώθη δυνάμεως, ὥστε ἐκλυθῆναι καὶ παρεθῆναι τοὺς κατὰ διαδοχὰς παντὶ τρόπῳ βασανίζοντας αὐτὴν ἀπὸ ἐωθινῆς ἕως ἑσπέρας, καὶ αὐτοὺς ὁμολογοῦντας ὅτι νενίκηνται μηδὲν ἔχοντες μηκέτι ὁ ποιήσωσιν αὐτῇ, καὶ θαυμάζειν ἐπὶ τῷ παραμένειν ἔμπνουν αὐτήν, παντὸς τοῦ σώματος περιερρωγότες καὶ ἡνεωγμένου, καὶ μαρτυρεῖν ὅτι ἐν εἶδος στρεβλώσεως ἱκανὸν ἦν πρὸς τὸ ἐξαγαγεῖν τὴν ψυχὴν, οὐχ ὅτι γε τοιαῦτα καὶ τοσαῦτα. ἀλλ' ἡ μακαρία ὡς γενναῖος ἀθλητὴς ἀνενέαζεν ἐν τῇ ὁμολογίᾳ, καὶ ἦν αὐτῆς ἀνάληψις καὶ ἀνάπαυσις καὶ ἀναλγησία τῶν

One of the powerful effects of martyrdom accounts was to counter Roman claims to control by showing forth an unwavering resolve, or a different kind of (self-)control, in the face of physical and psychic abuse.<sup>144</sup> Blandina is shown to be extraordinary in that she withstands torture so long that her persecutors considered themselves defeated.<sup>145</sup>

Blandina typifies Christ beyond any of the other martyrs by suffering as he had suffered. The letter explains how others were martyred through serving as substitutes in gladiatorial contests, but a special punishment was reserved for Blandina:

But Blandina was hung on a stake and was offered as food for the wild beasts that were let in. Since she seemed to be hanging in the form of a cross, and by her firmly intoned prayer, she inspired the combatants with great zeal, as they looked on during the contest and with their outward eyes saw through their sister the one who was crucified for them, that he might persuade those who believe in him that everyone who suffers for the glory of Christ always has fellowship with the living God. And when none of the wild beasts then touched her, she was taken down from the stake and again cast into the prison, being saved for another contest, that by conquering through more trials she might make the condemnation of the crooked serpent irrevocable, and might encourage the sisters and brothers. Although small and weak and greatly despised, she had put on the great and invincible athlete Christ, and in many contests had overcome the adversary and through the conflict had gained the crown of immortality (*Hist. eccl.* 5.1.41–42)<sup>146</sup>

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συμβαίνοντων τὸ λέγειν ὅτι «Χριστιανὴ εἰμι καὶ παρ' ἡμῖν οὐδὲν φαῦλον γίνεται». All Greek of *Hist. eccl.* is from Gustave Bardy, ed., *Histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 2, Sources chrétiennes 41 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1955).

<sup>144</sup> Virginia Burrus, “Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994): 27–51; Brent D. Shaw, “Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996): 269–312; Nicole Kelley, “Philosophy as Training for Death: Reading the Ancient Christian Martyr Acts as Spiritual Exercises,” *Church History* 75 (2006): 723–47.

<sup>145</sup> Note also the rhetoric of those particularly deemed weak or morally inferior as exemplary martyrs. See Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, “Taking it Like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 249–73.

<sup>146</sup> ἡ δὲ Βλανδῖνα ἐπὶ ξύλου κρεμασθεῖσα προύκειτο βορὰ τῶν εἰσβαλλομένων θηρίων· ἡ καὶ διὰ τοῦ βλέπεσθαι σταυροῦ σχήματι κρεμαμένη διὰ τῆς εὐτόνου προσευχῆς πολλὴν προθυμίαν τοῖς ἀγωνιζομένοις ἐνεποίει, βλέπόντων αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ ἀγῶνι καὶ τοῖς ἔξωθεν ὀφθαλμοῖς διὰ τῆς ἀδελφῆς τὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἐσταυρωμένον, ἵνα πείσῃ τοὺς πιστεύοντας εἰς αὐτὸν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ὑπὲρ τῆς Χριστοῦ δόξης παθὼν τὴν κοινωνίαν ἀεὶ ἔχει μετὰ τοῦ ζῶντος θεοῦ. καὶ μηδενὸς ἀγῶνα τότε τῶν θηρίων αὐτῆς, καθαιρεθεῖσα ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου ἀνελήφθη πάλιν εἰς τὴν εἰρκτήν, εἰς ἄλλον ἀγῶνα τηρουμένη, ἵνα διὰ πλειόνων γυμνασμάτων νικήσασα, τῷ μὲν σκολιῷ ὀφεί ἀπαραίτητον ποιήσῃ τὴν καταδίκην, προτρέψῃται δὲ τοὺς ἀδελφούς, ἡ μικρὰ καὶ ἀσθενὴς καὶ εὐκαταφρόνητος μέγαν καὶ ἀκαταγώνιστον ἀθλητὴν Χριστὸν ἐνδεδυμένη, διὰ πολλῶν κλήρων ἐκβιάσασα τὸν ἀντικείμενον καὶ δι' ἀγῶνος τὸν τῆς ἀφθαρσίας στεψαμένη στέφανον.

Blandina is exceptionally Christ-like. Made to hang in the shape of a cross, Christ appears to the observers through her witness, and she persuades those who are suffering for Christ to persevere. There are resonances of the apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians where it is said that Christ "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil 2:7). Here it is a slave who most resembles Christ.<sup>147</sup>

Blandina's endurance is encouraging to all others. It is only after the others have been killed that Blandina is finally martyred:

But the blessed Blandina, last of all, like a noble mother who has encouraged her children and sent them forth triumphant to the king, herself also enduring all the conflicts of the children, hastened to them, rejoicing and glad at her departure, as if called to a marriage feast and not being thrown to the beasts. And after the scourging, after the wild beasts, after the roasting seat, she finally was placed in a net and thrown to a bull. She was tossed about for some time by the animal, but was insensitive to what was happening to her because of her hope and hold upon what had been entrusted to her and her communion with Christ. And she also was sacrificed, and the nations themselves confessed that never had a woman among them suffered so many and such horrible tortures. (*Hist. eccl.* 5.1.55–56)<sup>148</sup>

Blandina's status (slave) and her gender (emphasized here by referring to her as being "like a noble mother" and with recognition that her suffering was particularly extraordinary for a woman) are part of what make her martyrdom exceptional. She, of all the martyrs named in the account, most demonstrates bold resistance to earthly powers (specifically Roman) in the name

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<sup>147</sup> See chapter 3 for discussion of the image of Christ as slave in the interpretive history of Philippians.

<sup>148</sup> ἡ δὲ μακαρία Βλανδῖνα πάντων ἐσχάτη, καθάπερ μήτηρ εὐγενὴς παρορμήσασα τὰ τέκνα καὶ νικηφόρους προπέμψασα πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα, ἀναμετρουμένη καὶ αὐτὴ πάντα τὰ τῶν παιδῶν ἀγωνίσματα ἔσπευδεν πρὸς αὐτούς, χαίρουσα καὶ ἀγαλλιωμένη ἐπὶ τῇ ἐξόδῳ, ὥς εἰς νυμφικὸν δεῖπνον κεκλημένη, ἀλλὰ μὴ πρὸς θηρία βεβλημένη· καὶ μετὰ τὰς μάστιγας, μετὰ τὰ θηρία, μετὰ τὸ τήγανον, τοῦσχατον εἰς γυργαθὸν βληθεῖσα ταύρῳ παρεβλήθη, καὶ ἱκανῶς ἀναβληθεῖσα πρὸς τοῦ ζώου μηδὲ αἰσθῆσιν ἔτι τῶν συμβαινόντων ἔχουσα διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐποχὴν τῶν πεπιστευμένων καὶ ὁμιλίαν πρὸς Χριστόν, ἐτύθη καὶ αὐτή, καὶ αὐτῶν ὁμολογούντων τῶν ἐθνῶν ὅτι μηδεπώποτε παρ' αὐτοῖς γυνὴ τοιαῦτα καὶ τοσαῦτα ἔπαθεν.

of Christ. This is made especially dramatic by the fact that she, as a slave woman, would have been among the least in status in the Roman world.

Blandina is shown to be exemplary, but her very exemplariness depends upon the low valuation of slaves and women (and so especially slave women). At the same time, the dismissiveness that gives way to wonder and praise betrays recognition of the extraordinary capacity of slave women to the work of bearing the gospel and (re)generating faithfulness. Blandina's centrality to the martyrdom account recorded by Eusebius reminds of slave women's labors. She is part of a repetitive genealogy of enslaved women used to serve the interests of others. For Eusebius and even many scholars today, there is little concern for Blandina's enslavement, with scholars often noting her slave status only in passing.<sup>149</sup> The image of Blandina's resiliently brutalized enslaved body functions to bolster a kind of Christian exceptionalism, one that endures in suffering, displaying a level of self-control that undermines imperial control.

There is a danger, then, in simply lifting up Blandina as a model slave. Her slave form is exploited to reinforce a discourse that does not serve the interests of the enslaved. And yet, foregrounding her body as an enslaved body, with attentiveness to the repetitive genealogy of slavery, as Brown describes, calls to mind not just Blandina but the exceptional labors and contributions of generations of unnamed slaves before and after her. Taking seriously the toils and perseverance of Blandina and other slaves is not to celebrate some myth that slaves are enslaved precisely because of an inherent ability to endure savage treatment, nor is it to glorify

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<sup>149</sup> E.g., Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 62, writes that Blandina's "low position in the ordinary social hierarchy is starkly contrasted with her exalted place in martyrological hierarchy embedded in the text," without pausing to reflect on how the roles and treatments of slaves in the social-material world are precisely what enable a poignant parallel to Christ. See my discussion of the links between Christ, crucifixion, and slaves in chapter 3.

their suffering. Instead, calling attention to material and discursive uses of the enslaved is to insist upon foregrounding their unrecognized work—including the unrecognized exploitations and abuses—within the development of early Christianity.

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

My argument that slavery in antiquity cannot be divided into metaphors and real slaves begins in chapter 1 by taking up the question of what it means for Paul to call himself a slave. Previous scholarship has read Paul's self-designation as a slave of Christ and a slave to all primarily as metaphorical and rhetorical. Slavery as such is abstracted from the social and material practices of enslavement in the world, becoming instead a signifier of humility and obedience, of which Paul presents himself as a model. I argue instead that Paul identifies himself as a slave to all in 1 Cor 9:19, not in a generic or figurative way, but in a way modeled on the effectiveness of slave labor, in particular the usefulness of slaves for making economic exchanges in order to gain profits and advantage. The gains with which Paul is concerned may be theological and ecclesial rather than monetary, but in a context where his authority appears to have been contested, Paul presents himself as most advantageous to the Corinthians. By reading Paul's self-identification and argumentation as grounded in the social and material realities of slavery, in which Paul and his readers were deeply embedded, I allow for the dynamic material-discursive world of enslavement behind the text to come to the fore. This, in turn, has implications for viewing slaves' influence upon and potential responses to Paul's writing.

The second chapter moves from Paul's self-identification as a slave to his treatment of someone enslaved, namely Onesimos. In his letter to Philemon, Apphia, and Archippos, I show how Paul negotiates with other freepersons over the role and place of the slave Onesimos.

Interest in this epistle has largely been driven by questions about Paul's overarching attitude toward slavery, whether he argued for manumission or avowed and even strengthened slaveholding ideology. I build upon scholarship exhibiting Paul's active participation in social-material practices of slavery but propose a shift in attention from Paul to the ways enslaved persons fashioned their lives within the constraints of enslavement. I do so by considering how Paul's deployment of kinship language in the letter, referring to Onesimos as a brother and Paul as his father, reflects variegated and dynamic material-discursive practices of kinship in the Roman world. Against the mechanisms by which slaveholders manipulated kinship relations to shore up their dominance, whether to break up slave families or to reinforce slaves' position under the auspices of the slaveholding family, I consider how the enslaved cultivated kinship ties among themselves. To read these materials alongside Paul's letter allows the dynamic world of enslavement to come more fully into view, especially to bring the enslaved to the fore. Moreover, it highlights the potential to respond to Paul's writing through alternative modes of relationality that resisted rather than confirmed slaveholding ideology and practice.

Chapter 3 brings the slavery language of Paul's writing and the responses of slaves into even closer connection. I consider the queer implications of Phil 2:6–7, in which Christ is imagined as taking the form of a slave and examine the early interpretive history of the passage. These early treatments of the text evince both the anxieties and disruptive potentials that inhere within slavery. On the one hand, some early Christian writers reframe the notion of Christ as slave in terms that show him to be philosophically exemplary. On the other hand, the Alexamenos graffito from a slave training complex in Rome offers the chance to see how Christ's slave form may have been a source of inspiration for the enslaved, instead of merely embarrassing. For one of the earliest, if not the first, extant depictions of the crucifixion to

appear in a social-material context inhabited primarily by slaves and freedpersons suggests that slaves may have something more to teach us about the manifold ways of treating and responding to slavery and its constitutive role in Christianity.

### ***Plowing Fields of Kyriarchy, Planting Seeds of Freedom***

In this dissertation, then, I seek to identify in early Christian texts 1) the social-material constraints of enslavement, 2) their discursive and rhetorical preservation and perpetuation, and 3) the humanity that remains within the bodies of the enslaved, who act to survive under slavery's constraints, their very existence being a form of resistance to the dehumanization of slavery. I do not propose to invent histories but to insist upon history's possibilities, in the past and present. Saidiya Hartman envisions such a representational tack:

Narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure, is a requirement of this method, as is the imperative to respect black noise—the shrieks, the moans, the nonsense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint at and embody aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and antithetical to its attendant discourse of Man.<sup>150</sup>

If we can delineate as precisely as possible the social and material practices of slavery without granting closure to elite discursive representations of slaves, we can look differently for traces of the enslaved moving through the spaces between social death and freedom to fashion livable lives. We can listen in the empty gaps for the rage and lament and cries that in their voicing witness to utopian, anti-kyriarchal visions.

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<sup>150</sup> Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *small axe* 26 (2008): 12. For similar ideas from religious studies, see Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, Catherine Keller, and Elias Ortega-Aponte, eds., *Common Goods: Economy, Ecology, and Political Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

As a complement to grander narratives of resistance, I seek to illuminate the kernels of struggles for survival that buttress the subjectivity of the oppressed. These are the seeds that might bloom into full-fledged liberation. As Langston Hughes writes in his poem “Freedom’s Plow”:<sup>151</sup>

A long time ago, but not too long ago, a man said:

ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL...  
ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR  
WITH CERTAIN INALIENABLE  
RIGHTS...  
AMONG THESE LIFE, LIBERTY  
AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

His name was Jefferson. There were slaves then,  
But in their hearts the slaves believed him, too,  
And silently took for granted  
That what he said was also meant for them.  
It was a long time ago,  
But not so long ago at that, Lincoln said:

NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH  
TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN  
WITHOUT THAT OTHER’S CONSENT.

There were slaves then, too,  
But in their hearts the slaves knew  
What he said must be meant for every human being—  
Else it had no meaning for anyone.  
Then a man said:

BETTER TO DIE FREE,  
THAN TO LIVE SLAVES.

He was a colored man who had been a slave  
But had run away to freedom.  
And the slaves knew  
What Frederick Douglass said was true.  
With John Brown at Harpers Ferry, Negroes died.  
John Brown was hung.  
Before the Civil War, days were dark,

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<sup>151</sup> Langston Hughes, “Freedom’s Plow,” in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 265–66, 268.

And nobody knew for sure  
When freedom would triumph.  
“Or if it would,” thought some.  
But others knew it had to triumph.  
In those dark days of slavery,  
Guarding in their hearts the seed of freedom,  
The slaves made up a song:

KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW!  
HOLD ON!

That song meant just what it said: *Hold on!*  
Freedom will come!

KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW!  
HOLD ON!

[...]

A long time ago,  
An enslaved people heading toward freedom  
Made up a song:  
*Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!*  
That plow plowed a new furrow  
Across the field of history.  
Into that furrow the freedom seed was dropped.  
From that seed a tree grew, is growing, will ever grow.  
That tree is for everybody,  
For all America, for all the world.  
May its branches spread and its shelter grow  
Until all races and all peoples know its shade.

KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW!  
HOLD ON!

Hughes writes of the song of the plow and the exhortation to “keep your hand on the plow.” As he says, “That plow plowed a new furrow/ Across the field of history./ Into that furrow the freedom seed was dropped.” What seeds may have been planted in the responses to Paul’s letters and their treatments of slaves and slavery? When Paul and others put slaves to work, literally and figuratively, how might the enslaved have turned the grounds of their enslavement such that

other free(d)persons joined them in endeavoring after “the overthrow of everything,” as John Chrysostom fretted?

Slavery has been constitutive of American discourses of freedom and democracy that too often privilege the already privileged. And yet, as Hughes poignantly expresses, the enslaved and their progeny have internalized, embodied, and enacted these discourses differently within the varying contexts of their oppression. Likewise, this dissertation shows how slavery was constitutive of early Christianity. The enslaved were put to physical, theological, rhetorical, and ecclesial use to advance the gospel. They birthed,<sup>152</sup> mothered, nurtured, and re-presented Christ and generations of Christians. It matters to understand slavery discourse as never “merely” theological or metaphorical, since slavery is realized in material form, with corporeal and psychic consequences. The marks of slavery are repeating, borne out on the bodies of slavery’s progeny, from Onesimos to Felicitas and Blandina, to Sally Hemings and Frederick Douglass, to Langston, Saidiya, Kimberly, Carrie, and reverberating to all of us.

It matters to view slave bodies as constitutive of discourse, not only to come to terms with their exploitation and degradation, but also to recognize that early Christian discourses bear the traces of slaves whose lives matter. Their lives matter, not to be posthumously glorified in ways that prop up Christian exceptionalism, but as bearing humanity that remains, carries on, and is regenerative in the face of dehumanization.

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<sup>152</sup> The celebrated song of Mary in Luke 1:46–55 identifies Mary as God’s slave (δούλης αὐτοῦ, verse 48). In the bold declarations of power turned upside, we often miss the one body whose lack of freedom remains, who is made to do the work of her *kyrios* without choice and without the promise of freedom. It is only natural, then, for Christ to take the form of a slave (Phil 2:7)—slave born to slave. And perhaps we ought not be surprised that the one able most perfectly to mimic the crucifixion of Christ, and so to bring about salvation for others, would be Blandina, the slave woman begetting generations of the faithful. These cycles of exploitation of the slave body are not incidental but re-present the work of slaves in the world.

## Chapter 1

### “A Slave to All”: The Queerness of Paul’s Slave Form

Was Paul a slave? The most obvious answer is that he was not. His repeated self-identifications as a slave, both of Christ (Phil 1:1; Gal 1:10; Rom 1:1) and to the *ekklēsia* in Christ (1 Cor 9:19; 2 Cor 4:5), have generally been understood as metaphorical. Indeed, “slave of Christ” may have functioned as a title of leadership in the *ekklēsia*.<sup>1</sup> Beyond this, though, Paul put his slave form to work. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul dramatically declared, “I made myself a slave to all so that I might gain the greater number” (πᾶσιν ἐμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα ἵνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω; 1 Cor 9:19).<sup>2</sup> In this way, he simultaneously claimed freedom (1 Cor 9:1, 19) and enslavement. Others have looked to philosophical parallels to explain Paul’s self-designation as enslaved, but I contend that the efficacy of Paul’s slave form stems from a more immediate correspondence: slaves and their work in the world.

Perhaps scholars have turned toward more figurative readings because there is something queer about Paul’s identification as a slave. In the Roman world, slaves were subject to all manner of use and abuse, including sexual.<sup>3</sup> We might even say that ancient slaves were the

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<sup>1</sup> On “slave of Christ” as a title of leadership, see Dale B. Martin: *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 51–60, 63–68; J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006), 103. Cf. Jennifer A. Glancy, “Slavery, Historiography, and Theology,” *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007): 206–7, who argues alternatively that the designation is deployed to be a sign of humility and self-abasement.

<sup>2</sup> Translations are my own unless otherwise noted. The Greek for New Testament texts throughout the dissertation is from Barbara Aland et al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> For a thorough treatment of the sexual use of slaves and its implications for understanding early Christian writings, see Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Joseph A. Marchal, “The Usefulness of an Onesimus: The Sexual Use of Slaves and Paul’s Letter to Philemon,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130 (2011): 749–70; Sheila Briggs, “Paul on Bondage and Freedom in Imperial Roman Society,” in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 110–23.

queer subjects of their time, figured as fundamentally non-ideal, particularly with respect to the so-conceived perversity of their bodies. And yet, Paul, paragon of self-control (at least according to 1 Cor 7:7), claimed this role for himself, identifying as a slave to all (1 Cor 9:19) and boasting of a slavish body (2 Cor 11:23–25). Why? How? To what effects?

I am not deploying the term ‘queer’ to function as a descriptive category of identity but as an analytical tool aimed at investigating the terms by which any person or group is marked as standing outside prevailing ideals and values, as shamefully other.<sup>4</sup> More precisely, I follow Jasbir Puar’s elaboration of a critical queer framework that “resists queerness-as-sexual-identity (or anti-identity)... in favor of spatial, temporal, and corporeal convergences, implosions, and rearrangements.”<sup>5</sup> Puar explains that “there is no entity, no identity to queer, rather queerness coming forth at us from all directions, screaming its defiance.”<sup>6</sup> In this way, queerness is not a thing but a doing. It is not that the slave is inherently queer as if inhabiting a fixed identity to be recognized and named as such. Instead, queerness is already installed in the naming of the slave insofar as slaves are construed as ever potentially disruptive to the social-material reification of elite ideals. Slaves do not simply occupy a status opposite that of freepersons but are characterized fundamentally as bearing capacities to undermine the interests of free elites, socially, materially, and philosophically.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> As Stephen Moore explains, “‘queer’ is a supple cipher both for what *stands over against* the normal and the natural to oppose, and thereby define, them, and what *inheres within* the normal and the natural to subvert, and indeed pervert, them—this opposition and subversion privileging, but by no means being confined to, the mercurial sphere of the sexual.” Stephen D. Moore: *God’s Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 18.

<sup>5</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” *Social Text* 84–85, vol. 23, nos. 3–4 (2005): 121.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>7</sup> On representations of slaves as always potentially disruptive to elite concerns, see Sandra R. Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 13–17.

Aristotle named the slave in terms of lack. Slaves are “naturally” ruled over (*Pol.* 1254b21-24) since they have just enough virtue, in inverse proportion to the virtue of the master, to be obedient and diligent in their tasks (*Pol.* 1260a33-b5). For many Romans, slavery was not natural but a consequence of fate, of the ability for some to conquer and rule over others (*Dig.* 1.5.4.1; *Inst.* 1.3.2). Slaves are made, not only through physical constraints but through their discursive construction and legal categorization as akin to animals, rightfully owned and necessarily brought under control.<sup>8</sup> Even upon manumission, the freed slave carried the *macula servitutis*, or ‘stain of slavery,’ suggesting that an element of queerness—that conspicuous otherness and lack—remained, making the freedperson always somewhat morally suspect.<sup>9</sup> One discursive strand from Aristotle to predominant Roman thought, then, is the idea that slaves are queerly human, marked as outside the bounds of ideal humanity—things, instruments, and animals. The slave is not only the one who is subject to the control of a master but whose supposed natural lack of control is a threat to the ideals of the free and of kyriarchal rule.<sup>10</sup> There is an apparent need for vigilant surveillance and the ability to delineate status, lest the uncontrolled slave body become capable of infecting the communal body.<sup>11</sup> This is demonstrated

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<sup>8</sup> See Keith Bradley, “Animalizing the Slave: The Truth of Fiction,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000): 110–25; J. Albert Harrill, “Slavery and Inhumanity: Keith Bradley’s Legacy on Slavery in New Testament Studies,” *Biblical Interpretation* 21 (2013): 506–14. On legal classifications of slaves as similar to animals, see Jane F. Gardner, “Slavery and Roman Law,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, ed. Keith Bradley et al., vol. 1, *The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 415–19, 423.

<sup>9</sup> On the enduring *macula servitutis*, see Henrik Mouritsen, “*Macula servitutis*: Slavery, Freedom, and Manumission,” chap. 2 in *The Freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Conversely, effective mastery of slaves exemplifies the ideals of free elites. See J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 22–25.

<sup>11</sup> We find perhaps no clearer example than in 1 Cor 6:14–20, with its particular implications for slaves in light of the lack of slaves’ control over their own bodies.

by debates in the Roman Senate over whether slaves should be marked with clearly identifiable clothing (Seneca, *Clem.* 1.24.1).<sup>12</sup> The idea was ultimately rejected since it would be too great a threat if slaves could readily identify one another and so act together to resist and potentially overthrow the ideals of freedom constructed by elites.<sup>13</sup>

But this does not tell the whole story of the queerness installed in the project of naming the slave. Here again I take cues from Puar, who expounds queerness in a way that moves away from “queerness exclusively as dissenting, resistant, and alternative (all of which queerness importantly is and does) [and] underscores contingency and complicity with dominant formations.”<sup>14</sup> We ought not look for queerness in slavery only where slaves are shown especially as shameful or as resisting. In fact, we should be attentive both to social-material practices aimed at constraining the slaves’ always-potentially-disruptive bodies, as well as to the ways slaves themselves could negotiate the coercive terms of enslavement.<sup>15</sup> The Roman practice of manumission held out the promise of freedom so that there were incentives for slaves to do enslavement well.<sup>16</sup> By this, I do not suggest primarily absolute obedience by slaves but

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<sup>12</sup> See Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 87–89, 95–99.

<sup>13</sup> See Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140 B.C.–70 B.C.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), esp. 18–45, on resistance to slavery in the Roman world and yet its general stability. “Resistance, however, even if sporadic, discrete, and diffuse, was also constant, which implies that the slavery system itself was oppressive, harsh, and essentially brutal. The implication is real and cannot be altogether offset by the undeniable fact that, within the system, devices existed for softening oppression and for making slavery more tolerable” (ibid., 44).

<sup>14</sup> Puar, “Queer Times,” 122.

<sup>15</sup> For the idea that resistance can be measured by the constraints placed upon slaves, see Brent D. Shaw, “‘A Wolf by the Ears’: M. I. Finley’s *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* in Historical Context,” in M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, ed. Shaw, exp. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1998), 49.

<sup>16</sup> Anxiety over large scale revolts and the practice of manumission evince awareness that the slave system was contingent upon slaves themselves having some kind of incentives to work hard and maintain order. See especially Keith Hopkins, “The Growth and Practice of Slavery in Roman Times,” chap. 2 in *Conquerors and Slaves* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

also savvy maneuverings that may not have radically undermined institutional slavery but that could work toward a slave's own advantages or at least survival. As such, the queerness of slavery inheres in the dynamic between how enslaved bodies are pre-figured as potentially disruptive and yet also as capable of being masterfully controlled, or at least appearing to be. Under this logic, then, there is an ideal slave: one whose queerness is kept in check and whose obedience proves quite useful. By understanding queerness as not only resistant but also complicit in reiterating elite ideologies, it is possible to understand Paul's representations of his enslaved form as simultaneously productive for his argumentation and potentially disruptive to it. Such contingency highlights the text's openness to a variety of responses. Those who read Paul's self-representation as a slave could reasonably have had an array of reactions to it.

### **“A Slave to All”**

Slaves, ideal and otherwise, would have been well-known at Corinth. After the city was razed by the Romans in 146 BCE, Julius Caesar refounded Corinth in 44 BCE, and the colony came to be populated by a significant number of freedpersons and traders.<sup>17</sup> As an important port between east and west, Corinth was a key site for trade.<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Millis has argued that the city “was made attractive to a group of colonists who could make it a viable and successful

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<sup>17</sup> Antony Spawforth, “Roman Corinth: The Formation of a Colonial Elite,” in *Roman Onomastics in the Greek East: Social and Political Aspects: Proceedings of the International Colloquium Organized by the Finnish Institute and the Centre for Greek and Roman Antiquity, Athens, 7–9 September 1993*, ed. A. D. Rizakis (Athens: Kentron Hellēnikēs kai Rōmaikēs Archaiothētos, Ethnikon Hidryma Ereunōn, 1996), 167–82.

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin W. Millis, “The Social and Ethnic Origins of the Colonists in Early Roman Corinth,” in *Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies on Religion and Society*, ed. Steven J. Friesen, Daniel N. Schowalter, and James C. Walters (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 13–35; Kathleen Warner Slane, “East-west Trade in Fine Wares and Commodities: The View from Corinth,” *Rei Cretariae Romanae Fautorum Acta* 36 (2000): 299–312; Cavan W. Concannon, *“When You Were Gentiles”: Specters of Ethnicity in Roman Corinth and Paul’s Corinthian Correspondence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 47–74.

commercial enterprise.”<sup>19</sup> Alongside a relatively elite stratum of freedpersons who were likely quite adept at negotiating economic exchanges, we should assume also slaves’ integral role in trade as commonplace at Corinth.<sup>20</sup> Paul’s letter itself gives indications of the usefulness of slaves for undertaking tasks on behalf of freepersons, including communicating across long distances, mentioning the coming of Fortunatus and Achaius (possible slave names) to refresh Paul’s spirit (1 Cor 16:17–18).<sup>21</sup> The Corinthians would have been intimately familiar with the roles of the enslaved, especially in commerce.

This socio-economic background is generally not taken into account when reading Paul’s language of self-enslavement, with attention given instead to philosophical tropes.<sup>22</sup> Discussion of 1 Corinthians 9 has centered largely around Paul’s rhetoric and how the chapter functions in the broader outline of Paul’s argumentation.<sup>23</sup> His assertion of freedom and apostleship, with particular concern for the rights of an apostle, comes between treatments of food sacrificed to idols (ch. 8) and idolatry (ch. 10). Some scholars consider chapter 9 to represent a disjuncture,

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<sup>19</sup> Millis, “Social and Ethnic Origins,” 33.

<sup>20</sup> On slaves and freedpersons in the Corinthian context, see Laura S. Nasrallah, “‘You Were Bought with a Price’: Freedpersons and Things in 1 Corinthians,” in *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequality*, ed. Steven J. Friesen, Sarah A. James, and Daniel N. Showalter (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 54–73.

<sup>21</sup> On the likelihood of slaves participating in the Corinthian community, see Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 103.

<sup>22</sup> But see Laura S. Nasrallah, “1 Corinthians,” in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament*, ed. Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sánchez (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), who foregrounds the material context of the letter and reads chapter 9 in light of temple practices, including issues of pay and the use of slaves as ritual experts. See also Concannon, *When You Were Gentiles*, 27–46, for discussion of Paul’s malleable self-representation not only in terms of rhetoric and philosophy but as embedded in the social-material setting of Roman Corinth.

<sup>23</sup> For the basic contours of scholarly debate, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 661–63.

either the introduction of a new topic or even part of a separate letter.<sup>24</sup> Others, however, view continuity in terms of rights that might be claimed, such as eating food offered to idols (ch. 8), pay for apostolic efforts (ch. 9), or the lawfulness of all things (10:23), but which should nonetheless be avoided lest weaker persons be led astray.<sup>25</sup> Under this scheme, Paul is paradigmatic of restraint that serves the interests of the whole community. Paul's concern in chapter 8 that certain practices might prove an obstacle to the weak, such as eating food offered to idols, finds resolution in the way Paul sets himself up as an example of what is required to gain the weak.<sup>26</sup>

Against the backdrop of asserting his free status in the first half of 1 Corinthians 9 ("Am I not free? Am I not an apostle?" [9:1]), in verse 19 Paul makes the claim that he has made himself a slave to all ("For being free from all, I made myself a slave to all so that I might gain [κερδήσω] the greater number"). Paul has already identified himself generally with manual (i.e.,

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<sup>24</sup> E.g., Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), xxxix–xlili, 211–13; Walter Schmithals, "Die Korintherbriefe als Briefsammlung," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 64 (1973): 263–88.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 130–38. For such a reading that considers also the implications of entering into a patronage relationship should Paul receive support for his activities as an apostle, see John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 107–12, 130–41; cf. Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relation with the Corinthians* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), in terms of the social obligations of accepting so-called rights. On the interplay between strong and weak members of the community, see Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, ed. and trans. John H. Schütz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 121–43. Cf. Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 89–118, on Paul's rhetorical positioning in a relationship of power.

<sup>26</sup> Against readings of 1 Corinthians 9 as a defense of Paul's apostleship, Margaret Mitchell argues that Paul sets himself up as an example for imitation (Mitchell, *Paul and Rhetoric*, 246–48). Likewise, Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 77–80. Moreover, "In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul manifests the same rhetorical agenda. He does not advocate self-lowering as a general ethical value; he has a specific goal of persuasion with a specific audience in mind" (Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 122). Scholars debate the structural integrity of 1 Corinthians 9, but Mitchell asserts that it sensibly follows upon chapter 8 as a "digress" or, in Mitchell's terms, an "exemplary argument" (Mitchell, *Paul and Rhetoric*, 249–50).

slavish) labor<sup>27</sup> and here goes further to declare his slave status.<sup>28</sup> Many scholars read this passage without giving particular attention to Paul's slave form, suggesting that his enslavement primarily stands as evidence of humility and love for others in service of the gospel.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, Dale Martin foregrounds Paul's slavery language to argue that Paul's rhetoric, particularly his self-representation as a slave, sets forth a model of leadership opposed to the apparent "benevolent patriarchalism" of at least some Corinthian leaders, i.e., their assertion of social hierarchy as essential, elites being morally superior.<sup>30</sup> Paul instead identifies his authority as coming from his master, Christ, and finds power "from below" by gaining popularity with the masses, following the Greek demagogic model of the leader as a kind of slave to all.<sup>31</sup>

Martin identifies the model of the enslaved leader as recurring frequently enough in Greco-Roman political rhetoric to be termed a *topos*.<sup>32</sup> The general concept holds that an

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<sup>27</sup> E.g., 1 Cor 4:12: "We grow weary laboring with our own hands" (κοπιῶμεν ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν).

<sup>28</sup> See Gerd Theissen and Dale Martin on Paul's discussion of strong and weak as operating primarily in terms of status. Theissen, *Social Setting*, 121–43; Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 119.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 701: "Paul very subtly but also emphatically presses in what precise sense Christian believers and Christian leaders are **free** and in what sense voluntary **slavery** performs a wholesale, even essential, saving purpose in Christ-like obedience and love for the other" (emphasis original). In contrast, Nasrallah, "1 Corinthians," 566, connects the practical, tangible concerns over food and idolatry in chs. 8 and 10 with Paul's own reference to his temple service (9:13), arguing that this, in addition to Paul's self-designation as a slave, should call to mind the use of temple slaves and slaves generally as ritual experts (on slaves as religious experts, see Katherine A. Shaner, "The Religious Practices of the Enslaved: A Case Study of Roman Ephesos" [Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 2012]; Shaner, *Enslaved Leadership in Early Christianity* [New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming]).

<sup>30</sup> On benevolent patriarchalism, Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 87–108, 127–28. See also Clarence E. Glad, *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), on the tradition of educators exhibiting flexibility to adapt themselves to the weak.

<sup>31</sup> Against the idea that Paul is Christ's slave in 1 Corinthians, but instead that he positions himself as a "freewill servant of Christ," see John Byron, "Slave of Christ or Willing Servant? Paul's Self-Description in 1 Corinthians 4:1–2 and 9:16–18," *Neotestamentica* 37 (2003): 179–98.

<sup>32</sup> Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 92.

effective leader assumes a servile position so to accommodate the needs of the people.<sup>33</sup>

Invective against leaders who would call themselves slaves to the many often included charges that the true motives were selfish gain, but “someone could defend any populist by asserting that he acted purely in the interests of the public.”<sup>34</sup> Martin reads Paul as developing this concern for the common good, culminating in Paul’s assertion that he makes himself a slave to all.<sup>35</sup> While Paul makes this claim of self-lowering explicitly, he sets it up in the first part of chapter 9 by saying that he proclaims the gospel out of necessity (ἀνάγκη) (v16), not of his own will (ἐκὼν) but out of constraint (ἄκων) (v17).<sup>36</sup> “It is clear... that in both popular understandings and moral philosophy, slavery was linked with compulsion and involuntary behavior. Words appearing in such contexts include ones used by Paul: *anagkē, akōn, hekōn*.”<sup>37</sup> In these ways, Paul constructs himself as quintessentially enslaved and as a leader.

Martin importantly highlights the vocabulary of manual labor, especially under compulsion, in order to demonstrate the image of Paul’s enslavement as central to Paul’s argument. Verse 17 is key: “For if I do this [proclaim the gospel] of my own free will (ἐκὼν), I have a wage (from hire) (μισθὸν), but if unwillingly (ἄκων), I am entrusted with management

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 91–100.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 99. See also M. I. Finley, “Athenian Demagogues,” *Past and Present* 21 (1962): 3–24.

<sup>35</sup> Moreover, this is the model that Paul would have the Corinthians adopt. “The common advantage (that of ‘the all,’ ‘the many’ and ‘the all’ [9:19, 22]) is that which one should pursue with one’s *exousia*, not merely one’s own advantage. 9:19–23 gives the specific application of the exemplary argument to the Corinthian situation. Paul is not concerned for the Corinthians likewise to work for their living, but rather to be accommodating of one another in all things, but especially in regard to meat-eating practices” (Mitchell, *Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 248)

<sup>36</sup> On these terms as markers of slave status, see Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 71–77.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 74.

(οικονομίαν).”<sup>38</sup> The force is twofold. Within elite discourses, working for a wage, a *misthos*, often carried unfavorable connotations; though a *misthos* would not always be compensation specifically for manual labor, working out of need to receive pay similarly signaled inferiority.<sup>39</sup> Paul’s claim to work under compulsion, and more precisely as a slave, hardly seems any more admirable, but the crucial distinction is that Paul says he receives not standard wages but an *oikonomia*. Effectively Paul is set up as Christ’s *oikonomos*, or household manager. Though working under the legal and social constraints of slavery, a slave-manager could command a great deal of respect in proportion with the prestige of the slave’s master.<sup>40</sup> Hence, as Martin argues, Paul’s entrustment with an *oikonomia*, presumably that of Christ, is superior to the compensation of a wage laborer, if not monetarily then almost certainly in terms of philosophical cachet.<sup>41</sup> The logic goes that Paul appeals to the lower class by becoming a manual laborer. At the same time, he invites those who find manual labor distasteful, yet who may also know the topos of the enslaved leader, to follow his example of self-lowering.

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<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*, 80–85, on the comparison between working for a *misthos* and being entrusted with an *oikonomia*. Cf. Abraham J. Malherbe, “Determinism and Free Will: The Argument of 1 Corinthians 8 and 9,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. Troels Enberg-Pedersen (London: T & T Clark, 1994), 231–255; Byron, *Slavery Metaphors*, 245–53.

<sup>39</sup> “In Roman thought the concept of manual labour, which Cicero (*On Duties*, 1.150–51) calls base (*sordidus*) and ‘a pledge of servitude’ (*auctoramentum servitutis*), had highly pejorative associations that pertained to low status and specifically to slavery” (Michele George, “Slavery and Roman Material Culture,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, ed. Keith Bradley et al., vol. 1, *The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011], 403).

<sup>40</sup> An *oikonomos* was often but not always a slave, which Martin acknowledges (*Slavery as Salvation*, 16–14, 74–75). See also Byron, *Slavery Metaphors*, 243–44. On the respect a slave-manager could garner, Martin writes, “In Paul’s society it mattered less that one was a slave than whose slave one was” (*Slavery as Salvation*, 85).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Peter Arzt-Grabner et al., *1. Korinther*, Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 353–57, who read *οικονομία* in light of *ἀνάγκη*, which finds widespread use in documentary papyri for a variety of actions people are compelled to perform. In the papyrological record, *οικονομία* appears often as a public office for which one might be expected, or compelled, to carry out services without a wage. It may be that Paul refers to a common social practice whereby he pursues unpaid labor as a matter of fulfilling the duties of an office with which he has been entrusted, in this case by God.

## Using Slaves to Gain the Greater Number

Martin's argument is compelling for expounding some of the text's possible resonances, but there is an even more proximate context for Paul's argumentation than philosophical rhetoric. I would expand the scope to consider also the real economic advantages of using slaves to make gains in the Roman world. Notice Paul's repeated use of the verb κερδαίνω, which means literally to gain or derive a profit or advantage:

For being free from all, I made myself a slave to all so that I might gain (κερδήσω) the greater number. To the Jews I became as a Jew so that I might gain (κερδήσω) the Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law—not being under the law myself—so that I might gain (κερδήσω) those under the law. To those without the law I became as one without the law—not being without God's law but keeping within the law of Christ—so that I might gain (κερδήσω) those without the law. I became weak to the weak so that I might gain (κερδήσω) the weak. To all people I have become all things so that I might in all ways save some. (1 Cor 9:19–22)<sup>42</sup>

Commentators have tended to generalize the sense of κερδήσω to mean something like “to win over.”<sup>43</sup> But taking into account both the context of the letter and Roman practices of using slaves to make gains, we ought to give a more literal reading.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ἐλεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων πᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα, ἵνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω· καὶ ἐγενόμην τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὡς Ἰουδαῖος, ἵνα Ἰουδαίους κερδήσω· τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον, μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον, ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον κερδήσω· τοῖς ἀνόμοις ὡς ἄνομος, μὴ ὢν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλ' ἔννομος Χριστοῦ, ἵνα κερδάνω τοὺς ἀνόμους· ἐγενόμην τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής, ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω· τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω.

<sup>43</sup> See Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 701–3, who outlines primarily a missionizing strategy for winning others over; Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *First Corinthians*, Anchor Yale Bible 32 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 368–69. See also David Daube, “κερδαίνω as a Missionary Term,” *Harvard Theological Review* 40 (1947): 109–20, who argues for rabbinic parallels to Paul's use of κερδαίνω as a term referring to the gain of persons (rather than profits, strictly speaking). Cf. Mitchell, *Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 243–49, on Paul's rhetorical argument in favor of the advantage of his adaptive approach.

<sup>44</sup> To be sure, *Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “κερδαίνω,” includes ‘win’ within the primary sense of gaining or deriving a profit. Still, I contend that the argument of Paul's apologia in 1 Corinthians 9 is chiefly articulated in terms of economic exchange with Paul's enslavement as the central image. I am grateful to Jennifer Quigley, whose forthcoming dissertation examines the pervasiveness of theo-economic rhetoric in the letters of Paul, for calling my attention to the primary economic use of κερδαίνω.

Considering the context of Corinth as a freedperson's colony and its significance as a site for trade, it is important to note that commercial enterprises in the Roman world relied heavily on the enslaved. Slaves were valued primarily for their production, for the profits that could literally be gained through their use. In urban centers, slaves and freedpersons often carried out business transactions on behalf of their masters, acting not as independent agents but as extensions of the master.<sup>45</sup> Slaves also performed skilled labor in workshops to produce a variety of wares.<sup>46</sup> The economics of slavery centered largely on the profits of slave labors with gains going primarily to slaves' owners.<sup>47</sup>

Alan Watson explains the particular efficacy of slave labor in trade: "What is immediately striking [about Roman regulations for economic exchanges] is that the configuration of the rules means that in commerce a slave can do much more for his master than an extraneous free person could."<sup>48</sup> The reason, quite simply, is that anything that came into a slave's possession, with very few exceptions, would be possessed by that slave's owner since

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<sup>45</sup> John Bodel, "Slave Labour and Roman Society," in *Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1, *Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Bradley and Cartledge, 316: "It was the transparency of the slave as a surrogate that made slave labour essential to the ideology of self-sufficiency, since it allowed the slave-owner to reap the material and social benefits of labour (revenue, prestige, autonomy) without incurring the physical and social costs (fatigue, toil, dishonour)." On a slave's lack of juridical standing, see also Jane F. Gardner, "Slavery and Roman Law," in *Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1, *Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Bradley and Cartledge, 415–16. Likewise, freedperson's conducted business through their masters as part of obligations owed through a system of continued patronage. See Nasrallah, "Bought with a Price," 60–61.

<sup>46</sup> Dennis P. Kehoe, "The Early Roman Empire: Production," in *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Walter Scheidel, Ian Morris, Richard P. Saller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 563. For a fuller treatment of the range of slave jobs, see Bradley, *Slavery and Society*, 58–64; Sandra R. Joshel, *Work Identity, and Legal Status at Rome: A Study of the Occupational Inscriptions* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

<sup>47</sup> "The functional distribution of income is not the sole source of social inequality, however. Inequality may also exist because people do not even receive what their productive contribution entitles them to in terms of market value" (Willem M. Jongman, "The Early Roman Empire: Consumption," in *Cambridge Economic History*, 595).

<sup>48</sup> Alan Watson, *Roman Slave Law* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 107.

slaves themselves could not legally hold property of any kind.<sup>49</sup> This is spelled out in Gaius's *Institutes*, compiled in the late second century CE and an important source for earlier Roman laws:

Whatever children in our power and slaves in our ownership receive by *mancipatio* [formal process for transferring certain types of property, including slaves] or obtain by delivery, and whatever rights they stipulate for or acquire by any other title, they acquire for us. For a person who is in our power can have nothing of his own (*Inst.* 2.87).<sup>50</sup>

The gain of the slave is ultimately the gain of the master.

This begs the question: who is the master of the slave Paul? To whom would all this gain accrue? Elsewhere in his letters, Paul introduces himself a slave of Christ (Phil 1:1; Gal 1:10; Rom 1:1), but in 1 Corinthians 9:19, he is more broadly a slave to all. If we consider Paul as a slave of Christ on loan to the Corinthians, the concerns and argument of chapter 9 are legible within the parameters of Roman rules for making acquisitions through slaves. Roman law allowed the right of a usufruct.<sup>51</sup> A usufruct was a kind of temporary borrowing; one (in this case

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<sup>49</sup> Slaves could, however, maintain a *peculium*, or assets available for them to manage, though the *peculium* was technically still under the power of the slaveholder. This may have proved especially useful for commerce since the master's liability could be limited only to *peculium* funds whenever it was made clear that transactions were based on the *peculium*. On the benefits of using the *peculium* in commerce, and so also the usefulness of employing slaves to carry out economic transactions, see Aaron Kirschenbaum, *Sons, Slaves, and Freedmen in Roman Commerce* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 31–88; Luuk de Ligt, "Roman Law and the Roman Economy: Three Case Studies," *Latomus* 66 (2007): 10–25. However, evidence for this practice is scant and debated; see esp. Jean Andreau, "Les esclaves 'hommes d'affaires' et la gestion des ateliers et commerces," in *Mentalités et choix économique des Romains*, ed. J. Andreau, J. France, and S. Pittia (Pessac: Ausonius, 2004), 111–26.

<sup>50</sup> Translation from Watson, *Roman Slave Law*, 104. *Igitur quod liberi nostri, quos in potestate habemus, item quod serui nostri mancipio accipiunt uel ex traditione nanciscuntur siue quid stipulentur uel ex aliquolibet causa adquirunt, id nobis adquiritur: ipse enim, qui in potestate nostra est, nihil suum habere potest* (E. Seckel and B. Kübler, eds., *Gaius: Institutiones* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1935]).

<sup>51</sup> Gaius, *Institutes* 2.91–92: "With regard to those slaves in whom we have only a usufruct, it is settled that whatever they acquire in connection with our affairs or through their own work is acquired by us, but whatever they acquire outside these grounds belongs to the owner of their property. Thus, if such a slave is instituted heir, or given a legacy or gift, he acquires not for me but for the owner of the property in him. It is settled that the same rule applies when a person is possessed in good faith by us, whether he is a free man or the slave of another. For what has been held of a usufructuary is approved also for the possessor in good faith. Thus whatever he acquires outside of these two grounds belongs to him if he is free or to his owner if he is a slave" (Watson, *Roman Slave Law*, 104–5). *De his autem seruis, in quibus tantum usumfructum habemus, ita placuit, ut quidquid ex re nostra uel ex operis*

“all”) would be granted the right both to use and to enjoy the fruits of another person’s property, including the products or effects of the labor of that person’s slave. During the period of usufruct, any gains made in connection with the slave’s own work or the affairs of the borrower would accrue to and be enjoyed by the borrower.<sup>52</sup> Paul is the property of Christ, loaned to the Corinthians, and the Corinthians enjoy the fruits of Paul’s slave labor. He provides an inventory of his own gains: Jews, those under the law, those outside the law, and the weak. These so-called gains are the product of a man who is “slave to all,” and thus, according to the logic of Roman law regarding usufruct, they presumably have accrued to the community of Christ followers at Corinth. A free person, contrary to a slave, could claim the gains for himself. Paul is emphatic that he *could* claim the privileges of freedom, but he does not do so in order to “gain the greater number.” Instead, he becomes a slave to fulfill the logic that his labor profits not only Christ but the Corinthians. Paul is on the defensive in chapter 9, offering an apologia for his freedom and apostleship. He does so by defending his value to the Corinthians on the basis of his self-enslavement. Against apparent contestation over his authority, Paul uses the efficacious role of the slave in trade—something quite familiar to the Corinthians—to claim that, of all who might call themselves apostles, he is most advantageous to the Corinthians because he is slave to all.

Paul’s slave form here is one that seems to eschew queerness, not exemplify it. This slave Paul does not seem concerned that he might be confused with someone lacking self-control. He is the idealized slave. Such a representation, though, is not novel. Literary depictions of the

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*suis adquirunt, id nobis adquiratur; quod uero extra eas causas, id ad dominum proprietatis pertineat: itaque si iste seruus heres institutus sit legatumue quid ei aut donatum fuerit, non mihi, sed domino proprietatis adquiritur. Idem placet de eo, qui a nobis bona fide possidetur, siue liber sit siue alienus seruus: quod enim placuit de usufructuario, idem probatur etiam de bonae fidei possessore: itaque quod extra duas istas causas adquiritur, id uel ad ipsum pertinet, si liber est, uel ad dominum, si seruus est* (Seckel and B. Kübler, eds., *Gaius: Institutiones*).

<sup>52</sup> On usufruct, see Watson, *Roman Slave Law*, 103–8.

enslaved sometimes functioned to demonstrate elements of self-mastery. In the *Life of Aesop*, whose fables go back as far as the fifth century BCE, with extant versions dated to around the turn of the common era, the slave Aesop is shown to be extraordinarily wise.<sup>53</sup> Aesop typifies a literary pairing of slave and philosopher.<sup>54</sup> He frustrates his owner, Xanthos, with cunning misunderstandings of instructions. When Xanthos finally commands Aesop to do nothing more or less than precisely what he is told, Aesop responds in the most literal ways possible, to comic, and pointed, effect. Asked to “cook lentil” for a dinner party, Aesop prepares just a single lentil. His cleverness demonstrates that, not only are slaves not automatons, but a slaveholder should not even desire such since the slave’s initiative is necessary for order to be maintained.<sup>55</sup>

Aesop’s ingenuity serves to teach about proper mastery.<sup>56</sup> In an ironic twist, the one figured as requiring control shows how a master must manage potential chaos through proper understanding of human relationships, something the slave is equipped to do well. The wise master responds deftly to dynamic circumstances, recognizing that short of guaranteeing absolute obedience, mastery over others begins with self-mastery. The second-century physician Galen likewise makes this case, also in relationship to slaves but from the reverse perspective. Galen cautions against responding to a slave’s perturbing actions, or inaction, with fits of rage, urging

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<sup>53</sup> On multiple versions of fables about Aesop, dating, and comparison with the gospels, see Lawrence M. Wills, “The *Life of Aesop* and the Cult Hero Paradigm in the Gospel Tradition,” in *The Quest of the Historical Gospel: Mark, John and the Origins of the Gospel Genre* (London: Routledge, 1997), 23–50.

<sup>54</sup> William Fitzgerald, *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26–27.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>56</sup> Keith Hopkins, “Novel Evidence for Roman Slavery,” *Past and Present* 138 (1993): 18–21; Lloyd W. Daly, *Aesop without Morals: The Famous Fables, and a Life of Aesop* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), 53–54; Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 22.

that sufficient time be taken to hold the passions in check.<sup>57</sup> A master's response should be well reasoned rather than impulsive. While such discourses have as their primary concern the ways free men are philosophically self-controlled, they depend upon what slaves do or do not do. The discursively inscribed slave body is not wholly descriptive of slaves in the social-material world, but it is also not abstracted from very real anxieties over the dynamic, contingent relations between slaves and free(d)persons.

To emphasize the queerness of slavery is to keep in mind the ever-present potential for disruptions to the ideal. Queerness threatens to spill past the edges of Paul's carefully circumscribed rhetoric. Paul, like Aesop, is a resourceful slave who knows how to navigate his circumstances to his gain, and both Paul and Aesop reflect something of the responsibilities entrusted to the enslaved in the world.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, there is danger that their activities as slaves will provoke disorderly, undesirable responses. What if those Corinthians who receive Paul's letter, or who know Paul, do not understand Paul's slave form to perform the relatively respectable duties of the managerial slave he projects himself to be? After all, slave-managers would not have been the only ones traversing the streets of Corinth. Prostitutes were often slaves pimped out by their owners, and we know from 1 Corinthians 6 that Paul is concerned over prostitution at Corinth.<sup>59</sup> Paul's rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 9 puts on display a desirable, even respectable slave body. But a slave could not choose her or his own work.<sup>60</sup> What if Paul's

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<sup>57</sup> Galen, *The Diagnosis and Cure of the Soul's Passions* IV, in *Galen: On the Passions and Errors of the Soul*, trans. Paul W. Harkins (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1963), 37–41.

<sup>58</sup> Paul is like Aesop in another respect: Aesop is described as having a hideous physical form, something against which Paul also contends and which he works to his best advantage in 2 Corinthians, as discussed below.

<sup>59</sup> Jennifer Glancy, "Obstacles to Slaves' Participation in the Corinthian Church," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 481–501.

<sup>60</sup> Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status*.

enslaved body were put to different kinds of uses? What effect might it have had to receive these words among myriad forms of slave bodies, both living bodies and those represented in art and literature?<sup>61</sup>

## Representing Slaves

We can start to imagine possible responses by turning to material representations of slaves. This can help ground us in a world where the line between depictions of slaves, on the one hand, and living, breathing persons who are enslaved, on the other, is blurred. That is, representations of slaves, like Paul's, do similar kinds of work as slaves themselves. We cannot so easily say that we have representations, on the one hand, and "real" slaves, on the other, as if representations are not quite real. Instead, the ideology of slaveholding is realized in myriad social-material forms, from the control over bodies to displays of that control which reinforce the logic of its practice.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, Paul's self-styling as a slave to all is not merely rhetorical or discursive but depends upon and reiterates social-material practices of enslavement.

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<sup>61</sup> Here I follow the example of David Balch, who reads Paul's discussions of suffering—Christ's and his own—alongside artistic depictions of scenes of suffering in Greek and Roman myth, asking what might have been the effects of reading Paul's words in spaces that may have been decorated with such images. David L. Balch, "Paul's Portrait of Christ Crucified (Gal. 3:1) in Light of Paintings and Sculptures of Suffering and Death in Pompeiian and Roman Houses," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 84–108.

<sup>62</sup> This extends Karen Barad's analysis breaking down the binary between representations and what they represent. "To think of discourse as mere spoken or written words forming descriptive statements is to enact the mistake of representationalist thinking. Discourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said. Discursive practices define what counts as meaningful statements. Statements are not the mere utterances of the originating consciousness of a unified subject; rather, statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities. This field of possibilities is not static or singular but rather is a dynamic and contingent multiplicity." Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (2003): 819.

The value of *representing* slaves and of *using* slaves is entangled. Take, for instance, the lampstand from Pompeii (fig. 4), which represents a common type of what we might call the idealized slave form. Noel Lenski describes that common type in this way: “bronze rack-holding lantern bearers fashioned in near life size to look like youths, often on quadripedal square bronze pedestals, and always portrayed as if in early pubescence—with small genitals and no pubic hair.”<sup>63</sup> Lenski goes on to make an overly general but still illustrative assertion that, “in addition to providing light, [such lampstands] were obviously also meant as stand-ins for the beautiful mellephebe every Roman host aspired to own for serving drinks at his banquets.”<sup>64</sup> That the figure represents a slave, Lenski argues, is confirmed by similar depictions of enslaved youths bringing pleasure and exhibiting their owner’s status in literature, such as in the caricatured extravagance on display at Trimalchio’s banquet (Petronius *Sat.* 41.6).<sup>65</sup>

The value and effects of the material representation of slaves in this way are entwined with those of living, breathing slave bodies. The lampstand literally does the work of maintaining a source of light. Taking the form of a slave, it also represents the work that slaves themselves accomplish; the candelabrum could just as well be substituted with a slave holding a lamp. The value both of living slaves and their representations is not just economic but social. To possess and control persons and objects of high quality, indeed to possess and control persons *as* objects and then doubly to represent such capacity for control through the display of one’s own material

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<sup>63</sup> Noel Lenski, “Working Models: Functional Art and Roman Conceptions of Slavery,” in *Roman Slavery and Roman Material Culture*, ed. Michele George (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 138.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Seneca, for his part, writes against this very use and display of slaves as a sign of immoderation and cruelty (*Ep.* 47.7).

possessions, is to convey one's high status.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, we might note the idealized form of the lampstand. The beauty of this slave form stands to bring pleasure to the viewer as a slave might be expected to bring pleasure to the master.

At the same time, we should not lose sight of the abject form of the slave, which is also put on display (fig. 5). Here we have a fourth-century CE bronze lamp from northern Greece made to hang from the ceiling. The characteristics of this figure are linked to the comic slave.<sup>67</sup> A torque surrounds his neck, his hands are bound behind his back, and he is made to “genuflect humiliatingly.”<sup>68</sup> The placement of the hinge for refilling the oil chamber at the neck would require the owner to knock back the figure's head to put the lamp to use. This is the slave whose pitiful state reminds the viewer of bodies meant to be controlled, even violently. There are multiple slave forms put to multiple kinds of use.<sup>69</sup> These two different lamps showcase different manifestations of power over enslaved bodies—from status and pleasure derived from the idealized form of the slave to the violent coercion inflicted upon the abject slave body. Viewed separately, we see quite different representations of slaves, but taken together, we are reminded of the various ways the slave body is brought under control and used to the benefit of the master for both social and material gains.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> On the particular value and prestige of domestic slaves in the Roman period, see Walter Scheidel, “The Roman Slave Supply,” in *Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge, 287–310.

<sup>67</sup> Lenski, “Working Models,” 133.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> This is likewise evinced in literary and theatrical works. See Fitzgerald, *Slavery and Roman Literary Imagination*; Kathleen McCarthy, *Slaves, Masters, and the Art of Authority in Plautine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Roberta Stewart, *Plautus and Roman Slavery* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

<sup>70</sup> Disparate representations of slaves and their uses reflect something of the wide-ranging disparities in quality of life among slaves. See Bradley, “Quality of Life,” chap. 5 in *Slavery and Society*.

We ought to be suspicious of the static depictions of slaves in images and texts, which seem *only* to replicate the logic of the enslaved body as rightly and sufficiently being brought under proper discipline, whatever the uses of that body. These representations aspire toward the reification of slaveholding ideology.<sup>71</sup> And yet, attention to the queerness of the slave form reminds us of the persistent potential for these idealizations to fail, for queerness to break through, both in the effects of and responses to the depictions and in the social-material practices of enslavement, which by no means guarantee their own absolutizing success.

### **Paul's Slave Form**

What happens when Paul's precise delineation of his work as a slave is envisioned alongside other representations and expectations of slaves? Is Paul's form potentially pleasure-inducing, like the lampstand depicting the beautiful slave whom elites would have desired to own, display, and enjoy?<sup>72</sup> Or might Paul's slavery have evoked the image of the bound, abject slave? Whatever Paul had in mind—whether the topos of the enslaved leader, a dutiful and efficacious slave, or otherwise—he could not ultimately dictate the reception of his self-representation.<sup>73</sup> He might have been able carefully to control his rhetoric but not the response to it. Paul makes use of the effectiveness of the slave body toward accruing certain gains, but,

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<sup>71</sup> As Albert Harrill argues of slavery discourses throughout *Slaves in the New Testament*.

<sup>72</sup> We might consider the sexual dimensions of slavery in relation to Paul's own engagements with slaves, as in Marchal, "Usefulness of an Onesimus."

<sup>73</sup> We might already assume this after the so-called death of the author. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142–48.

perhaps ironically, his performance as a slave to all is convincing to the extent that he cannot control how his enslaved form is both perceived and put to use.<sup>74</sup>

Indeed, it seems from 2 Corinthians that at least some in Corinth mocked Paul for slavishness signaled by his corporeal vulnerabilities. Paul moves from defending his apostleship on the basis of his value as a slave to all (1 Cor 9) to defending himself against the invective of opponents by boasting, ironically, of his apparently slavish weakness (2 Cor 10–13). In a long list of the hardships he has endured (2 Cor 11:23–28), it is particularly striking that Paul begins by recounting his toil and suffering, including countless blows, lashings, and beatings by rod (11:23–25). The remainder of Paul’s catalogue of adversity—highlighting danger in travel, hunger, and immense daily pressures (11:25–28)—might well have been read as showcasing heroic endurance.<sup>75</sup> Yet, as Jennifer Glancy argues, Paul’s whipped body would likely have been read as servile.<sup>76</sup> In the context of the first-century CE Roman world, battle wounds signified manly persistence and achievement,<sup>77</sup> but scars on one’s back from repeated lashings heralded a whippable body, which was a dishonorable body.<sup>78</sup> While slaves were not the only ones to

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<sup>74</sup> On the dynamics of controlling enslaved bodies, see Keith R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1984).

<sup>75</sup> See, e.g., A. E. Harvey, *Renewal through Suffering: A Study of 2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), who writes that “piling on case after case of apparently heroic endurance was a rhetorical device from which Paul may well have drawn perhaps unconscious inspiration” (ibid., 99).

<sup>76</sup> Jennifer Glancy, “Boasting of Beatings (2 Corinthians 11:23–25),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 (2004): 99–135.

<sup>77</sup> Matthew Leigh, “Wounding and Popular Rhetoric at Rome,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 40 (1995): 195–215.

<sup>78</sup> See Glancy, “Boasting of Beatings,” 107–13, and citations therein.

experience corporal punishment, the violability of one's body was a distinctly slavish quality, certainly unbefitting a free man.<sup>79</sup>

As Albert Harrill has shown, making physiognomic distinctions between enslaved and free bodies was common in writings from Aristotle through the Roman imperial period.<sup>80</sup> Associating moral characteristics with the form and appearance of particular bodies served to reinforce social hierarchies, especially the difference between slave and free.<sup>81</sup> As such, invective against opponents frequently including charges of failing to live up to the standards of idealized masculinity (i.e., free, self-controlled, inviolable, and authoritative).<sup>82</sup> Harrill argues that this sort of invective is deployed against Paul by competing teachers, facetiously dubbed by Paul as "super-apostles," who mock his dishonorable body in order to undermine his standing among the Corinthians. Paul's weaknesses signal his lack of capacity to exercise authority over others (*auctoritas*). Instead of working to overturn this representation outright, Paul follows a Cynic-Socratic tradition of rejecting such physiognomic logic by underscoring the value of humility.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, Harrill follows Abraham Malherbe in reading Paul's valorization of his beaten body as akin to Homer's Odysseus flagellating himself and appearing like a slave to gain

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<sup>79</sup> For discussion of citizens' presumption of the right to corporal inviolability, in contradistinction to the corporal punishment of slaves, see Richard A. Bauman, "Cicero on Punishment," chap. 4 in *Crime and Punishment in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>80</sup> Harrill, "The Slave Body: Physiognomics and Invective against Paul," chap. 2 in *Slaves in the New Testament*, esp. 37–44.

<sup>81</sup> This was perhaps especially important in the Roman context, wherein manumission was a relatively widespread practice, as a matter of shoring up distinctions of status as people's status could and did change. See Mouritsen, "*Macula servitutis*."

<sup>82</sup> See esp. Maud W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Representation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>83</sup> Harrill, *Slavery in the New Testament*, 53–54.

entry into Troy (*Od.* 4.240–50).<sup>84</sup> In this way, “Paul defends himself by taking the tag of the slave *schēma* that connects his struggle to that of Odysseus, a famous counterexample of the danger that confidence in outward appearance brings to strongholds under siege.”<sup>85</sup>

Harrill makes a compelling case for reading Paul’s self-representation in 2 Cor 10–13 as drawing upon and participating in competing philosophical discourses over the significations of (slave and free male) bodies. In terms of his beaten body, it is plausible that Paul had Odysseus in mind as a model for undermining the reliability of physiognomic assumptions.<sup>86</sup> Even so, it is not entirely necessary to turn to philosophical and literary works to consider the force of Paul’s argumentation in its social-material context. Whatever rhetorical tactics Paul had in mind, the Corinthians would not have needed to be familiar with physiognomic handbooks or the tale of Odysseus’s self-flagellation to read the scars on a person’s back. Within an *ekklēsia* that included both slaves and masters and a city accustomed to the buying and selling of humans as chattel, dishonorable associations with the marks of whips and rods would have been poignant.<sup>87</sup>

For Paul to boast of his beatings, as Glancy argues, is not to assert valor but to identify with Christ. Paul owns up to the beatings his body has taken and imbues them with deeper meaning. As he has said to the Corinthians, he is “always carrying in the body the

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<sup>84</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, “Antisthenes and Odysseus, and Paul at War,” *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983): 143–73.

<sup>85</sup> Harrill, *Slavery in the New Testament*, 56.

<sup>86</sup> Yet, Glancy makes the key point that Paul does not flagellate himself as Odysseus does (“Boasting of Beatings,” 129 n.113). Still, Harrill contends that this is in line with the ways Paul regularly overlooks and changes details of source material (*Slavery in the New Testament*, 55–56).

<sup>87</sup> As Glancy argues, “Those habituated to a first-century corporal idiom distinguished between a breast pierced in battle and a back welted by a whip: not every scarred body told a war story. Whippability was a token not of honor, excellence, or virility, but of dishonor, abasement, and servility” (“Boasting of Beatings,” 134).

mortification/death (νέκρωσις) of Jesus” (2 Cor 4:10).<sup>88</sup> Paul’s response to the criticisms of the super-apostles is thus both strategic and theological.<sup>89</sup> Whether or not Paul has Odysseus in mind when working to undercut the physiognomic invective of the super-apostles, there is a more obvious and relevant connection to make. The scars on Paul’s body re-present a narrative presumably held in common by the whole *ekklēsia*, namely the passion of Christ, which itself has slavish associations (Phil 2:6–7).<sup>90</sup>

### The Queerness of Slavery

In the comparison between Paul’s self-representation as slave to all in 1 Corinthians 9 and his beaten body in 2 Cor 11, we can see something of the queerness inscribed in slavery—both its potentially disruptive effects as well as its repetition of slaveholding ideologies. As a slave to all, Paul shows himself to be the most respectable sort of slave, one who performs significant functions on behalf of a prominent patron, or patrons, and does so thoughtfully and effectively.<sup>91</sup> He is even exemplary, modeling service that is to the advantage of all. The queerness of slavery, that is, that which is conceptualized as outside the prevailing ideals of the free elite, is managed in such a way as to “gain the greater number,” which works to shore up

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<sup>88</sup> Bearing marks (*stigmata*) of Christ is a recurring theme for Paul. See Glancy, “Boasting of Beatings,” 131–34.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>90</sup> See my discussion of the image of Christ as slave and the association between slavery and crucifixion in chapter 3.

<sup>91</sup> “The power of the slave, of course, was inextricably linked to that of the owner. Therefore, the perceived status and authority of the leader as slave depends on the perceived status and power of Christ. [...] to accept and respect the power of Christ as a god is to assign a great amount of authority to his slave agent, the Christian leader” (Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 56–57).

Paul's own social standing. As Puar observes, complicity with dominant material-discursive arrangements can be constitutive of queerness, not only resistance.

At the same time, to insist upon queerness as constitutive of slavery, even where it seems most contained or even effaced, is to insist upon the potential for queer disruptions, for the perversion of the ideal. This has historiographical implications, particularly toward recognizing that discourses of slavery, inasmuch as they perpetuate the queerness of slavery, are never quite stable. That is, what Paul intends by invoking slavery discourses is too narrow a scope to account for the meaning, implications, and provocations of his writing. We must also consider how such discourses interface with the social-material realities of enslavement, since Paul both draws upon and engages a world in which there are slaves and matters.

No matter how carefully circumscribed the conception of slavery and the enslaved body, as with Paul's self-representation as a dutiful slave to all, the slave form carries with it the queerness installed in the naming and constraining of slaves. This is evident in the dramatic shift from Paul's self-representation as a slave in 1 Corinthians 9 to the super-apostles' mocking of his weak, slavish body in 2 Cor 10–12. It is not only that Paul has been unable to control the response to his claims to apostleship, as if any author could ever guarantee singular interpretation, but the queerness of his slave form has spilled into the open, its monstrous marks of violability on full display. Granted, to deride Paul's whipped and beaten body would not first require that he had called himself a slave and so opened himself up to this sort of invective. But the uneven deliberation over the value, or not, of Paul's body and work as related to his apostleship and authority is tied up with the discursivity and materiality of enslavement.<sup>92</sup> What

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<sup>92</sup> This is intrinsically connected with the ways that discourses of power in 1 Corinthians more broadly are played out on and through bodies. See Elizabeth A. Castelli, "Interpretations of Power in 1 Corinthians," *Semeia* 54 (1991): 197–222.

is said about slaves and how slaves' bodies are (re)presented, regulated, and active in the world come to bear on Paul—the slave of Christ, slave to all, and beaten apostle.

Even so, some might be inclined to say that Paul empties slavery of any queerness by deploying slavery rhetorically and philosophically, abstracted from the lives of those who are enslaved in the world, from those who are marked as queer. Indeed, Harrill makes such a claim regarding “the Roman physiognomic polarity of free and slave,” proposing that it “has little to do with actual slaves, but only between free men and slavish free men... In other words, the reference is *literary*, not social, description.”<sup>93</sup> While this is an important caveat insofar as Paul's perspective should not stand as sufficiently describing the lives of the enslaved, it is also insufficient insofar as it dislodges discourses of slavery from the social-material realities of enslavement. The machinations of enslavement are simultaneously discursive and material.<sup>94</sup> Slaves' bodies and lives are regulated in accord with slaveholding ideologies made manifest through particular material arrangements and practices.<sup>95</sup> In turn, slaves act, often in dynamic relation to free(d)persons, in ways that may provoke a response, such that the social-material enactments of the enslaved inform and shape discourses of slavery.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Harrill, *Slavery in the New Testament*, 37. This formulation draws on a similar contention of Gleason, *Making Men*, xxviii.

<sup>94</sup> My understanding of the mutual constitution of discourse and materiality is significantly informed by Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity.”

<sup>95</sup> This is made especially vivid in the work of Sandra R. Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). More generally on the ways discourses shape social-material practice, which in turn constrain people's lives to varying degrees, see Mayra Rivera Rivera, “A Labyrinth of Incarnations: The Social Materiality of Bodies,” *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 22 (2014): 187–98.

<sup>96</sup> See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), esp. 10–16, on the potentials for interpellations to be resisted. The responses provoked belie elite fantasies of absolute control, evincing the contingencies inhering in dynamic human relations.

Said more simply, without slaves in the world, whose bodies are acted upon but who also act, there can be no legible discourses of slavery.<sup>97</sup> It is not sensible for Paul to call himself a slave of all, especially in a way modeled on the role of slaves in accruing gains for their masters, if there are no slaves who do this work. Philosophical debates over physiognomy, as well as rhetorical invective in physiognomic terms, may take distinctions between free men as their primary aim, but they are only meaningful insofar as discursive delineations between slave and free have real effects in the world. When the super-apostles impugn Paul's slavish body, this is not abstracted from the repetitive lashings that regularly mark certain bodies as ever suspect and dishonorable.

### **Reading Paul Queerly**

Underscoring the queerness of enslavement when reading ancient slavery discourses is to insist that representations of slaves and slavery can never be disentangled from the bodies and lives discursively and materially figured as queer, as non-ideal. Paul might not literally have been enslaved himself, nor may he have been interested in describing the lives of the enslaved. Yet, in identifying as a slave and defending his slavish body, he re-presented material-discursive practices that shaped and were shaped by dynamic, contingent relations between slaves and free(d)persons in the social-material world. Likewise, these discourses were informed by the presence and activities of the enslaved, whose so-conceived potential to undermine elite ideals

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<sup>97</sup> One might argue that language of slavery can still be meaningful today even where there is no chattel slavery (though we ought to interrogate the tactics of making such language "relevant," such as by substituting 'servant' for 'slave' as often happens throughout English translations of the Bible). Yet, especially in the United States with its own history of enslavement, the ideologies of slavery embedded within historical texts and traditions continue to haunt. Indeed, they continue to circumscribe and mark certain bodies as ever vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, even when those bodies may not be legally enslaved, as poignantly underscored by Kimberly Juanita Brown, *The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

could never be wholly restrained, leaving open always possibilities for the disruption of slaveholding logics.

Paul may have set himself up as an exemplar, but he did so by imitating slaves and freedpersons. Even as his rhetoric evinces a level of unease over the perception of his labors, neither Paul's hedging nor the elite discourses that degrade manual work stand as fully representative. Slaves and freedpersons themselves regularly took a different view of their labors.<sup>98</sup> This is best evidenced by monuments and inscriptions of freedpersons. While distinct from slaves in terms of status, freedpersons, as formers slaves, demonstrated that the skills cultivated and put to use in both slavery and freedom could be a source of pride.<sup>99</sup> In some places, the disproportionately high representation of freedpersons in epigraphic and visual evidence might be attributed to the desire to avow status, and it is not insignificant that this was often done by identifying with work, not concealing it.<sup>100</sup> Thus, even though "Paul uses his manual labor as an example in chapter 9 of his social self-lowering," recognizing this as degrading is not the only interpretive option.<sup>101</sup> Paul may have perpetuated discourses that functioned to shore up the mastery of freedpersons, but his exploitation of the slave form can also

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<sup>98</sup> Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 124: "The implication that manual labor was despised in general within Greco-Roman society is not sufficiently class-sensitive."

<sup>99</sup> Lauren Hackworth Petersen, *The Freedman in Roman Art and Art History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 114–17; Michele George, "Slavery and Roman Material Culture."

<sup>100</sup> Henrik Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 127–28. Hackworth Petersen, *Freedman in Roman Art*, 114: "One possible explanation for the abundant epigraphic and visual testimony of workers is based on the idea that nonelites aspired to elite culture and thereby imitated it with the only means they had—through work—because they could not participate in military and political endeavors and achievements."

<sup>101</sup> Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 123.

be read differently through a framework rooted in the value, and perhaps values, of the enslaved and freed.

It is not only, then, that Paul's writing and logic is embedded in a particular slavish corporal idiom bound up with material-discursive practices of enslavement.<sup>102</sup> Emphasizing also the queerness of slavery opens up consideration of how Paul's complicity with the dominant ideology of slaveholding simultaneously poses potentials for disruptions as his words reverberate through the social-material world. Just as the discursive construction of slaves as "rightly" brought under control could not ensure the absolute control of slaves in the social-material world,<sup>103</sup> so too the rhetorical invocation of the slave form would be subject to contingency and unpredictability in its reception and treatment. We might consider how Paul's enslavement to all could have been read to suggest the figure of the slave as exemplary for the *ekklēsia* in Christ. This idea may well have undergirded forms of empowerment that provoked those writing later in Paul's name to reassert social boundaries through the injunction "slaves, obey your masters."

This suggestion gestures toward a larger kind of resistance or transformation, but we can also consider potential day-to-day effects for enslaved persons. Take, for instance, the problem Glancy has named with regard to Paul's instruction in 1 Cor 6:18 to shun or, more literally from the Greek (φεύγετε), to flee *porneia*. This would not have been an option for slaves, who could be compelled into sexual service for their owners or through prostitution.<sup>104</sup> Yet, the discourses of Roman jurists do present as legitimate the option for slaves to flee (*fugio* in Latin) from their

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<sup>102</sup> On this point, I take inspiration from Glancy's insistence on the corporeality of slavery discourse.

<sup>103</sup> For instance, the mechanisms of controlling slaves' work could not guarantee that slaves would actually work efficiently, with their obstinacy serving perhaps as a tactic of resistance and subtle self-determination. See the example of the baker's house in Joshel and Hackworth Petersen, *Material Life of Roman Slaves*, 140–42.

<sup>104</sup> Jennifer Glancy, "Obstacles to Slaves' Participation."

owners in cases of extreme abuse, at least for a time, including to seek out another free(d)person to intercede on her or his behalf.<sup>105</sup> Did the slave, and even the free(d)person who owned or interacted with slaves, hear Paul's injunction to flee *porneia* as highlighting the sexual use of slaves as a form of egregious cruelty from which a slave could rightly flee? We do not have sufficient evidence to answer affirmatively.<sup>106</sup> But we can imagine how Paul's words rubbed up against the social-material realities of slavery in ways that might not just have confirmed their controlling practices but could have generated responses that disrupted and reshaped enslavement, even subtly so.<sup>107</sup>

I am not arguing that the queerness in slavery means disruptions and alternative responses were infinitely possible. Instead, I insist upon viewing the tension between resistance and complicity as intrinsic to slavery discourses. Paul's slave form is legible because of the work slaves do, materially and discursively, to make gains, fulfill obligations, and reflect something of mastery. Insofar as the proper performance of slavery conforms to and confirms slaveholding ideology, it is not such a surprise for Paul to embrace the role of the slave as particularly useful. At the same time, the queerness of the enslaved, imputed to justify control and constraint,

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<sup>105</sup> E.g., *Dig.* 21.1.17.

<sup>106</sup> There are some later negative examples, like the use of a slave as a sexual stand-in for her newly abstinent mistress in the *Acts of Andrew*, but evidence from early Christians sources for the everyday lives of the enslaved in general is too scant to make broad claims.

<sup>107</sup> For example, slaves did, in fact, run away from their masters for any number of reasons. To do so successfully would have required concealing the scars on the body, since such physical marks were often used as the basis for identification in public notices about runaway slaves. See Christopher J. Fuhrmann, "'Arrest me, for I have run away': Fugitive-Slave Hunting in the Roman Empire," chap. 2 in *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administrations, and Public Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). To conceal and re-present the body to the advantage of an escaped slave would certainly have been precarious, subject to capture and punishment in a way not represented by Paul. Yet still, Paul's anxieties over the presentation of his body might remind us of the slippages inhering within the performativity of status. There are different stakes and limitations for the enslaved in comparison with Paul, but this is all operating within the material-discursive practices of enslavement and status-making, which are dynamic and contingent.

threatens always to undermine that control. Just as masters could not guarantee their slaves would act according to the masters' desires, we should not assume that Paul's deployment of the figure of the slave always accomplished his intentions. To read Paul's language and rhetoric as embedded in and not abstracted from the social-material world of Roman slavery shifts attention beyond Paul's aims toward the presence and influence of the enslaved.

## Chapter 2

### Bonds beyond Bondage: Centering Onesimos and the Enslaved in Paul's Letter to Philemon, Apphia, and Archippos

One of the key texts for studying slavery in early Christianity is Paul's letter to Philemon, Apphia, and Archippos, and the *ekklēsia* in "your house." Because Paul's primary purpose in writing pertains to the slave Onesimos, the epistle offers a glimpse into the life of an identifiable slave, or so it seems. Onesimos's situation is not so clear, nor are Paul's intentions. Paul does not explicitly state the circumstances under which he has come to know Onesimos, saying simply that he is in prison (Phlm 1, 13) and has become a "father" to Onesimos during his imprisonment (Phlm 10). The letter indicates only that Onesimos was "separated" (ἐχωρίσθη) from his owner (Phlm 15). While the cause of separation is not mentioned, Paul argues that it has been purposeful, namely in order that Onesimos be received back "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother" (Phlm 16).

The letter has been variously read as pro-slavery, pro-emancipation, and ambivalent.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it has a long, deleterious interpretive history, in which it has been used to buttress ideologies and rhetorics of enslavement, enabled by deploying Paul's voice in the service of proslavery arguments.<sup>2</sup> As I have contended, the multiplicity of responses should not surprise us, however. Even as discourses of slavery generally function to reinforce slaveholding ideologies and practices, slavery is dynamic. In the interplay between Paul's writing and its reception in

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Dwight Callahan, "'Brother Saul': An Ambivalent Witness to Freedom," *Semeia* 83–54 (1998): 235–50.

<sup>2</sup> On the role of Philemon in debates over slavery in the antebellum United States, e.g., see Clarice J. Martin, "'Somebody Done Hoodoo'd the Hoodoo Man': Language, Power, Resistance, and the Effective History of Pauline Texts in American Slavery," *Semeia* 83–84 (1998): 203–33.

communities comprised of slaves, masters, and freedpersons, manifold possibilities for response inhere along a spectrum of accommodation and resistance to enslavement.

Tensions between conflicting reactions to Paul's letter are especially clear in John Chrysostom's fourth-century CE homilies on the epistle. Chrysostom argues forcefully for the message's general relevance.<sup>3</sup> This broader applicability addresses particularly the issue of slaves' roles.<sup>4</sup> Chrysostom weaves together citations from Pauline and Pastoral epistles to make the case that, despite the fact that some might read Philemon to argue for the freeing of slaves, it is wholly appropriate and right for slaves to be and remain enslaved. The climax of his argument framing the homilies makes plain Chrysostom's concern:

But what is more important than all, that the word of God be not blasphemed, as he [Paul] himself says in one of his Epistles. "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed" (1 Tim 6:1). For the Gentiles also will say, that even one who is a slave can be well pleasing to God. But now many are reduced to the necessity of blasphemy, and of saying Christianity has been introduced into life for the subversion of everything, masters having their servants taken from them, and it is a matter of violence. (*Hom. Phlm., Argumentum*, NPNF<sup>1</sup> 13:546)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The general value of Philemon appears to have been contested. Though it was included in Marcion's canon (Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 5.21) and the Muratorian Canon, the Syrian church rejected the epistle, there was little commentary on it, and some writers, including Chrysostom and Jerome, felt the need to defend its utility. Demetrius K. Williams, "'No Longer as a Slave': Reading the Interpretation History of Paul's Epistle to Philemon," in *Onesimus Our Brother: Reading Religion, Race, and Culture in Philemon*, ed. Matthew V. Johnson, James A. Noel, and Demetrius K. Williams (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 16; Eduard Lohse, *A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, trans. William R. Poehlmann and Robert J. Karris, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 188; Allen Dwight Callahan, *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International), 12–13; Robert McLachlan Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 317; Markus Barth and Helmut Blank, *The Letter to Philemon: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 202–3.

<sup>4</sup> On Chrysostom's reading as reflective of elite discourses that praise model slaveholders over and against degenerate slaves, see Chris L. de Wet, *Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 185–90.

<sup>5</sup> Τὸ δὲ πάντων ἀναγκαιότερον, ἵνα μὴ ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ βλασφημῆται, καθὼς καὶ αὐτὸς γράφων ἔλεγεν. Ὅσοι εἰσὶν ὑπὸ ζυγὸν δοῦλοι, τοὺς ἰδίους δεσπότας πάσης τιμῆς ἀξίους ἡγείσθωσαν, ἵνα μὴ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ διδασκαλία βλασφημῆται. Ἐροῦσι γὰρ καὶ Ἕλληνες, ὅτι δύναται καὶ δουλεύων εὐαρεστεῖν τῷ Θεῷ· ἐπεὶ εἰς ἀνάγκην καθίστανται πολλοὶ τοῦ βλασφημεῖν καὶ λέγειν, ἐπὶ ἀνατροπῇ τῶν πάντων ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς εἰς τὸν βίον εἰσενήνκεται, τῶν δεσποτῶν ἀφαιρουμένων τοὺς οἰκέτας, καὶ βίας τὸ πρᾶγμα ἐστίν. (PG 62:704)

For Chrysostom, there is a singular proper way to read the letter. Those who have been interpreting and acting otherwise are admonished to come into conformity on the basis of a broader set of scriptural mandates.

It has been argued that Chrysostom invented the idea that Onesimos was a runaway slave, a rebel not just against his owner but also God.<sup>6</sup> While this idea has been contested,<sup>7</sup> it is hard to miss what was at stake for Chrysostom in the fourth century. Chrysostom asserts that a slave could be pleasing to God *as a slave*, and he identifies this as something even Gentiles would maintain. He argues this over and against those Christians who have apparently gone to the extreme by renouncing the principle that slaves ought to honor their master.<sup>8</sup> Chrysostom is especially concerned that non-Christians may observe such practices and come to believe that Christianity “has been introduced into life for the subversion of everything,”<sup>9</sup> even a subversion

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<sup>6</sup> Allen Dwight Callahan, “Paul’s Epistle to Philemon: Toward an Alternative Argumentum,” *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993): 357–76.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Mitchell, “John Chrysostom on Philemon: A Second Look,” *Harvard Theological Review* 88 (1995): 135–48. See also Callahan’s response: “John Chrysostom on Philemon: A Response to Margaret M. Mitchell,” *Harvard Theological Review* 88 (1995): 149–56.

<sup>8</sup> There is evidence for the widespread practice among early Christians of using communal funds to purchase slaves’ manumission. See J. Albert Harrill, “Ignatius, *Ad Polycarp*. 4.3 and the Corporate Manumission of Christian Slaves,” in *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 158–92. However, this might not always have been for humanitarian reasons, since freed slaves could then owe obligations to the community just as they would to former owners.

<sup>9</sup> Chrysostom makes explicit what may also have been a concern for Ignatius as he sought to rein in the use of communal funds to purchase manumission (*Pol.* 4.3). Such activities could have been perceived by non-Christians as subversive. Romans were generally suspicious of corporate manumission as a potential tool to recruit slaves to join a particular faction. See Harrill, *Manumission*, 182–86.

through which slaves would be taken away from their masters, or, said differently, liberated from their masters.<sup>10</sup>

The idea that Onesimos had run away from his master held sway for centuries and still appears in a great many biblical annotations and commentaries. Yet, if we take Chrysostom seriously about those against whom he argued, in the public context of preaching, no less, at least by the fourth century there were Christians striving to subvert the logic and practice of enslavement, if not working for the “subversion of everything.”<sup>11</sup> The argument that Chrysostom explicitly and implicitly makes is temporally and spatially far removed from Paul’s penning of the letter. However, it does provide data for the multiple and divergent trajectories of interpreting and responding to Christian slavery discourses, especially as they developed out of the Pauline tradition. We can ask, then, whether Paul’s own writing and its engagement with the discursive-material practices of enslavement gives rise to such starkly different possibilities for slaves.

### **The Problem of Onesimos**

As reflected already in the contestation at the heart of Chrysostom’s polemic, one of the primary problems of Paul’s letter to Philemon, Apphia, and Archippos has been the figure of

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<sup>10</sup> Such concerns are in line with pervasive anxieties among Roman freepersons over the literal policing of status. Efforts to ensure that slaves remained enslaved, including especially the recapturing of escaped slaves, aroused nearly unparalleled coordination of forces at all levels of the empire, from emperors to local magistrates. Christopher J. Fuhrmann, “‘Arrest me, for I have run away’: Fugitive-Slave Hunting in the Roman Empire,” in *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administration, and Public Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21–43.

<sup>11</sup> This would not have been unprecedented. Whether endeavoring after the subversion of everything or not, in the second century, the Carpocratians were accused of abolishing social distinctions, including between slave and free. See Kathy L. Gaca, *The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 273–91. Then in the middle of the fourth century, the Circumcellions in Numidia rebelled for several years against the wealthy who oppressed them, including slaveholders. See Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), esp. 630–720.

Onesimos. For much of the letter's interpretive history, Onesimos has been viewed literally as a problem, as a fugitive slave. While this reading has been challenged and decentered especially in recent decades, Onesimos's status is still up for debate.<sup>12</sup> He might have been a runaway,<sup>13</sup> truant,<sup>14</sup> envoy,<sup>15</sup> assistant,<sup>16</sup> or free brother of Philemon.<sup>17</sup> The problem with Onesimos, it turns out, is our problem: we are not sure who he was or why Paul wrote a letter concerning him. It is this latter concern over Paul's reason in writing that has generated a great deal of interest in the letter. Onesimos is often the one on center stage, yet he serves as a datum in the reconstruction of Paul's life and character.<sup>18</sup> That is, the primary question is not so much who Onesimos was and what he had done but why and how Paul acted, ostensibly on Onesimos's behalf, in relation to a community of (presumably) freepersons.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the communal aspect of the letter, as indicated by its three addressees plus the *ekklēsia*, is significant because it shows the negotiation

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<sup>12</sup> Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon"; J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 6–14; Demetrius K. Williams, "No Longer as a Slave," 20–35.

<sup>13</sup> Lohse, *A Colossians and Philemon*.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Lampe, "Keine 'Sklavenflucht' des Onesimos," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 76 (1985): 135–37.

<sup>15</sup> Sara C. Winter, "Paul's Letter to Philemon," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 1–15.

<sup>16</sup> Craig S. Wansink, *Chained in Christ: The Experience and Rhetoric of Paul's Imprisonments* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 188–89.

<sup>17</sup> Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon"; Callahan, *Embassy of Onesimos*, 51–54.

<sup>18</sup> In this way, we might appropriately be troubled to imagine ourselves in the slave market, inspecting the enslaved body of Onesimos, inquiring whether he has ever run away or has any other physical or psychic defects, trusting whatever information Paul, the free man, is willing to offer up.

<sup>19</sup> See esp. Callahan, "Paul's Epistle to Philemon"; Joseph A. Marchal, "The Usefulness of Onesimos: The Sexual Use of Slaves and Paul's Letter to Philemon," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130 (2011): 749–70, on the kyriarchal, master class ideology of the exchange.

over the role of the enslaved not to be simply a private matter.<sup>20</sup> Onesimos's function is a matter for ecclesial deliberation, and so we might ask what roles Onesimos specifically and slaves generally could perform in the *ekklēsia*.<sup>21</sup>

Ironically, then, one of the rare glimpses in the New Testament of a slave within the *ekklēsia* in Christ has become an occasion for centering the figure not of the enslaved but of the free, namely Paul. Perhaps this is not so much ironic as it is the product of dominant histories of interpretation invested in maintaining and perpetuating the interests of free elites. The recent volume *Onesimus Our Brother* incisively names and interrogates this problem:

Whether we describe it as elite, conventional, traditional, or normative, biblical criticism in the West has assured and sustained Onesimus's silence and enslavement. How and why has it done this, even after slavery has ended? Should not Onesimus, too, have been set free, emancipated, manumitted? But if Onesimus is freed, given voice and agency, what will happen to the interpretive system that has kept him in thrall? Why is Onesimus's freedom of agency and voice such a threat?<sup>22</sup>

There are serious challenges to knowing and claiming anything about Onesimos, as I discuss. Still, the danger of prioritizing the role of Paul, especially if to view him as a champion of freedom,<sup>23</sup> is that such a move continues to privilege the perspectives of the dominant while

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<sup>20</sup> Winter, "Paul's Letter to Philemon," argues that the legal and commercial terminology suggest a public audience. See also Clarice J. Martin, "The Rhetorical Function of Commercial Language in Paul's Letter to Philemon (Verse 18)," in *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy*, ed. Duane F. Watson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 321–37. On the idea that the second-person singular throughout the letter refers to Archippos instead of Philemon, see Winter, "Paul's Letter to Philemon," 2. Winter revives the view of John Knox, *Philemon among the Letters of Paul: A New View of Its Place and Importance* (New York: Abingdon, 1959), 17–18.

<sup>21</sup> Katherine A. Shaner, "The Religious Practices of the Enslaved: A Case Study of Roman Ephesos" (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 2012), esp. 99–108.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew V. Johnson, James A. Noel, and Demetrius K. Williams, "Introduction," in *Onesimus Our Brother*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> See Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre and Laura Nasrallah, "Beyond the Heroic Paul: Toward a Feminist and Decolonizing Approach to the Letters of Paul," in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. Christopher Stanley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 161–74.

covering over and often undermining the historically marginalized and exploited.<sup>24</sup> This, I argue, is a problem not only for ethical interpretation<sup>25</sup> but also for historiography.<sup>26</sup> In his letter to Philemon, Paul is deeply embedded in a kyriarchal system of domination, reiterating and reinforcing its slaveholding logic. And yet, when we read the language of the letter alongside alternative articulations of relationality among the enslaved, we can begin to trace the possibilities for the divergent responses attested by Chrysostom.

### **A Partner in Slaveholding**

Whether or not Onesimos was a fugitive slave, it is time to leave that unanswerable and endlessly problematic question aside. The terms of the letter's negotiation over Onesimos operate within a general system of social-legal-economic exchanges involving slaves.<sup>27</sup> To read

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<sup>24</sup> E.g., the role of Philemon in debates over slavery in the antebellum United States. See Martin, "Somebody Done Hoodoo'd"; Callahan, "Brother Saul."

<sup>25</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> See Williams, "No Longer as a Slave," esp. 44: "It is not that newer readings 'fail to take history seriously' but that history is not the only determinant for interpreting Scripture: *experience* is important also—of 'the original setting(s) of the biblical texts themselves' and of the flesh-and-blood readers who interpret them! The anxiety for readers within the historical paradigm with a text like Paul's letter to Philemon is that it provides 'an excellent opportunity for a case study about the ways in which a person's social location can serve as a tacit rationale for reading inappropriate values into the text, distorting the document's original intent'" (citing Kirk D. Lyons, "Paul's Confrontation with Class: The Letter to Philemon as Counter-Hegemonic Discourse," *Cross Currents* 56 [2006]: 118). See also Dale B. Martin, "Slave Families and Slaves in Families," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 208, on "anecdotal historiography" and the unequal treatment of data on slaves and elites, even as extant evidence across classes is limited. Cf. J. Albert Harrill, "The Slave Still Appears: A Historiographical Response to Jennifer Glancy," *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007): 212–21, who reads slavery discourses, including in Philemon, as stereotypical literary conventions more than evidence for enslaved persons.

<sup>27</sup> Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 16, concludes, "The slave literally is a 'living tool' caught between two 'masters' deciding on the use of his services." But it is important to note again the communal nature of the letter and its implications for viewing the enslaved as holding a particular role within the broader *ekklēsia*.

the letter in this light, we would do well to start at its rhetorical climax, where Paul asserts his role as a *κοινωνός*. In verse 17, Paul encourages Philemon to recognize him as a *κοινωνός*.<sup>28</sup> This ought not be read as an abstract invocation of some generic theme of partnership but had concrete social and economic consequences.<sup>29</sup> Earlier in the letter, Paul introduces the partnership in terms of faith, saying that he remembers the letter's recipients always in his prayers (4) "in order that the partnership of your faith (*κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου*) might become effective in recognition of all the good that is in us in relation to Christ (*παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν εἰς Χριστόν*)" (6). Effectively, by framing the *κοινωνία* as one of faith and in relationship to Christ, Paul heightens its terms. In his examination of contemporaneous documentary papyri, Peter Arzt-Grabner demonstrates the widespread and predominant use of *κοινωνία* either in marriage contracts made directly between husbands and wives, as opposed to between husbands and wives' parents, or in reference to business partnerships.<sup>30</sup> To become a *κοινωνός* is to commit to particular social and material responsibilities and obligations to another person. Hence, we cannot separate the theological from the economic dimensions of such partnership language but should be attentive to the ways a *κοινωνία* of faith might be enacted and embodied.

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<sup>28</sup> I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Jennifer A. Quigley, "Divine Accounting: Theo-Economic Rhetoric in the Letter to the Philippians" (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, in progress), for her work on what she terms theo-economic language in the letters of Paul, especially uses of *κοινωνός* and its cognates. Quigley's insistence upon recognizing the economic dimensions of such terms helped me to begin to notice more precisely the ways that discourses of slavery are inseparable from the economic machinations of enslavement, which has in turn expanded the scope of my own readings. See also Jennifer A. Quigley and Laura S. Nasrallah, "Cost and Abundance in Roman Philippi: The Letter to the Philippians in its Context," in *Philippi, From colonia augusta to communitas christiana: Religion and Society in Transition*, ed. Steven J. Friesen, Daniel N. Schowalter, and Michalis Lychounas (Leiden: E. J. Brill, forthcoming).

<sup>29</sup> Peter Arzt-Grabner, *Philemon*, Papyrologische Kommentare zum Neuen Testament 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 226. Arzt-Grabner shows that, in the papyrological record, *κοινωνός* refers clearly to business partners and not generically to friends. "In den Papyrusdokumenten bezeichnet der griechische Ausdruck *κοινωνός* nicht allgemein den Freund, sondern den Geschäftspartner" (ibid., 226).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 182–87.

This κοινωνία has concrete consequences, and Paul's precise argumentation throughout the letter names one such consequence: Paul is able to stake a claim in a share of Onesimos.<sup>31</sup>

Paul immediately follows up his claim to being a κοινωνός in verse 17 with the assertion that, if indeed Philemon considers Paul as such, Philemon ought to “welcome him [Onesimos] as me” (17). Slaves in the Roman world could function essentially as surrogate bodies for their masters.<sup>32</sup> It might not be simply that Paul wishes for Philemon to welcome Onesimos “as you would welcome me,” as the NRSV translates, but that Philemon should receive Onesimos as a representative of Paul himself.<sup>33</sup> If the partnership Paul envisions includes shared possession of Onesimos, his command here carries the weight of a master whose slave is his surrogate body.<sup>34</sup>

The use of κοινωνία language for business partnerships in general is attested also for the specific venture of jointly owning a slave, with jurists then dealing with complications that could arise. A papyrus fragment from Oxyrhynchus dated to 89 CE, for instance, records the sale of a

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<sup>31</sup> Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 14–16, adduces from the evidence presented by Arzt-Grabner and his own study of “journeyman apprentice contracts” that Paul’s letter reproduces the genre of such apprenticeship agreements. While the letter may not itself be a formal contract, “Paul used stock formulae of slaves in apprentice contracts [...] to ‘think with,’” with the desire for “Philemon to entrust the slave with new responsibilities, as a business partner” (ibid., 15). I go further to suggest that Paul may have been positioning himself to a share of ownership over Onesimos, but I find Harrill’s reading compelling and take as the primary implication that the letter is a negotiation between freepersons over the use of a slave. See also Shaner, “Religious Practices of the Enslaved,” 103–6, on Onesimos as a possible religious expert, in training from or needed by Paul.

<sup>32</sup> Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15–16.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Frilingos, “‘For My Child, Onesimos’: Paul and Domestic Power in Philemon,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000): 91–104. Frilingos makes the case that Paul effectively stakes a claim over Onesimos such that Onesimos would become Paul’s presence in the household of Philemon. Frilingos does not, however, make much of κοινωνός, which in my estimation would only strengthen his argument, while also making even more concrete in social-material terms what Frilingos reads as primarily rhetorical.

<sup>34</sup> This sort of surrogate role of the enslaved is seen also in the practice of slaves carrying letters between freepersons and explicating them to their recipients. See Henrik Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 48.

third share of a fourteen-year-old slave named Sarapos.<sup>35</sup> Specifically, the purchase is named as a third share of common property (τρίτου μέρους κοινωνικῆς), employing a κοινων- cognate to identify that which is held in common. This example from the documentary record highlights the practice of persons being partners (κοινωνοί) in the ownership of a slave.

The juridical record is messier and less certain as evidence of practice but serves well to underscore the ownership of slaves as having serious material stakes. The jurists dispute how to settle wrongs committed by a jointly owned slave against one of the owners. Opinions vary depending, in part, on whether the slave committed the wrong with the consent of the (potentially) offending owner, but in cases where the act was not explicitly authorized, *Dig.*

47.2.62.pr (Africanus, book 8 of *Questions*) recommends:

If a common slave stole from one of his owners, it is settled that the owner should sue by the action for division of common property (*actio communi dividundo*), and it is in the choice of the judge to order that the loss be made good or a share in the slave be ceded.<sup>36</sup>

The general lack of clarity around judgments in situations involving jointly owned slaves demonstrates one of the problems of drawing upon Roman legal materials for ascertaining anything of regular practices, which were likely not uniform. Still, the legal opinion is helpful for recognizing that sharing a slave could be complex and contentious with potential repercussions ranging from owing for damages to ceding one's share in the slave. One thing is certain: the

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<sup>35</sup> P.Oxy. II 332: Διονύσιος ὁ συνεσταμέν(ος)/ ὑπὸ Ζήνωνος τῷ ἀγορανόμ(ῳ)/ χαίρ(ειν)· κατάγραφον ὄνην/ Ἄλιτι Διογένους τοῦ Διογέ-/ νους τῶν ἀπ' Ὁξυρύγχων πόλ(εως)/ τρίτου μέρους κοινωνικῆς/ πρὸς τὴν Ἄλειν(\*)κατὰ/ τὸ ἄλλο δῆμοιρον δούλ(ης)/ Σαραποῦτος ὡς (ἐτῶν)ιδ' [οὗ ἐ]π[ρί]ατ[ο] παρὰ Που-/ - - - - -  
- (Jean A. Straus, *L'achat et la vente des esclaves dans l'Égypte romaine* [München: K. G. Saur, 2004], no. 10). This is an example I found in a search for κοινων- cognates appearing near terms for slaves in documentary papyri from the first-century CE.

<sup>36</sup> Translation from Alan Watson, *Roman Slave Law* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 74. *Si servus communis uni ex dominis furtum fecerit, communi dividundo agi debere placet et arbitrio iudicis contineri, ut aut damnum praestet aut parte cedat* (Theodor Mommsen and Paul Krueger, eds., *The Digest of Justinian*, vol. 4, trans. Alan Watson [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985]). On the complications of resolving disputes involving a common slave, see *ibid.*, 73–75.

interactions between free persons over their relationship to a slave would require careful negotiation.

In this light, Paul's insistence that he will cover any wrongs that Philemon perceives Onesimos to have committed or anything thought to be owed is not necessarily a benevolent act on behalf of a slave.<sup>37</sup> Instead, Paul might very well be protecting himself against some potential legal dispute.<sup>38</sup> At the very least, Paul preempts any objections by presenting himself as committed to making things right. If indeed Paul is staking claim to a share of Onesimos, this commitment to restitution is not so much a sign of generosity toward Onesimos or a plea that Onesimos be restored to Philemon's favor as it is a guarantee (written in Paul's own hand [19]) that Paul will act as a responsible partner. At the same time, the terms of the letter suggest that there has been no formal contract of shared ownership. This is a tendentious claim to partnership. After setting himself up as a dutiful *κοινωνός*, Paul pleads with Philemon for him to make real the claims Paul has already made: "Indeed, brother, let me have this profit (*ὀνάϊμην*) from you in the Lord" (20).<sup>39</sup> What Paul desires from Philemon is contingent upon Philemon's benevolence toward Paul, not toward Onesimos, as has so often been read.

From here, we might circle back around to Paul's particular request, often conceptualized as his "plea for Onesimos," as some translations and commentaries title the section. If there is an appeal for Onesimos, though, it might not be so much on behalf of Onesimos as it is for a share

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<sup>37</sup> Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 15, likewise does not read benevolence but views a claim typical of apprenticeship contracts whereby "the master craftsman guarantees assumption of any debts that might accrue."

<sup>38</sup> Winter, "Paul's Letter to Philemon," discusses the possibility that the dispute was already underway and that Paul engages here on legal terms. See also Martin, "Rhetorical Function of Commercial Language."

<sup>39</sup> LSJ, s.v. "ὀνίμημι." The middle form of the verb, as we have here, means "have profit or advantage, enjoy help or support, have enjoyment or delight," appearing most frequently with a genitive (here σοῦ) to mean "have advantage from..., have delight or enjoyment of..."

of Onesimos. Paul offers an explanation: “I myself was wishing to enjoy possession (κατέχειν) of him for myself, so that he might serve [with] me (μοι διακονῇ) instead of you (ὑπὲρ σοῦ) in the bonds of the gospel (ἐν τοῖς δεσμοῖς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου)” (13).<sup>40</sup> There is both more clarity and more ambiguity than the NRSV translation presents (“I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel”). First, the force of κατέχω is stronger than just “to keep.” There is an implication across the verb’s semantic range that the subject of the verb stands in a position of power by which s/he can hold, possess, seize, or master something or someone.<sup>41</sup> The usage here directed toward Onesimos is not necessarily surprising given the power, generally speaking, of a free person over a slave, but its force is amplified as Paul’s argument builds toward his own claim of a share in Onesimos.

Second, it is possible to take ἐν as a dative of time and τοῦ εὐαγγελίου as a genitive of purpose so to understand Onesimos as serving Paul during his imprisonment for the sake of the gospel. Yet, the noun δεσμός most often refers to imprisonment in the singular, whereas here it is in the plural.<sup>42</sup> Paul does refer to himself twice as a “prisoner of [or for] Christ Jesus” (1, 9), so it might be reasonable to read the chains here as Paul’s. However, it might rather be that Paul is reconceptualizing Onesimos’s bonds as those of the gospel.<sup>43</sup> In this way, Onesimos serves Paul

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<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that Paul uses the verb διακονέω, which can denote service generally (as distinct from enslaved obligation) and cultic practice specifically (John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990], 194). It may be that Onesimos has a role as religious functionary, a deacon, within the *ekklesiā*. See Shaner, “Religious Practices of the Enslaved,” 103–6. It is still possible that Onesimos’s service, religious or otherwise, occurs under compulsion, at the whims of those freepersons negotiating about his place and role.

<sup>41</sup> LSJ, s.v. “κατέχω.” See Winter, “Paul’s Letter to Philemon,” though Winter oddly introduces a theological valence not necessarily evident in the text.

<sup>42</sup> LSJ, s.v. “δεσμός.”

<sup>43</sup> Winter, “Paul’s Letter to Philemon,” also translates “in the bonds of the gospel” but without further comment.

but not merely as a function of the legal demands of slavery. The demands placed upon Onesimos are now the demands of the gospel. Again, the convergence of theological, legal, and economic discourses can be generative of new forces and affects, the responses to which surely will not be singular.

Paul continues to pick up rhetorical steam by shifting further Onesimos's status vis-à-vis Philemon. The caveat, though, is that he hopes for this shift to be consensual. Having stated outright his desire in verse 13, Paul continues, "but I wished to do nothing without your consent, so that your good deed might not be as if under constraint (ὥς κατὰ ἀνάγκην) but by acting of free will (κατὰ ἐκούσιον)" (14).<sup>44</sup> While Paul is clear about what he wants (and perhaps expects) to happen (namely, that he keep Onesimos), he ensures Philemon that their partnership is an equal one, that Paul will not subordinate Philemon's will to his own. This is clearly for rhetorical effect since, in fact, Paul could do nothing without Philemon's consent. If Paul and Philemon are indeed *κοινωνοί*, Philemon must be in agreement over that which they share.<sup>45</sup> Paul appears to be inventing his claim, so he reorients the framework and transforms the terms of their *κοινωνία* of faith beyond strictly legal terms.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> My translation highlights the contrast between action under constraint or according to one's free will in order to bring out what may be an underlying play between slavery and freedom. As Dale Martin has shown, *ἀνάγκη* and *ἐκούσιος* were often deployed rhetorically to undermine the status of those who would act out of necessity as compared with those whose actions were voluntary (Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990], 71–77). See also Michael Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*, ed. A. A. Long (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> See Winter, "Paul's Letter to Philemon," and J. Paul Sampley, *Pauline Partnership in Christ: Christian Community and Commitment in Light of Roman Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), on *κοινωνία* in relationship to the legal obligations of *societas*. While I find it more compelling to think about the legal and economic stakes specifically around slavery, in particular the shared use of a slave, since the letter negotiates the relationship of a slave to freepersons, Winter's turn to Sampley's work on *societas* likewise highlights the necessity of mutual consent and the shared financial responsibilities when it comes to the common purpose of the *κοινωνία*.

<sup>46</sup> For this reason, while I appreciate the observations of some scholars that the letter functions akin to a legal document (see esp. Winter, "Paul's Letter to Philemon," Martin, "Rhetorical Function of Commercial Language"), I would contend that Paul argues on these terms only in order to shift them since, as far as we can tell, he actually has no legal claim to a share in Onesimos.

Paul does so primarily on the basis of the effects of his time with Onesimos. He explains to Philemon that perhaps the reason Onesimos “went away for a time (ἐχωρίσθη πρὸς ὥραν)” (15)<sup>47</sup> was “so that you might receive (ἀπέχῃς)<sup>48</sup> him forever, no longer as a slave but exceeding (ὕπερ)<sup>49</sup> a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord” (16). The shift to acknowledgment of Onesimos as a brother places the relationship within an active discourse of kinship in Christ. This is not without its own effects, but the immediate practical consequences are clear: Philemon ought to regard Onesimos as no

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<sup>47</sup> I follow Peter Arzt-Grabner, “How to Deal with Onesimos? Paul’s Solution within the Frame of Ancient Legal and Documentary Sources,” in *Philemon in Perspective: Interpreting a Pauline Letter*, ed. D. Francois Tolmie (Berlin: De Gruyter: 2010), 113–42, who notes that the passive form of χωρίζω has an active sense—“to go away, depart” (LSJ, s.v. “χωρίζω”). Arzt-Grabner argues that this is confirmed by papyrological evidence, there being no other instance of the passive form meaning “was separated” as is traditionally translated here (ibid., 123–24). While I do not agree with Arzt-Grabner’s ultimate assertion that Onesimos must have been a truant on the basis that he actively went away, the question of the conditions under which Onesimos departed from Philemon remains. I find no compelling reason to suspect underhanded motives. It could simply be that Onesimos literally and simply has departed one place and gone to another for a time, whether of his own volition or at the request or command of another.

<sup>48</sup> I follow the traditional translation of ‘receive’ because it makes better sense of Paul’s following explanation of how precisely Onesimos is to be received. However, we might also keep in mind the primary meaning of ἀπέχω, which is “to keep off or away from” (LSJ, s.v. “ἀπέχω”). It is possible that this ambiguity could also carry the force of a directive that Philemon keep away from Onesimos, at least in terms of his identity as a slave.

<sup>49</sup> The comparative ‘more than’ is the traditional translation and is fitting, though I opt for ‘exceeding’ because of its resonances with critical theory (queer and otherwise) that underscores how efforts to name and constrain others (or even oneself) in terms of status and identity are never absolutely determinative but exceed and are exceeded by the subjects they name. For example, the expectations of perfect obedience at work within discourses and practices of enslavement go beyond—or are more broadly encompassing than—any particular slave and will not be perfectly embodied and performed by each enslaved individual. Likewise, the slave will not necessarily behave as one named a slave ought but has capacities to exceed and disrupt the terms of enslavement, which is not an escape from the name but a demonstration that its realization is contingent upon the ever dynamic performances of slavery by both slaves themselves and the free(d)persons with whom they interact. See, e.g., Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” *GLQ* 1 (1993): 17–32. In this vein, I find ‘exceeding’ a useful translation for signaling that Paul stretches the meaning of ‘slave’ in ways that might surpass and potentially undo the term, and yet, as we will see, it remains possible still to account for that which potentially exceeds but nevertheless remains tied up in the social-material discursive practices of enslavement.

longer his slave. The corporeal and spiritual (καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ) are brought into alignment under a rubric of kinship rather than slavery, at least primarily for Philemon.<sup>50</sup>

It appears that Paul's claim and the basis of this shift in status is grounded in what Paul has invested in Onesimos. Paul has already averred that Onesimos "once was useless (ἄχρηστον) to you but now is useful (εὐχρηστον) to you and to me" (11). There is a likely play on Onesimos's name, which means 'useful' or 'profitable' or 'beneficial,' though the pun uses a different word here.<sup>51</sup> Based on evidence for the frequent interchange of η and ι, it is possible that the pun invokes also a distinction between life without Χριστός and life in Χριστός, suggesting perhaps that at least one of the ways Paul has made Onesimos useful has been instructing him in the way of life in Christ.<sup>52</sup> It is not necessary to presume anything literal about the designation as formerly 'useless.' It is also not certain the precise ways in which Onesimos is now useful, whether performing more profitably and beneficially as a slave, in relationship to Christ, or otherwise.<sup>53</sup> The salient point is that Paul stakes a claim on having made Onesimos useful, which is one of the key characteristics of an effective slave. The rhetorical force is to undermine Onesimos's standing as a slave in relationship to Philemon, with Paul instead credited for bringing out the best in Onesimos qua slave. Granted, Paul identifies Onesimos as "useful to you and to me," but Paul clearly argues that he has been the one to make Onesimos profitable or

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<sup>50</sup> That Paul says he has become Onesimos's father and Onesimos his child (10) is another matter that operates still within the social-material discursive practices of slavery, as I will discuss below.

<sup>51</sup> See esp. Marchal, "Usefulness of Onesimus."

<sup>52</sup> Arzt-Grabner, "How to Deal," 121–22. See also Winter, "Paul's Letter to Philemon," 4, and her comparison with the interchange in 1 Cor 15:33.

<sup>53</sup> Marchal's provocative essay, "Usefulness of Onesimus," rightly expands the scope of understanding the expected usefulness of slaves, including sexual uses. The effect is not to claim definitively what Paul means but to recognize that his terminology here is grounded in kyriarchal slave protocols.

beneficial. This line of argumentation grounds Paul's claim at least to a share of Onesimos, rhetorically if not necessarily legally. Not only does Paul want to continue enjoying the benefits of Onesimos's usefulness,<sup>54</sup> but he seems to have made an investment in Onesimos that has enhanced this human commodity.<sup>55</sup> It appears, then, that this investment—by which Onesimos is now useful and exceeds slavery so to be regarded as a brother, especially to Philemon—is the basis for which Paul can positively posit that he ought to be considered as a *κοινωνός* (17). Paul has positioned himself as rightfully possessing a share of Onesimos such that, through Onesimos, Paul might also maintain a presence in Philemon's household ("welcome him as me" [17]) and might function effectively not only as Philemon's partner but as the senior partner.<sup>56</sup>

Ultimately, the point is that Onesimos has become useful to Paul, and Paul desires to continue receiving the benefits of this usefulness. The language and logic of the letter operates fully within discourses of enslavement. I am not the first to notice this language as that of commerce, but a considerable amount of energy given toward contextualizing the letter in the discourses and practices of Roman slavery has (necessarily) been directed toward refuting the hypothesis that Onesimos is a fugitive slave.<sup>57</sup> The aim has been a hopeful one: to restore the reputation of Onesimos and highlight his elevated status within the *ekklēsia* in Christ.<sup>58</sup> But we might note that Onesimos is not named as a *κοινωνός*, and his freedom is not in any way

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<sup>54</sup> There is no way of knowing if this is a situation in which a usufruct has actually been granted, that is, that Onesimos has been loaned to Paul with the understanding that the fruits of Onesimos's labors would accrue to Paul, but the concept may be at play. See chapter 1 above.

<sup>55</sup> Frilingos, "For My Child," 102.

<sup>56</sup> See Frilingos, "For My Child," on how the public nature of the letter's address and reading makes clear Paul's stature over Philemon.

<sup>57</sup> See notably Martin, "Rhetorical Function of Commercial Language."

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. See also Winter, "Paul's Letter to Philemon."

secure.<sup>59</sup> Though Paul urges Philemon to welcome Onesimos as Paul himself, it remains clear that the status of Onesimos is dependent on Paul, or so he contends. This, to be sure, is the logic of slavery.<sup>60</sup> Whatever Onesimos has done and whatever is his legal status—slave, freed, or hoping soon to be freed—and whatever it is that Paul desires and whatever advantage he hopes to gain, rhetorically or otherwise, Paul’s language throughout the letter traffics in the material-discursive practices of enslavement. The surest thing we might be able to say about the letter, then, is that it shows Paul to participate in slave trafficking.

### **Ties that Unbind**

I am, of course, being provocative. Paul would not be a slave trafficker in the modern sense of dealing in the illegal sale and exploitation of humans. Indeed, slave trafficking, or dealing in a (human) commodity, was legal in the Greco-Roman world and generally accepted as ethically unproblematic. The point I am emphasizing, over and against heroic treatments of Paul as benevolent toward Onesimos, is that dealing in and dealing with slaves was always a matter of negotiation between freepersons. In this letter, we find Paul negotiating the terms of Onesimos’s enslavement, not obviously toward the benefit of Onesimos, but explicitly in terms of partnership between free men with the benefits such partnership could entail, including the use of owned slaves. Paul’s apparent expressions of affection for Onesimos hardly suggest the undoing of

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<sup>59</sup> Artz-Grabner, “How to Deal,” 137: “The documentary papyri and ostraca do not attest that a slave could sometimes be referred to by his master as a *κοινῶνός*. Moreover, Paul does not explicitly call Onesimos a potential or future *κοινῶνός* of Philemon; he only does so in an indirect way. Nevertheless, there is compelling papyrological evidence that slaves were sometimes appointed as managers or confidants by their masters.” I would highlight that working as a manager or confidant was still embedded in the *kyriarchal* slave protocols.

<sup>60</sup> Marchal, “Usefulness of Onesimos.” See also Henrik Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), on the lasting “stain of slavery” and continued expectations of service in patron-client relations even upon manumission.

enslavement but are part and parcel of the kyriarchal discourses and practices that sustained slavery.

Paul's letter to Philemon gives us no more access to the life of a slave living among some of the earliest followers of Christ than simply knowing that this slave, Onesimos, interacted with Paul. As I have argued, the unrelenting kyriarchal matrix in which the letter is firmly embedded evinces the negotiation between freepersons over a slave. Yet still, we might inquire further about the broader dynamics of enslaved and free relations evoked by the letter and so also the potential for a variety of interpretations and responses. Specifically, we might wonder about the reformulation of kinship ties with Onesimos being called a beloved brother. What did this mean, and what effects might it have had? Did claims of kinship have social and material consequences upon the life of Onesimos or others who were enslaved? Did relationships shift between free(d) and slave and among slaves themselves?

These questions are brought into sharp relief by the natal alienation that Orlando Patterson describes as one of the constitutive elements of slavery.<sup>61</sup> A slave was categorized legally as *res*, a thing,<sup>62</sup> and one of the significant consequences of slaves' lack of legal identity was the inability to marry and claim familial relations.<sup>63</sup> Children born to slave mothers would themselves be enslaved,<sup>64</sup> and slaveholders had the capacity and did sometimes in practice break

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<sup>61</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 5–10, 13.

<sup>62</sup> On slavery in Roman law, see Jane F. Gardner, "Slavery and Roman Law," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, ed. K. Bradley et al., vol. 1, *The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. K. Bradley and P. Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 414–37.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 423–26. See also Sandra R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 124–25.

<sup>64</sup> Yet, see Gardner, "Slavery and Roman Law," 424, on contested and shifting iterations of law with regard to the status of children born to a free Roman woman and enslaved man, as well as the resulting status of the woman.

apart any biological and affectionate relationships between slaves.<sup>65</sup> Even so, literary, epigraphic, and even legal evidence reveal the formation of familial ties among those who were enslaved.<sup>66</sup> The jurist Ulpian, though perhaps unique, indicated a preference that families not be separated, recognizing the value (likely as much economically productive as humanitarian) of maintaining kinship units (*Dig.* 21.1.35, 33.7.12.7). In the New Testament, the parable of the king settling accounts with his slaves in Matthew 18, describes the sale of a slave, his wife, children, and possessions (Matt 18:25). This and other literary accounts naming slaves' family relationships suggest that it would not have been beyond imagination to recognize the bonds between slave spouses and their children, even while a slave had no relatives according to the law.<sup>67</sup> Even more significantly, extant epitaphs show slaves themselves having used the same terms to describe familial relations as freeborn persons.<sup>68</sup> Possibilities for the formation and maintenance of family ties among slaves complicate the legal formulations of slavery that deny such relations. Even so, how enslaved persons negotiated and enacted any kind of family life, or kinship ties more generally, would always have been subject to the ultimate power of slaveholders to bind and break apart, manipulate, and control slave relationships.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 5. On the particular vulnerabilities of enslaved families, see Bernadette J. Brooten, "Early Christian Enslaved Families (First to Fourth Century)," in *Children and Family in Late Antiquity: Life, Death and Interaction*, ed. Christian Laes, Katariina Mustakallio, and Ville Vuolanto (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 118–124.

<sup>66</sup> Keith R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 47–80; Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World*, 141–52.

<sup>67</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 47–48.

<sup>68</sup> Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World*, 141–49; Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 2–7.

<sup>69</sup> Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 45–46.

Queer theory, specifically notions and practices of kinship among persons who identify as queer, might provide a useful analog and framework for considering the complexities inhering within discourses of kinship in relation to the enslaved of antiquity. As Judith Butler explains, “The term ‘queer’ has operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names or, rather, the producing of a subject *through* that shaming interpellation.”<sup>70</sup> That is, the naming of some persons as queer has operated to identify certain bodies as existing outside the bounds of normative gendered and sexual modes of being, with attendant social-material repercussions even to the point of violence and death.

An irony exists with the invocation of the term ‘queer,’ however. The name has been taken up not as signifying exclusion but as an identity through which life-giving bonds of care and shared struggle can be forged. Butler writes,

Significantly, it is here in the elaboration of kinship forged through a resignification of the very terms which effect our exclusion and abjection, a resignification that creates the discursive and social space for community, that we see an appropriation of the terms of domination that turns them toward a more enabling future.<sup>71</sup>

The denial of inclusion within dominant ideals allows space for engaging creative capacities to take up the non-ideal, to form bonds of kinship where family ties have been cut off and denied, and to resist forces of domination.

Queerness is not without its dangers. Nor is queerness always resisting; it can conform to and be complicit in dominant formations.<sup>72</sup> Instead, as Butler makes clear, any articulation and

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<sup>70</sup> Butler, “Critically Queer,” 18.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–29.

<sup>72</sup> As I have argued throughout this dissertation on the basis of Jasbir Puar’s formulation of queerness. “Queerness as an assemblage moves away from excavation work, deprivileges a binary opposition between queer and not-queer subjects, and, instead of retaining queerness exclusively as dissenting, resistant, and alternative (all of which queerness importantly is and does), it underscores contingency and complicity with dominant formations” (Jasbir K. Puar, “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” *Social Text* 84–85, vol. 23, nos. 3–4 [2005]: 121–22).

performance of the self is subject to the constraints of dominant discursive practices.<sup>73</sup> As such, even self-identifications as queer cannot entirely escape efforts now or in the future to control queerness.<sup>74</sup> This tensive dynamic—highlighting both the possibilities for improvising within constraints along with the effects of controlling discourses and practices—is apt for examining the preclusions and possibilities of kinship among the enslaved of the Greco-Roman world. The enslaved, named and constrained by slavery’s alienating forces, are denied legal recognition of family ties and yet persist in forging life-sustaining bonds of kinship.

It is not that the enslaved could outright flout slavery’s demands without fear of death. Still, assertions of kinship attest to strategies for resisting the dehumanizing, alienating forces of enslavement. Moreover, it is important to note that the same opportunities for creative workings of enslavement’s demands and limitations were not available to all. Slaves of wealthier households and in higher-level positions surely had greater flexibility to forge and maintain bonds of kinship, especially extended families.<sup>75</sup> And while there is evidence of enslaved

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<sup>73</sup> Butler, “Critically Queer,” 18: “Indeed, I can only say ‘I’ to the extent that I have first been addressed, and that address has mobilized my place in speech; paradoxically, the discursive condition of social recognition *precedes* and *conditions* the formation of the subject: recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject. Further, the impossibility of a full recognition, that is, of ever fully inhabiting the name by which one’s social identity is inaugurated and mobilized, implies the instability and incompleteness of subject-formation. The ‘I’ is thus a citation of the place of the ‘I’ in speech, where that place has a certain priority and anonymity with respect to the life it animates: it is the historically revisable possibility of a name that precedes and exceeds me, but without which I cannot speak.”

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 19: “As much as it is necessary to assert political demands through recourse to identity categories, and to lay claim to the power to name oneself and determine the conditions under which that name is used, it is also impossible to sustain that kind of mastery over the trajectory, of those categories within discourse. This is not an argument *against* using identity categories, but it is a reminder of the risk that attends every such use. The expectation of self-determination that self-naming arouses is paradoxically contested by the historicity of the name itself: by the history of the usages that one never controlled, but that constrain the very usage that now emblemizes autonomy; by the future efforts to deploy the term against the grain of the current ones, efforts that will exceed the control of those who seek to set the course of the terms in the present.”

<sup>75</sup> Dale B. Martin, “Slave Families and Slaves in Families,” in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans: 2003), 213.

families being held intact, “the scales of evidence tip more strongly toward the extreme vulnerability and permeability of enslaved family life, both outside of and within early Christianity.”<sup>76</sup> I take seriously this unequal, non-uniform reality and contend that it should not be surprising. The effectiveness of Roman slavery seems to have been its capacities for allowing some level of flexibility and recognition of humanity—as evidenced by the existence of enslaved families in spite of their legal disavowal—and incentives for performing enslavement well—especially the enticing potential for manumission—all the while granting owners full control over the bodies and livelihoods of the enslaved.<sup>77</sup>

Hence, in analyzing kinship among the enslaved, I emphasize the unrelenting kyriarchy that constrained slaves’ lives while also highlighting the capacities for resilience and negotiation of constraints on the part of the enslaved. Otherwise, we are left with a view of slaves only ever as subjected to slavery and not as subjects in history. To read these materials alongside Paul’s letter to Philemon is not to displace or take lightly the letter’s rhetoric of slaveholding but to underscore the traces of the alternative responses that the letter may have elicited and the possibilities that existed beyond its words.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Brooten, “Early Christian Enslaved Families,” 124.

<sup>77</sup> On the effectiveness of the machinations of Roman slavery in this light, see Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), esp. 99–132.

<sup>78</sup> I offer a queer reading, not to the exclusion of other forms of ideological critique, such as the important work that has been done within African American biblical hermeneutics (e.g., *Onesimus Our Brother*, which consciously draws connections of kinship across time and place), but as a complement to such approaches. Specifically, I emphasize the queerness of slavery so to underscore the social-material ways slaves are named and constituted as monstrous, as those who subvert and pervert the ideal, and yet the possibilities generated for this naming as other to become the basis for acting otherwise (Butler, “Critically Queer”).

*Bonds within and beyond Bondage*

Funerary inscriptions leave a material trace of practices among the enslaved of claiming familial bonds that were legally denied to them. In one study of 115 slave inscriptions from Asia Minor, most dating from the first through third centuries CE, Dale Martin identified 74, or 64% of them, as referring in some way to family structure.<sup>79</sup> We must keep in mind that all of these possibilities and practices of maintaining families and networks of support fall within the logic and control of slavery.<sup>80</sup> And yet, kinship among the enslaved resists oversimplification as it works in multiple directions, as we will see. Expressions of ties among the enslaved themselves could signal the forging of networks of care and support amid and against the forces of natal alienation.

While it has been generally assumed that slaves forged bonds with others residing in the same household, since this would be most convenient and tenable, this was not exclusively the case. In fact, a relatively significant number of funerary inscriptions indicate care for networks of kin and other friends extending beyond single households.<sup>81</sup> As just one example of this work of maintaining kinship, we have here an inscription from a limestone sarcophagus in Termessos of modern-day Turkey:<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 161. For burial practices in Asia Minor more generally, including consideration of slaves as buried either with their owners or on their own and with their families, see J. Rasmus Brandt, Erika Hagelberg, Gro Bjørnstad, and Sven Ahrens, eds., *Life and Death in Asia Minor in Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Times: Studies in Archaeology and Bioarchaeology* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017).

<sup>80</sup> For the complex nature of slaves' roles within Roman families, including the possibilities for slaves to maintain their own kinships ties, as well as further inscriptional evidence, see Jonathan Edmondson, "Slavery and the Roman Family," in *Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1, *Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Bradley and Cartledge, 337–61.

<sup>81</sup> Martin, "Slave Families," 209.

<sup>82</sup> There is a relatively large number of limestone sarcophagi, some even ornamented, for slaves and freedpersons in Termessos, suggesting that high production made the materials affordable. See Brandt et al., *Life and Death*, ccx, including discussion of costs of materials and differing epigraphic habits, such as recording social

Ἀρτέμων ὁ καὶ Ζωτικός, οἰκέτης Αὐρ(ηλίου) Ἀρτέμωνος  
 Ἀπολ(λωνίου) Αρ(τειμου) ε' Αλικρεους, τὴν σωματοθήκην ἐφέσει τοῦ δεσ-  
 πότης ἑαυτῷ καὶ Αὐρ(ηλία) Κορκαινα Κορκαινου, τῇ γυ(ναικί), καὶ τῇ προ-  
 εντεθαμμένη  
 Πασαγάθῃ, τῇ πρ<ο>γό-  
 νῃ· ἐτέρῳ δὲ μετ' αὐ-  
 τοὺς οὐ[δενὶ κτλ.]<sup>83</sup>

Artemon, also called Zotikos, slave of Aurelios Artemon Apollonios [son of?] Arteimas V Alikreous, [provided] the sarcophagus, by permission of the master, for himself and for Aurelia Korkaina [freedwoman] of Korkainos, his wife, and his previously interred step-daughter [?] Pasagathe... etc.<sup>84</sup>

We see the slave Artemon providing a sarcophagus for his wife, Korkaina, now a freedwoman, along with someone who may have been a stepdaughter. It is notable that Artemon and Korkaina belonged to different households. Perhaps Artemon was claiming that he and Korkaina were bonded together in marriage beyond the limits of place and time. Whatever the circumstances, we get a glimpse at the messiness of slave relations, with influences beyond their control, and still too the forging of ties across differences of household and status. In this case, the relationship may have been especially complex. For unions between a free woman and an enslaved man, the *senatus consultum Claudianum* of 52 CE provided the slave's owner options either to enslave the woman for himself or to allow the union and claim the woman as his *liberta*, or freedwoman.<sup>85</sup> How might such complex relations have worked between slaves and freedpersons themselves and with those to whom they owed continued obligations? We are left only with the commemoration of ties that this freedwoman and slave man indeed did strive to

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status or not, that have rendered slaves and other lower-class persons either more or less visible in archaeological remains. Termessos is a rich site for viewing funerary habits of the enslaved.

<sup>83</sup> TAM 3.338.

<sup>84</sup> Translation from Martin, "Slave Families," 216.

<sup>85</sup> See Kyle Harper, "The *SC Claudianum* in the *Codex Theodosianus*: Social History and Legal Texts," *Classical Quarterly* 60 (2010): 610–38.

make work. Their claims exceed lives marked out by enslavement, asserting relationality stretching the spatial and temporal boundaries of life and death.

In another example, one freedman honors life-long friendship with another freedman. While there is no claim to a familial tie, the epitaph evinces a strong emotional bond between the two. A(ulus) Memmius Urbanus set up the following commemoration of A. Memmius Clarus:

*A(ulo) Memmio Claro / A(ulus) Memmius Urbanus / conliberto idem consorti / carissimo sibi / inter me et te sanctissime mi / conliberte nullum unquam / disiurgium fuisse conscius / sum mihi hoc quoque titulo / superos et inferos testor deos / una me tecum congressum / in venalicio una domo liberos / esse factos neque ullus unquam / nos diunxisset nisi hic tuus / fatalis dies. (CIL 6.22355a = ILS 8432)*

I cannot remember, my most beloved fellow-freedman [*conliberto idem consorti / carissimo sibi*], that there was ever any quarrel between you and me. By this epitaph I invoke the gods of heaven and of the underworld as witnesses that we first met on the slave-dealer's platform, that we were granted our freedom together in the same household, and that nothing ever parted us from one another except the day of your death.<sup>86</sup>

On its face, a claim to friendship may not seem as remarkable as one of familial kinship, since it does not assert a relational bond disavowed by law. Yet, we can read the last line as a sort of claim to victory over enslavement's alienating forces. Despite the myriad ways slaves' lives and relationships were beyond their control, only death could separate these two dear friends. They did not become most beloved companions only through their freedom, but in fact already at the slave market (*venalicius*). Nor did the dearness of their relationship depend on recognition as such by freepersons, but they simply were beloved in relationship to one another.

In both of these cases, we might identify the expressions of relationality as queer. Artemon and Korkaina, and their enslaved kin more broadly, preceded the term queer. Yet they, and so many persons like them who have been marginalized, dominated, and exploited, have

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<sup>86</sup> Translation adapted from Edmondson, "Slavery and the Roman Family," 344.

ever been anticipating and calling into being alternative modes for negotiating constrained circumstances. The bond between Memmius Urbanus and Memmius Clarus too evinces the vitality of enslaved lives and relationships beyond the ideologies and practices by which slaves were regarded as mere things, as not fully human. By reading these examples alongside Paul's letter to Philemon, we do not have to prioritize what Paul said and meant about kinship with the enslaved. We can consider the ways that enslaved persons were already forging bonds of relationality before and regardless of Paul's assertion. Thereby we might see the enslaved, already and always, as more than things, more than slaves. Perhaps it is Paul who follows the lead of Onesimos and other slaves in coming to understand the enslaved as beloved kin.

It is also possible that Paul makes a claim of kinship that merely reiterates the perspectives and ideology of slaveholders. Across the Greco-Roman world, we find inscriptions and literary examples of masters using terms of endearment and of kinship for their slaves, but this did not necessarily mitigate the brutality of enslavement, let alone signal impending manumission.<sup>87</sup> Instead, we can understand such designations of slaves as kin to their masters as part of the binding of the enslaved, managing the so-conceived "excess" of their desires for intimate and familial belonging with one another by bringing enslaved kinship entirely under the

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<sup>87</sup> For example, inscriptions at Delphi describe owners who raised foundlings as their own, with some expressions of fondness but also clear expectations of service and no reduction in fees for freedom; see Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 154. An inscription from Philippi identifies a slave who is also the son of his owner, with the relationship defined significantly in terms of the economic interests of the father/owner. See Jane F. Gardner, *Being a Roman Citizen* (London: Routledge, 1993), 59–60; Martin, "Slave Families," 227.

rubric of the master-slave relationship.<sup>88</sup> This is akin to the ways kinship works in Paul's rhetoric, shoring up rather than reimagining kyriarchal hierarchies.<sup>89</sup>

### **Toward Alternative Conclusions**

Together, these material remains attest to some of the ways enslaved persons negotiated the alienating constraints of slavery to forge bonds of life beyond insistence upon their social death. The kinship language in the letter to Philemon and the claims to family ties in the inscriptions of the enslaved all operate under the rubric of kyriarchy, but they work in different directions. Whereas I have argued that Paul's words function rhetorically to shore up the forces and effects of bondage, kinship among the enslaved could be worked toward different ends. In this light, Paul's letter could have different effects. Indeed, these are not just idle fantasies but seem to have come to bear in the early history of interpreting Paul's correspondence with Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus, as demonstrated by John Chrysostom's rebuke of those who deployed the epistle in a quest for "the subversion of everything."

While the material-discursive practices of kyriarchy may have been able to withstand and contain ruptures here and there, traces of the possibilities for and enactments of alternative futures remain. It is an oversimplification to think only in terms of the physical, temporal constraints of enslavement and not to consider what precedes and exceeds those terms, to take seriously the ties that could be forged within and beyond them. Assertions of kinship might not

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<sup>88</sup> See esp. Christopher Frilingos, "For My Child"; and Marchal, "Usefulness of Onesimus." Marchal makes the point that calling a slave "brother" or "sister" did not undo the fact that the so-named were still essentially slaves or freed slaves and so subject to the same uses, including sexual.

<sup>89</sup> Frilingos, "For My Child," shows that the parent-child language in Paul's letter to Philemon functions rhetorically to reinforce hierarchies. See also Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 45–47.

literally unbind so as to free one from the chains of slavery, but working such ties as a matter of connection and survival—the disavowal of alienation—could unbind persons from kyriarchal fantasies of absolute control over the social and psychic lives of the enslaved.

Moreover, bonds—the kind that stretch beyond bondage—can be formed across time so that the effects of kinship are not spatially or temporally constrained but pulse through far-reaching and diverse times and places, always potentially offering life, always potentially producing ruptures in the kyriarchal matrix of domination. We see this in the ancient allied slaves and free(d)persons who banded together to purchase freedom, in those who seem to have read Paul’s letter to Philemon in ways that troubled the hierarchies John Chrysostom and others maneuvered to reinforce, in the American slaves who walked out in protest against a masterly reading of Philemon they knew could not possibly comport with the gospel,<sup>90</sup> and in those today who resist still the exploitative, violent logic of slavery made manifest in myriad new forms, whether through trafficking or racialized violence. The material-discursive practices in which Paul was embedded and with which he engaged preceded and exceeded his writing to Philemon. By elaborating more extensively both the reiteration of slavery’s logic, as well as the traces of ever present potentials for slavery to be reworked (even if not undone), we can understand more fully—if not completely—Paul’s letter in its context. Just as importantly, we can begin to understand the alternative responses and potential futures behind, beside, and beyond its words.

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<sup>90</sup> Clarice J. Martin, “‘Somebody Done Hoodoo’d the Hoodoo Man’: Language, Power, Resistance, and the Effective History of Pauline Texts in American Slavery,” *Semeia* 83–84 (1998): 219.

### Chapter 3

#### The Queerness of Christ's Slave Form: Phil 2:6–11 and the Queer Threat

In chapter 1, I introduced the idea that queerness is characteristic of the enslaved. Slaves are construed as ever threatening, needing to be brought under control lest they disrupt and pervert prevailing ideals. However, the queerness of the enslaved does not mean that slaves are only ever resistant to slaveholding ideologies and practices, since queerness does not preclude complicity in normative material-discursive practices. Likewise, whenever slavery is invoked, it carries with it queer disruptive potentials, at the same time that it can also be worked toward ends that reiterate the ideals and ideologies of the dominant. In this chapter, I demonstrate that this dynamic between resistance and complicity is at work also in treatments of the image of Christ taking the form of a slave in Phil 2:6–11:

<sup>5</sup>Τοῦτο ρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, <sup>6</sup>ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἄρπαγμόν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, <sup>7</sup>ἀλλ' ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος <sup>8</sup>ἐταπείνωσεν ἐαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ. <sup>9</sup>διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ ὅτὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα, <sup>10</sup>ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψη ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων <sup>11</sup>καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσεται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς.

<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, <sup>8</sup>he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:6–11, NRSV)

Instead of elucidating the context of Paul's writing to the Philippians and the function of the passage within his letter, I turn to early interpretations of the text and its central image.<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> For a survey of scholarship on this passage, see Joseph A. Marchal, "The Hymn within (and among the) Philippians," in *Philippians: Historical Problems, Hierarchical Visions, Hysterical Anxieties* (London: Bloomsbury

interpretive history underlines how the queerness of slavery that is tied up with the notion of Christ as slave is a cause for concern among free, higher status Christians, something that needs to be discursively smoothed over and contained. Likewise, asking critically whether an enslaved God can liberate, Sheila Briggs underscores how the Philippians passage reflects and extends slaveholding ideology and insists that we not look for liberation in the text but in the activities of the enslaved.<sup>2</sup> Looking to the social and material lives of the enslaved, I show how the idea of Christ taking the form of a slave has been fraught with anxieties over the queerness of slavery, yet still how the slave Christ may have been a source of inspiration for the enslaved.

### **Domesticating Christ the Slave**

Just as slaves are ever capable of acting in the world in ways deemed either proper or perverse, slavery discourses carry always the potential to play out in divergent ways. In this chapter, I ask what happens when we do not read images of slaves toward their assiduously crafted ends but toward their potential undoing and recasting. To pose the question as it relates to hermeneutics and historiography: what happens when we strive not to uncover an author's intentions so to be able to elaborate that author's singular line of thought, as if self-contained, but instead follow the strands that run through and beyond the discourse and rhetoric—touching and shaping and reflecting off of historical, material bodies—and thereby recognize that interpretations and responses are never perfectly controlled? We know that early Christians acted

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T&T Clark, 2017), 13–28. On questions of whether the passage constitutes a pre-Pauline hymn, as well as the rhetorical effects of presenting it as such, see Michael Wade Martin and Bryan A. Nash, “Philippians 2:6–11 as Subversive *Hymnos*: A Study in the Light of Ancient Rhetorical Theory,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 66 (2015): 90–138; cf. Michael Peppard, “‘Poetry’, ‘Hymns’ and ‘Traditional Material’ in New Testament Epistles or How to Do Things with Indentations,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30 (2008): 319–42.

<sup>2</sup> Sheila Briggs, “Can an Enslaved God Liberate? Hermeneutical Reflections on Philippians 2:6–11,” *Semeia* 47 (1989): 137–53.

in multiple ways toward slaves and the function of slavery. How might we better account for this multiplicity? How might we ascertain and assess the impact of slaves' presence in, through, and beyond discourses of slavery?

The project of naming the slave is to bring the slave under control, but this ironically is to recognize the queer potential of the slave always to disrupt and undo that control and the logic that enables it. To read these tensions as inherent to the project of naming the slave is to foreground the supposed threat that slaves pose and so then to consider what kinds of ruptures and dispersions are possible. In what ways might the assumed capacity of slaves to undermine kyriarchal values have actually played out—not just in outright resistance but through “reclaiming the nonexceptional,”<sup>3</sup> generating alternative practices and modes of being?

#### *Clement of Alexandria's Non-Slave Slave Christ*

Early Christian citations of Phil 2:6–7 evince a careful balancing between resistance and complicity in the treatment of the slave Christ, generally eschewing potentially perverse connotations in favor of reiterating Roman ideals. In the second century, Clement of Alexandria cites the Philippians passage to argue that Christ's transformation is exemplary for humans in the present. Clement views the human body of Christ, which is an enslaved body in Phil 2:7, not as a failure of normative conventions, but as the very model by which humans can learn about the potential for a human to become divine.

The Lord himself will speak to you, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself,” the

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<sup>3</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” *Social Text* 84–85, vol. 23, nos. 3–4 (2005): 137. It is imperative to note, as Puar does, that valuing the nonexceptional can yet still allow for “complicities of privilege and the production of new normativities even as they cannot anticipate spaces and moments of resistance” (ibid.), which is to call critical attention to ways even queer projects might function to assert new exceptionalisms.

compassionate God longing to save humanity. And already the Logos itself speaks to you manifestly, putting disbelief to shame. Yes, I say, the Logos of God became a human in fact in order that you also might learn from a human how perhaps a human might become a god. (*Prot.* 1.8.4)<sup>4</sup>

The enslaved body of Christ breaks down the divide between divine and human such that humans can learn from Christ how a human can become divine.<sup>5</sup> Embedded in this argument is the potentially radical notion that what is queerly construed—the slave—somehow becomes exemplary, not of slavishness but of divinity. The problem with this reading, though, is that Clement hides the slave body from view, quoting the first words of Phil 2:7 to say that Christ emptied himself, but then he stops short of noting Christ’s form as that of a slave. Dominant discourse is not upended here; instead it is the queerness of slavery that is jettisoned. This is not surprising considering Clement’s general preference for and reiteration of classical Greek conceptions of the ideal male citizen, i.e., one who is philosophically self-controlled.<sup>6</sup>

Elsewhere Clement appears to betray his anxiety with too enslaved a slave Christ. Putting forward Christ as the paradigmatic pedagogue for humanity, Clement writes that “our pedagogue

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<sup>4</sup> Translations are my own unless otherwise noted. σὺ δὲ ἀλλ’ εἰ προφήταις μὴ πιστεύεις, [...] αὐτός σοι λαλήσει ὁ κύριος, ‘ὅς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἄρπαγμόν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ: ἐκένωσεν δὲ ἑαυτόν’ ὁ φιλοκτίρμων θεός, σῶσαι τὸν ἄνθρωπον γλιχόμενος: καὶ αὐτὸς ἤδη σοὶ ἐναργῶς ὁ λόγος λαλεῖ, δυσωπῶν τὴν ἀπιστίαν, ναὶ φημι, ὁ λόγος ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος γενόμενος, ἵνα δὴ καὶ σὺ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου μάθῃς, πῇ ποτε ἄρα ἄνθρωπος γένηται θεός. The Greek consulted for the *Protrepticus* is that of C. Mondésert, ed., *Clément d’Alexandrie: Le protreptique*, 2nd ed, Sources chrétiennes 2 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1949).

<sup>5</sup> On ideas of deification, see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). We might consider here the great risk of spatial-temporal-cosmic rupture in bringing the slave into contact with the divine through the blurring of Christ and slave. Certainly, there is theological, philosophical, and political-rhetorical precedent for imagining devotees as slaves of God and leaders as enslaved to the masses (as surveyed in earlier chapters), but we might note how these discourses are carefully crafted so to evacuate and recast the queerness of slavery, as suggested by the immediate move in Phil 2:6–11 from Christ’s voluntary enslavement to his exaltation and dominance over all the earth. This view only heightens the force of the salient point Briggs makes about the hymn, namely that freedom or liberation so framed is not radically located in the idea of Christ as slave but is made accessible only in repeating dominant ideology and rhetoric by erasing slavishness in the triumph of control over all.

<sup>6</sup> Harry O. Maier, “Clement of Alexandria and the Care of the Self,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62 (1994): 719–45, esp. 722.

is like his father God, whose son he is—sinless, blameless, and without passion in respect to the soul—God in the form of a human... He is a spotless image to us. One must attempt with all strength to assimilate the soul to him. But he is altogether free from human passions” (*Paed.* 1.2.4).<sup>7</sup> The Christ who comes in human form, though again not explicitly in slave form, is not implicated in human passions. He cannot be allowed to be a slave subject to base desires, both his own and those of the master who controls his enslaved body. Here we see a reflection of Clement’s strident stance against sexual desire as akin to the dangers posed by biblical whores.<sup>8</sup>

Later in the same work Clement finally allows the slave Christ to appear, but he is no slave at all:

For desire (*epithumia*) both becomes and fabricates all things and wishes to lie in order that it might conceal the human. But that human with whom the Logos dwells does not embellish himself, nor is he fabricated. He has the form of the Logos, becomes like God, is beautiful, and does not beautify himself...

If the flesh is a slave, as Paul also testifies, how can anyone reasonably adorn the female slave as a pimp does? For that the fleshly is the form of a slave the apostle says in the case of the Lord “that he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,” calling the outward human a slave before the Lord became a slave and bore flesh. But the sympathetic God himself set the flesh free from corruption and slavery, releasing it from the death-bringing and cruel, and conferred upon it incorruption, bestowing on the flesh this holy embellishment of eternity—immortality. (*Paed.* 3.1.1.4–2.3)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ἐοικεν δὲ ὁ παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν, ὃ παῖδες ὑμεῖς, τῷ πατρὶ τῷ αὐτοῦ τῷ θεῷ, οὐπὲρ ἐστὶν υἱός, ἀναμάρτητος, ἀνεπίληπτος καὶ ἀπαθής τὴν ψυχὴν, θεὸς ἐν ἀνθρώπου σχήματι ἄχραντος... οὗτος ἡμῖν εἰκὼν ἡ ἀκηλίδωτος, τοῦτο παντὶ σθένει πειρατέον ἐξομοιοῦν τὴν ψυχὴν· ἀλλ’ ὁ μὲν ἀπόλυτος εἰς τὸ παντελὲς ἀνθρωπίνων παθῶν. The Greek edition consulted for the *Paedagogus* is that of M. Harl, H.-I. Marrou, C. Matray, and C. Mondésert, eds., *Clément d’Alexandrie: Le pédagogue*, 3 vols., Sources chrétiennes 70 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1960–70).

<sup>8</sup> Kathy L. Gaca, *The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 255–62.

<sup>9</sup> πάντα γὰρ ἡ ἐπιθυμία γίνεται τε καὶ πλάττεται καὶ φενακίζειν βούλεται, ἵνα κατακρύψῃ τὸν ἄνθρωπον. Ὁ δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος, ὃ σύννοικος ὁ λόγος, οὐ ποικίλλεται, οὐ πλάττεται, μορφὴν ἔχει τὴν τοῦ λόγου, ἐξομοιοῦται τῷ θεῷ, καλὸς ἐστὶν, οὐ καλλωπίζεται... Δούλης δὲ οὐσης τῆς σαρκός, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Παῦλος μαρτυρεῖ, πῶς ἂν τις εἰκότως τὴν θεραπείαν κοσμοίῃ προαγωγῶ δίκην; ὅτι γὰρ δούλου μορφὴ τὸ σαρκικόν, ἐπὶ τοῦ κυρίου φησὶν ὁ ἀπόστολος· Ὅτι ἐκένωσεν ἑαυτὸν μορφὴν δούλου λαβόν, τὸν ἐκτὸς ἄνθρωπον δοῦλον προσειπὼν πρὶν ἢ δουλεῦσαι καὶ σαρκοφορῆσαι τὸν κύριον. Ὁ δὲ συμπαθὴς θεὸς αὐτὸς ἡλευθέρωσεν τὴν σάρκα τῆς φθορᾶς καὶ δουλείας τῆς θανατηφόρου καὶ πικρᾶς ἀπαλλάξας τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν περιέθηκεν αὐτῇ, ἅγιον τοῦτο τῇ σαρκὶ καὶ αἰδιότητος καλλώπισμα περιθείς, τὴν ἀθανασίαν.

Slavery is initially constitutive of the flesh, but Christ's embodiment initiates a new fleshiness that breaks free of bondage to become divinely incorruptible. Not only does Christ inhabit a slave form that fancifully is characterized by self-control, but Clement raises in contrast the very real image of the pimped-out female slave, adorned against her will.<sup>10</sup> This invokes the coercive practices for controlling enslaved prostitutes in the Roman world.<sup>11</sup> In this case, her vulnerable body is thrust into service for the sake of comparison. She is a sign of excesses of the flesh, whereas Christ is able to set the flesh free. Granted, it is the pimp who is indicted in this scenario.<sup>12</sup> The female slave is merely his victim. It is important to note that pimps, too, were frequently slaves, caught up themselves in cycles of abuse and exploitation.<sup>13</sup> Still, we are left to wonder if her flesh can ever escape embellishment at the hands of another.<sup>14</sup> She is mired in shaming queerness. In comparison, Christ's body showcases a queer capacity to disperse prevailing norms; yet, this is only accomplished by excising the sexual identification of the slave, as if identities can be pried apart to bring forward only what is productive. All the while, the female slave is left defenseless against the very corruption and slavery of the flesh from which the flesh, which is the slave, was supposed to have been set free.

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<sup>10</sup> On the shaming effects of being adorned so to enhance sexual appeal as a prostitute, see Erin K. Vearncombe, "Adorning the Protagonist: The Use of Dress in the Book of *Judith*," in *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, ed. Kristi Upson-Saia, Carly Daniel-Hughes, and Alicia J. Batten (London: Routledge, 2016), 127.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas A. J. McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 37.

<sup>12</sup> Pimps are an easy target for Clement's judgment considering general animus toward them among Romans. See *ibid.*, 74, 76.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Clement demonstrates the problem Briggs identifies when considering Phil 2:6-11 as a potential text for liberation: there is ultimate exaltation for Christ unavailable to those actually enslaved.

### *Tertullian's Fleishy Christ*

Clement's sterilized version of Christ's slave form might be contrasted with Tertullian's strong objection to the assertion by Marcion that the *form* of the slave (*morphēn doulou*) for Christ is not the *reality* (*Marc. 5.20.3–5*). Here we find Tertullian in a specific debate over whether Christ took on true human flesh. Tertullian insists:

But if in the form and image of the Father, being his Son, he is truly God, this is proof beforehand that when found also in the form and image of a human, being the Son of man, he is truly human. And when he wrote 'found,' he meant it—'most indubitably human.' For that which a thing 'is found' to be, it certainly is. So also he was found to be God through his act of power, as he is found to be human by reason of his flesh: for the apostle could not have declared him obedient unto death if he had not been established in a substance capable of death. More even than that, he adds the words, 'even the death of the cross.' For he would not have piled on the horror, lifting on high the virtue of subjection, if he had known this to be imaginary and phantasmal, if Christ had cheated death instead of suffering it, and in his passion had performed an act not of power but of illusion (*Marc. 5.20.4–5*).<sup>15</sup>

Notably, Tertullian draws attention to the horrors of Christ's fleshly death. He does call to mind Christ's status as also like God, but he does so to make the case ever more strongly that Christ truly inhabits human fleshiness, particularly that of a slave. This differs from Clement's evident anxiety to make plain that Christ's slave form is wholly unlike a slave.

Within the particular discourse Tertullian engages over the flesh of Christ, the idea that Christ takes the form of a slave is not a source of shame. Instead, it is the sign for Tertullian of

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<sup>15</sup> Translation modified from Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972). *Quodsi in effigie et in imagine, qua filius patris, vere deus, praeiudicatum est etiam in effigie et imagine hominis, qua filius hominis, vere hominem inventum. Nam et inventum ratione posuit, id est certissime hominem. Quod enim invenitur, constat esse. Sic et deus inventus est per virtutem, sicut homo per carnem, quia nec morti subditum pronuntiasset non in substantia mortali constitutum. Plus est autem quod adiecit, Et mortem crucis. Non enim exaggeraret atrocitatem extollendo virtutem subiectionis, quam imaginariam phantasmate scisset, frustrato potius eam quam experto, nec virtute functo in passione sed lusu* (A. Kroymann, ed., *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Opera Pars I: Opera Catholica*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina [Turnholti: Brepols, 1954]).

Christ's great love and therefore is cause to love the flesh, even if treated by others as folly.<sup>16</sup>

Christ's slave form is the basis for Tertullian's case for Christ in the flesh. Clement eschews the slave form in the moment he avers that Christ is the exemplar of the philosophical masculine ideal, presumably because this would present an untenable paradox.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Tertullian foregrounds the slave Christ at the moment he wants to argue for Christ at his fleshiest, which works well since the slave, more than all other humans, is characterized by the flesh.<sup>18</sup> The essential point here is that, though these are distinct discourses, the slave form in both cases functions within discourse as controlled by the speaker, or, we might say, the master. It is not that Clement and Tertullian espouse radically different attitudes toward slaves, but they discursively put the slave to work toward different ends.

Elsewhere, Tertullian draws upon his intimate knowledge of Roman slaveholding to suggest that proper mastery over a slave—signified by the slave's obedience—can serve as instructive for Christian ethics.<sup>19</sup> Though it does not cite Phil 2:6–7, a portion of Tertullian's *De patientia* demonstrates quite well how Christian slavery discourse is shaped by the social-

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<sup>16</sup> Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 54–55.

<sup>17</sup> See the discussion below on masculinity and Jesus. On the way Christ conforms for Clement to the ideal of the elite man who exhibits philosophical self-control, see Laura Nasrallah, "The Earthen Human, the Breathing Statue: The Sculptor God, Greco-Roman Statuary, and Clement of Alexandria," in *Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise [Genesis 2-3] and Its Reception History*, ed. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), esp. 131–32.

<sup>18</sup> On the associations between slaves and corporeality, see Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. 9–38.

<sup>19</sup> J. Albert Harrill, "The Metaphor of Slavery in the Writings of Tertullian," *Studia Patristica* 42 (2006): 385–89, argues that, more than engaging a history of ideas about slavery, Tertullian demonstrates close familiarity with the social and legal apparatus of Roman slavery, which informs his metaphors. In turn, this might serve as a kind of evidence for slavery in an aristocratic household. Likewise, the same can be said of Clement's knowledge of slavery and the roles of the enslaved, especially in his *Paidagogus*.

material realities of Roman enslavement, while it is simultaneously crafted so to set forth ideals intended to inform Christian thought and practice.

When we see all slaves of good and upright disposition turning round to the inclinations (*pro ingenio*) of their master—obedience (*obsequium*), as you know, is a facility in rendering service, but the principle of obedience is compliant submission—how much more does it behoove us to be found modeled upon our Lord! We are indeed slaves of the living God, whose sway over his creatures consists not in manacles or the granting of the freedman’s cap (*pileus*), but in allocating everlasting punishment or salvation. To escape his severity or to invite his liberality one needs diligence in obeying, which is proportionate to the threats uttered by his severity or the promises made by his liberality. Yet, we ourselves exact obedience not only from people who are bound to us by the bonds of slavery or who, because of some other legal bond, are under obligation to us, but also from our flocks and even from wild animals. We understand that they have been provided and granted by the Lord for our purposes. *Pat.* 4.1–3<sup>20</sup>

The enslavement Tertullian depicts is distinctly rooted in material practices of slavery, as indicated by his references to *obsequium*—the obligation of a freedperson to her or his former owner—and the *pileus*.<sup>21</sup> It is especially noteworthy that Tertullian’s claims center on the representation of slaves who act properly. Elsewhere, he deploys stereotyped portraits of unscrupulous slaves (e.g., *Ux.* 2.8.1), but here Tertullian uses the image of the good slave as exemplary of obedience to God.<sup>22</sup> This is significant because it draws out the aristocratic Roman ideal of mastery known as *auctoritas*, “which recognizes the subjectivity of subordinates and

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<sup>20</sup> Translation from Harrill, “Metaphor of Slavery,” 387–88. *Igitur si probos quosque seruos et bonae mentis pro ingenio dominico conuersari uidemus (siquidem artificium promerendi obsequium est, obsequii uero disciplina morigera subiectio est), quanto magis nos secundum dominum moratos inueniri oportet, seruos scilicet Dei uiui, cuius iudicium in suos non in compede aut pillo uertitur, sed in aeternitate aut poenae aut salutis! Cui seueritati declinandae uel liberalitati inuitandae tanta obsequii diligentia opus est, quanta sunt ipsa quae aut seueritas comminatur aut liberalitas pollicetur. Et tamen nos non de hominibus modo seruitute subnixis uel quolibet alio iure debitoribus obsequii, uerum etiam de pecudibus, etiam de bestiis oboedientiam exprimimus, intelligentes usibus nostris eas a domino prouisas traditasque* (Jean-Claude Fredouille, ed., *De la patience*, Sources chrétiennes 310 [Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1999]).

<sup>21</sup> Harrill, “Metaphor of Slavery,” 388.

<sup>22</sup> On Tertullian’s especially extreme characterization of the unsavory nature of slaves, see Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery as Moral Problem: In the Early Church and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 68.

sees that true authority consists not just in obeying individual commands, but in the subordinate's compliance to the personal power of the master, even anticipating the master's will."<sup>23</sup> The focus might be on the slave, but the slave's actions are more truly a reflection of the master. The implication is that Christians should live in ways that demonstrate the goodness of God their master, which should, by extension, be reflected in their effective mastery over others, including not just slaves but animals.<sup>24</sup> We see clearly how the roles of slave and master, properly understood and performed, are mutually constitutive. Good slaves are not worthy on their own account but still evince their queerness in requiring the domesticating authority of a capable master; yet, slaves threaten always to besmirch the character of the master.

Again, we ought not to lose sight of the blurring between representations and what they are supposed to represent. Tertullian might be thinking with Roman slavery and its attendant constructions of slaves to make certain arguments, but the ways slaves are represented in this discourse are informed by the ways slaves exist in the world, always in dynamic relation to how it is that slaves are expected to be. There is, on the one hand, what is said to and about slaves. This is the project of naming the slave particularly as queer, i.e., as lacking self-control and so needing to be controlled, hence perverse and monstrous, capable of upsetting the ideals of the free if unrestrained. On the other hand are the performances of enslavement enacted by slaves. Slaves might conform to discursive-material expectations, both when properly controlled and

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<sup>23</sup> Harrill "Metaphor of Slavery," 387. See also J. Albert Harrill, *Slavery in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 22–26, for a fuller treatment of *auctoritas*, particularly as it appears in the New Testament.

<sup>24</sup> Tertullian makes this imperative to instill morality even more explicit elsewhere: "Do not wise property owners (*patres familiae*) offer and permit some things to their slaves (*servi*) on purpose in order to test them and to see whether and how they make use of things thus permitted, whether they will do so with moderation and honesty? However, is not that slave deserving more praise who abstains totally, thus manifesting a reverential fear of the kindness of his master?" (*Cult. Fem.* 2.10.5–6). Translation from Harrill, "Metaphor of Slavery," 389.

when perversely flaunting authority, since slaves are supposed to be the former in light of their so-construed proclivity toward the latter. Slaves might also resist, exceed, or recast what is expected of them, both when deviating from commands and when operating within constraints but to the slave's advantage more than the master's. Tertullian, toward particular rhetorical ends, reiterates dominant notions about slaves and slavery in his representations of slaves, but we need not view the enslaved under the same either/or terms as he represents.

While it might be said that Tertullian more readily deploys positive articulations of enslavement than does Clement, the key is recognizing that both men portray two hues of the same idea: the slave represents a threat to the highest philosophical ideas and so requires absolute obedience to surveillance and control of the master or Lord. Then the slave might actually become something different, perhaps no longer truly a slave.<sup>25</sup> Then, too, might the slave become particularly well suited for bearing the weight of Christian discourse. In discourse, the slave can be shaped into something especially and perfectly useful, but when confronted with the slave, in body and image, as always already queer, the carefully constructed representations are, in turn, always already prone to the disruptive potentialities of the represented slave. That is, the binary of representation and represented break down as always already mutually constitutive.

### **Imaging Christ as Slave**

We do not have extant evidence for answering the specific question of whether slaves themselves may have found the notion in Phil 2:7 of Christ as enslaved to be liberative. Still, one

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<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this is what philosophers like Epictetus and Philo suggest in their reflections on true freedom and enslavement: the legally free person might actually be enslaved to desires (Epictetus, *Diss.* 4.1), while the slave might enact a dramatic reversal whereby s/he demonstrates philosophical freedom even as the master is ensnared by passions, i.e., the true slavery (Philo, *Quod omnis* 6.38-39).

graffito etched into a wall in Rome offers the tantalizing prospect that at least one slave did, in some way, revere a Christ whose representation resembled his own slave form (fig. 6). Often referred to as the Alexamenos graffito because of its named referent, this sketch depicting a crucified figure with the head of a donkey and another man with arm outstretched toward the cross has piqued the interest scholars, especially of early Christianity, such that nearly all recent considerations refer to the graffito as “well known” or “famous.”<sup>26</sup> Yet, little is known about it, other than its location—the Paedagogium, or slave training center, on the Palatine Hill in Rome—and its basic appearance.

For scholars interested in early Christianity, the graffito represents what may be the earliest or one of the earliest images of the crucified Christ, appearing four to five centuries before depictions of the crucifixion began to occur with any frequency.<sup>27</sup> Christians apparently did not materially image the crucifixion until relatively late, despite its theological significance in writings as early as Paul’s letters.<sup>28</sup> It is with regard to this question that the Alexamenos graffito is most often treated, usually as a curious aside, presumably since so little can be said with certainty. While some attention has been paid to the significance of the physical context as

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Keegan, “Reading the ‘Pages’ of the *Domus Caesaris: Puerti Delicati*, Slave Education, and the Graffiti of the Palatine Paedagogium,” in *Roman Slavery and Roman Material Culture*, ed. Michele George (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2013), 69–98; Oliver Larry Yarbrough, “The Shadow of an Ass: On Reading the Alexamenos Graffito,” in *Text, Image, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World: A Festschrift in Honor of David Lee Balch*, ed. Aliou Cissé Niang and Carolyn Osiek (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012); John Granger Cook, “Envisioning Crucifixion: Light from Several Inscriptions and the Palatine Graffito,” *Novum Testamentum* 50 (2008): 262–85; Allyson Everingham Sheckler and Mary Joan Winn Leith, “The Crucifixion Conundrum and the Santa Sabina Doors,” *Harvard Theological Review* 103 (2010): 67–88; György Németh, “The Horse Head Demon,” *Sylloge Epigraphica Barcinonensis* 11 (2013): 153–62.

<sup>27</sup> Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 131; Felicity Harley and Jeffrey Spier, “The Crucifixion,” in *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art*, ed. Jeffrey Spier (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 227–32.

<sup>28</sup> Robin M. Jensen, *The Cross: History, Art, and Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 74–96.

one of the primary pieces of relatively firm data,<sup>29</sup> the social-material context of enslavement specifically has been underappreciated. Reading the Alexamenos graffito alongside Phil 2:6–7 calls to the fore the image of Christ as slave, a characterization which seems to have been a source both for mocking and potentially for inspiration, the distinct yet mutually constitutive forces of which are brought into sharp relief in a space primarily occupied by slaves.

### Alexamenos Graffito

The central image of the graffito, etched into a plaster wall, is a cross on which hangs a man with the head of a donkey (or horse). The cross is in the form of a T (*crux commissa* or *tau* cross). There is evidently a *suppedaneum*, or foot-support, marked by a horizontal line toward the base of the cross, immediately below the feet of the crucified figure.<sup>30</sup> The donkey head is turned to the left and appears to be looking downward. The figure on the cross wears a sleeveless garment, identified by some as a *colobium*.<sup>31</sup> Notably, the garment is short and leaves the buttocks exposed, indicating also that the scene is viewed from the rear. To the left and in the line of sight of the donkey head is a man standing on the same plane as the base of the cross. It is not entirely clear whether he faces the viewer or is seen from behind.<sup>32</sup> The man's head, which is

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<sup>29</sup> Notably Yarbrough, "Shadow."

<sup>30</sup> Hans Riemann, "Paedagogium Palatini," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. Wilhelm Kroll and Karl Mittelhaus, new ed., vol. 18, no. 1 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung: 1942), 2212; Heikki Solin and Marja Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti del Palatino*, ed. Veikko Väänänen, vol. 1, *Paedagogium*, Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae 3 (Helsinki: Helsingfors, 1966), 210.

<sup>31</sup> Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 209–10; Riemann, "Paedagogium," 2212; Keegan, "Reading," 92; Cook, "Envisioning Crucifixion," 284–85.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 210; Riemann, "Paedagogium," 2212; Keegan, "Reading," 92; Yarbrough, "Shadow," 241, who all describe the figure as seen from the back. It is not clear to my untrained eye why the rear is assumed since a turned head viewed in profile would look basically the same whether a person's back is turned or not. The distinction is not paramount, but the perspective and potential contrasts could generate different affects. If the man on the left is facing forward, the contrast with the rear-facing figure on the cross might

disproportionately large, is turned right and raised upward toward the crucified figure. His mouth is visible, perhaps an eye, and hair is indicated by jagged lines running from the top of the head to the neck. The arm closest to the cross is extended and raised with a bend at the elbow. The fingers, which are disproportionately small, are open and spread, which may represent a Roman style of throwing a kiss (*iactare basia*).<sup>33</sup> The man wears a garment similar to the figure on the cross but without visible buttocks.

There is also an inscription in Greek, etched after the design,<sup>34</sup> beginning between the two figures and extending over four lines: ΑΛΕ / ΞΑΜΕΝΟC / CEBETE / ΘΕΟΝ (ΘΕΩ), which may be translated either “Alexamenos, worship God” or “Alexamenos worships God.” There are two issues with reading the inscription: 1) the singular noun does not agree with the second-person plural verb, and 2) deciphering the last word is somewhat problematic. On the matter of agreement, Yarbrough prefers the translation “Alexamenos worships God” based on the sensible proposition that *sebetae* is an itacism of *sebetai*.<sup>35</sup> The last word poses additional difficulties since the third letter could be an O or Ω, and the fourth letter is either an over-sized N or not a letter at all but a set of extraneous marks. If the word is, in fact, ΘΕΩ, the inscription could read as two

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further emphasize his exposed buttocks, heightening attention to the absurdity or shame of this crucified character. Moreover, if the two figures are facing one another, with eyes directed toward each other, the image might convey a more intimate connection, even without explanatory text. It is uncertain what details have been lost, so it is possible this question of perspective would have been obvious to the earliest viewers, but we might still do well now to consider a range of ways the depiction may have been viewed so as to consider the range of affects and responses it may have generated.

<sup>33</sup> Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 210; Keegan, “Reading,” 92, 98 n.81; Cook, “Envisioning Crucifixion,” 283 n.91.

<sup>34</sup> Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 210, deduce that the inscription was written after the design based on the vertical of the E found behind the M.

<sup>35</sup> Yarbrough, “Shadow,” 241 n.5; Riemann, “Paedagogium,” 2212, likewise says simply that *sebetae* stands for *sebetai*. Alternatively, perhaps the author addresses Alexamenos by making a generalizable claim about the one whom Alexamenos and others (i.e., you all) worship. It could also be a grammatical error. I follow Riemann and Yarbrough.

imperatives: “Alexamenos, worship, behold [second-person singular imperative of *theaomai*].” Yet the verbal confusion would remain, with one plural and one singular imperative. Given the simpler explanation of itacism, that ‘god’ is a natural object of ‘worship,’ and that the handwriting in general is not so neat as to expect uniform letters, I follow the apparent consensus among scholars in accepting *theon* as the final word of the inscription.<sup>36</sup>

There remains one other feature to consider, which is a capital Y to the right of the donkey head. This will be addressed in below as it has been used to argue for non-Christian interpretations of the image. Still, the two most thorough scholarly treatments of the Paedagogium graffiti, the first by Hans Riemann and the second by Heikki Solin and Marja Itkonen-Kaila, conclude on the basis of paleographic analysis that the Y is inscribed by a second hand and so not necessarily pertinent to the original image and inscription.<sup>37</sup> Whatever else might be going on, primarily or secondarily, the connection between a crucified figure and the idea of worshipping him as a god most likely indicates Christ.<sup>38</sup> As discussed below, this identification of the graffito as representing the crucifixion of Christ, whatever the connotations,

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<sup>36</sup> See the bibliography in Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 210; see also Riemann, “Paedagogium,” 2211–12. The most recent scholarship has accepted this rendering generally without comment, with the exception of Yarbrough, “Shadow,” 241 n.4, though he, too, settles on *theon* (see also note below).

<sup>37</sup> Riemann, “Paedagogium,” 2212, notes specifically that the inscribed Y is deeper and more definite; see also Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 211. Even still, we could ask what it would mean to add the Y. What association or statement might an additional inscriber have intended, and for whom might this have been meaningful? While these secondary considerations are beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worthwhile to consider generally the social-material world of the Paedagogium, marked not only by the interactions of humans with one another but with the materiality of the space, which itself then acts back upon the observers. The graffiti throughout the Paedagogium call attention to the lives of the enslaved as not pre-determined and static but as dynamic and expressive. This should not necessarily be surprising—after all, even Aristotle acknowledged that slaves are more than mere instruments, but our glimpses behind discursive circumscriptions of enslavement are rare enough, or at least seem so, that we would do well to dwell for a while in spaces so clearly physically marked and affectively charged by the presence of slaves.

<sup>38</sup> This association is strengthened by the fact that Christians, as well as Jews, were charged with worshipping a donkey-headed god; see below.

most clearly works to make sense of all the features of the image and text. Moreover, a Christian presence in the Paedagogium is unsurprising if Tertullian is correct in his report of Christians working within the imperial household during the era of Septimius Severus (*Scap.* 4; *Apol.* 37), which is the period to which Solin and Itkonen-Kaila have dated the Alexamenos graffito.<sup>39</sup>

### *Social-Material Context of the Graffito*

One of the shortcomings of most attention given to the Alexamenos graffito in scholarship on early Christianity (surveyed below) is that the original location of the graffito is treated either as merely informational or as an additional setting wherein larger themes or concerns for early Christians are articulated or addressed. It would hardly seem to matter in these analyses whether the graffito were etched into the walls of the Palatine Paedagogium or some other space. Yet, the social-material context undoubtedly bears meaningfully on the production and affective force of the representation, which in turn might bear meaningfully on the function and impact of Christian discourses on slavery and crucifixion (for here in the Paedagogium, in the Alexamenos graffito, we find slavery and crucifixion tied up with one another, as we find outside the walls of the Paedagogium as well). Hence, before proceeding to interpretation, it is important to elaborate the social-material context of the graffito in question.

The remains of the Paedagogium are found on the southwestern slope of the Palatine Hill, west of the large hemicycle of the *domus Augustana/Caesaris* (fig. 7).<sup>40</sup> The original brickwork can be dated to the period of Domitian, and the graffiti are datable up through the third century,

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<sup>39</sup> Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> Unless specified, my archaeological overview draws upon data found in common in Riemann, “Paedagogium”; Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*; Keegan, “Reading”; E. Papi, “Paedagogium,” in *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, ed. Eva Margareta Steinby, vol. 4 (Rome: Quasar, 1999), 7–8.

though it is not clear when the building ceased to be used. The edifice is approximately in line with the front of the *domus Augustana* and is oriented northwest to southeast, running basically parallel to the Circus Maximus. A staircase indicates at least two levels, though only a single floor is preserved, with the northern portion of the building best preserved. This northern section consists of ten rooms of varying sizes on either side of a large semicircular room. The rooms open out onto a portico and a paved rectangular courtyard. The Alexamenos graffito comprises a drawing and inscription etched into the southeast wall of so-called room 7,<sup>41</sup> which has the exedra to its northwest (room 4) and a slightly larger rectangular room to its southeast (room 8).<sup>42</sup> The graffiti in rooms 7 and 8 date to the second and third centuries CE.<sup>43</sup>

The edifice has been identified as a Paedagogium based primarily on the appearance of the phrase *exi(i)t de p(a)edagogio*; the phrase is repeated twelve times in various formulations on the building's walls, often with a single name included.<sup>44</sup> The noted departures of those named as *paedagogi* could refer to persons fulfilling a range of functions related to duties of care and education.<sup>45</sup> As to the general function of the building, there remains some uncertainty.<sup>46</sup> It is possible that this particular building served as the living quarters for imperial pages being trained in another building on the Caelian Hill identified as a *paedagogium ad Caput Africae*. Others have suggested a school for painting, a prison for slaves on the Caelian, a vestibule of the palace,

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<sup>41</sup> Keegan, "Reading," 92.

<sup>42</sup> Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 47; Keegan, "Reading," 72. For dating of the graffito throughout the Paedagogium, see Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 46–48; Riemann, "Paedagogium," 2208.

<sup>44</sup> Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 72–76; Papi, "Paedagogium," 7.

<sup>45</sup> See Keegan, "Reading," 73–75, on sources for understanding the range of possible functions.

<sup>46</sup> Here I draw upon Papi, "Paedagogium," 7–8; and Keegan, "Reading," 71–72.

an infirmary for the Circus Maximus, among other options. “All views, though, require the structure to be occupied by a significant proportion of enslaved and manumitted persons.”<sup>47</sup>

Whatever the various roles the building and its inhabitants played, we can consider what the graffiti suggest about the social atmosphere of the space: who is there, what are their concerns, how they interact with one another, and how they represent their lives.<sup>48</sup> The graffiti include mostly names, sometimes with additives but rarely with functionary titles, some images, painted inscriptions, no evident poetry, and occasional sentences characterized as banter and profanity.<sup>49</sup> The graffiti seem to have been done almost entirely by men; there are some names of women, but they are written as forms of address to the women.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps most striking—because of the profanity and in light of the sexual use of slaves—are graffiti that name and sometimes depict sex acts, including between men.<sup>51</sup> As Keegan explains,

Given the likelihood that some of the Palatine *paedagogiani* would participate in sexual acts in the imperial household, the function of these graffiti may have been as an outlet for humour in the face of a humiliating but unavoidable reality of life as a young male slave in the *domus Caesaris*, or perhaps to direct abuse at a particular individual or the

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<sup>47</sup> Keegan, “Reading,” 72.

<sup>48</sup> While a seeming treasure trove if indeed these can be viewed with relative confidence as primarily the work of slaves and freedpersons, Solin and Itkonen-Kaila note that the graffiti here are relatively scarce compared with other sites like the publicly accessible walls of Pompeii, most likely because the Paedagogium, as a place inside the imperial palace, was limited in accessibility (*Graffiti*, 46). Furthermore, the graffiti might not offer the kind of first-person prose for which we might wish, conveying more self-evidently the thoughts and feelings of the enslaved, but they are indeed evidence for some of the ways slaves and freedpersons in servile roles expressed themselves in interaction with one another, their circumstances, and their surroundings. The challenge, as always, is interpretation, but increasingly scholars are asking questions with the enslaved primarily in mind; Keegan’s work (“Reading”) is exemplary for striving to elucidate slaves’ lives and social-material conditions through the extant data of the Paedagogium.

<sup>49</sup> Riemann, “Paedagogium,” 2209; Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 45–46.

<sup>50</sup> Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 46

<sup>51</sup> See Keegan, “Reading,” 85–89, for an overview.

community of slaves more generally as a means of dealing with actual or threatened peditation.<sup>52</sup>

Though we may not know in full what meanings the graffiti might have held for creators and viewers alike, we see in them glimpses of enslaved persons responding to and negotiating their circumstances. The physical spaces of the Paedagogium are marked by the lives of the enslaved. It might not be clear precisely how the building functions or what functions are being performed by those occupying its spaces, but the evidence suggests a predominantly servile population, both enslaved and manumitted, and provides openings for viewing slave sociality. It is within this social-material context that the Alexamenos graffito is literally and affectively marked, ready in turn to affect its viewers.

### *Interpretations of the Graffito*

It is possible to chart out three general approaches to interpretation of the Alexamenos graffito. In the minority are those that argue that the graffito is not representative of Christ. There is variation among these interpretations, but they tend to focus on the donkey or horse head, for which these scholars purport to have better comparanda or explanations. For the majority who take the graffito as referring to the crucifixion of Christ, there seem to be two general areas of interest: either 1) in how the graffito does or does not contribute to questions around the almost complete absence of material representations of the crucifixion until they begin to appear with some frequency around the beginning of the seventh century, or 2) in how the graffito represents non-Christian mockery of Christian worship and the shame of the crucifixion. These two

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 88. Moreover, “while the depiction of the sexual economy of slaves in the literary tradition consistently reflects deprivation of individuality and self-respect, the Paedagogium graffiti constitute a reminder that categorical distinctions of social identity for Roman slaves played out in unexpected ways within sub-elite, servile contexts” (ibid., 89).

approaches are overlapping but do shift the focus of interpretation, emphasizing different features of the graffito and distinct broader concerns.

From early after the graffito's discovery, there have been some detractors from the idea that the crucified figure is Christ. The earliest alternative argument proposed that the image is not actually one of mockery but is a sincere votive representing the Egyptian Seth-Typhon, who was regularly depicted with the head of a donkey.<sup>53</sup> Later this idea was further developed to suggest a gnostic sect worshipping a donkey-headed god; the graffito represents a conflation of Seth-Typhon and Christ.<sup>54</sup> Integral to this argument is interpretation of the Y to the right of the donkey's head as a mystical character with special meaning symbolizing two paths in both life and death (paths of vice or virtue and to Taratarus or Elysium).<sup>55</sup> However, these arguments have been hampered by absent or tangential comparanda and an inability to account for all of the image's features.<sup>56</sup>

A recent innovative solution by György Németh has found parallels in curse tablets that depict a horse-headed demon of the races.<sup>57</sup> Paramount to Németh's argument is the assertion that the head of the crucified figure is not that of a donkey but a horse.<sup>58</sup> This is significant because it introduces a new set of comparanda, namely curse tablets for races. Unfortunately, the

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<sup>53</sup> Here I depend on the survey by Riemann, "Paedagogium," 2215.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Wunsch, *Sethianische Verfluchungstafeln aus Rom* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1898), 110–14.

<sup>55</sup> Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 211, say that the Y is clearly inscribed by a secondary hand and so cannot sensibly be central to the original image's meaning.

<sup>56</sup> See the review of each approach by Riemann, "Paedagogium," 2215–16.

<sup>57</sup> Németh, "Horse Head Demon."

<sup>58</sup> Both Riemann and Solin and Itkonen-Kaila do indicate that the animal head is either that of a donkey or horse.

images Németh presents are not themselves uniform, and considering the disproportionately small fingers on the outstretched hand of the devotee in the Alexamenos graffito, we might not expect perfectly proportionate ears to indicate either a horse or a donkey.<sup>59</sup> Németh's proposal is still worth consideration as there may indeed be some connection to the demon of the races considering the Paedagogium's proximity to the Circus Maximus and the building's possible use as an infirmary for the injured (though Németh curiously does not consider this). Yet, the scenario Németh imagines seems flimsy. He concludes that the graffito conveys dismay over failed bets on races; it depicts the horse-headed demon of the races being crucified as a disobedient slave, and Alexamenos, an ill-fated gambler, as worshipping a deity that leads him to losses.<sup>60</sup>

In contrast to these proposed alternatives to Christian interpretation, Robin Margaret Jensen offers a second trajectory focused on the rarity of depicting Jesus's crucifixion. Jensen gives a helpful survey of the range of explanations offered to address the apparent reticence among early Christians to image visually the crucifixion, demonstrating a preference for representations of Jesus's ministry instead of his passion.<sup>61</sup> The problem arises out of an almost complete lack of extant evidence for early depictions of the crucifixion, even while the crucifixion appears as an important theme within texts, beginning with the letters of Paul and onward. Beyond the second- or third-century Alexamenos graffito and two intaglio gems dating perhaps to the fourth century (although others date one of these to the late second to third

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<sup>59</sup> Yarbrough, "Shadow," 240 n.3.

<sup>60</sup> Németh, "Horse Head Demon," 162.

<sup>61</sup> Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 130–37.

century),<sup>62</sup> the earliest known representations of Christ crucified are on the door of Santa Sabina in Rome dated to about 430 and on an ivory reliquary casket dated perhaps a decade earlier; these scenes remain generally rare until the seventh century.<sup>63</sup> Jensen identifies a range of common explanations for this late development.<sup>64</sup> Early Christians may have had an aversion to representing so gruesome a death while still close to the event, especially worrying that to do so would profane the holy. Or, instead of an aversion, they may have believed that the crucifixion was too profound for all to understand and so needed to be veiled from the uninitiated. In light of the stigma of crucifixion as a punishment, especially for slaves, Christians may also have sought to avoid public associations with crucifixion. Moreover, they may have had dogmatic concerns that some would interpret the death of Jesus as just an ordinary death or that visualization of the crucifixion would perpetuate a lower, popular kind of Christology emphasizing Jesus's works more than doctrinal and theological reflection.

Jensen goes on to show that Christians were not entirely averse to making signs of the cross in inscriptions and manuscripts, recognizing the cross in more ambiguous symbols and signs of the external world, or representing stories of the Hebrew Bible—especially the Passover and the near-sacrifice of Isaac—as typologies for Christ's suffering and sacrifice.<sup>65</sup> Jensen and

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<sup>62</sup> See Harley and Spier, "Magical Amulet with the Crucifixion," in *Picturing the Bible*, 228–29; Sheckler and Leith, "Crucifixion Conundrum," 70–74.

<sup>63</sup> Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 131.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 133–36.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 137–48. See also David L. Balch, "Paul's Portrait of Christ Crucified (Gal. 3:1) in Light of Paintings and Sculptures of Suffering and Death in Pompeiian and Roman Houses," in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 84–108, who considers common literary and mythological scenes of suffering found as decoration within Roman homes—images which many Christians were likely to have encountered, maybe even in the very houses where they worshipped—as perhaps informing Christians' own understanding of Christ's suffering and their own.

others are right to highlight the multiple ways Christians were able to think about and represent the passion narrative so central to Christian thought, yet drawing out these alternatives does not explain why they were preferred. It may indeed still be the case that depictions of the crucifixion posed some kind of threat to stir up trouble. Was the crucifixion perhaps too queer?

Indeed, one of the primary ways of thinking about the graffito has been to notice how it seems to mock Alexamenos, which constitutes the third trajectory of interpretation. The donkey head has drawn particular attention in this regard since multiple sources report that one of the charges made against Christians, as well as Jews, was that they worshiped a god with the head of a donkey (Tertullian, *Apol.* 16.1–3, *Nat.* 1.14; Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 9.3; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.79–8, 2.112–14).<sup>66</sup> Tertullian describes a scene of such confrontation based on a rumor he heard of someone parading around the city of Rome carrying “a picture with the explanatory inscription: ‘The God of the Christians, ass-begotten’” (*Apol.* 16.12).<sup>67</sup> It is tempting to imagine some kind of relationship between the graffito on the Palatine Hill and this rumor from Rome’s streets, that perhaps the mockery of Christians in Rome around this period had become so particularly charged that Christians lived not only under the threat of constant attacks by word but also by image. A salient comparison might be the possibility that the graffito itself performs a similar kind of assault as what Tertullian describes with the paraded picture and caption. The graffito, like this visualized claim about the absurdity of Christian worship, confronts Christians with a shame that at least some may have hoped could be sufficiently recast through discourses turning the enslaved, crucified Christ into a philosophical exemplar and worthy lord.

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<sup>66</sup> Yarbrough, “Shadow,” 245–49; Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 134.

<sup>67</sup> Translation from Yarbrough, “Shadow,” 247. See *Tertullian: Apology and De Spectaculis*, trans. T. R. Glover, Loeb Classical Library 250 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931).

It is worthwhile also to consider general associations made between donkeys and slaves.<sup>68</sup> From Aristotle to Roman literature, Greeks and Romans frequently animalized slaves, as if to suggest that slaves and beasts, particularly donkeys, were nearly synonymous, being similarly useful.<sup>69</sup> One graffito in the Paedagogium highlights slaves' own awareness of this link. It includes a sketch of a donkey harnessed to a mill with an inscription that reads, "Work, little ass, as I have worked, and it will advance you."<sup>70</sup> Sandra Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen suggest that "the injunction addressed to the donkey plays with the equation of the donkey's labor and the author's labor."<sup>71</sup> They share a similar lot, and the slave here offers his wise counsel, drawing on the idea pertinent to his own experience that there exist possibilities for advancement or even manumission, seemingly dependent on the owner's satisfaction with the slave's efforts. Likewise, the logic goes, perhaps the industrious donkey will be rewarded with a better role than the turning of a mill. "We might ask if there is a disguised joke here—some irony—about the expectation that hard work will lead to a better life, when in fact it only means going round and round."<sup>72</sup> While interpretation of the graffito might not be secure (as if interpretations were ever singular and stable), in viewing the common association between slaves

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<sup>68</sup> See Sandra R. Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 142–47.

<sup>69</sup> On such animalizing, see Keith Bradley, "Animalizing the Slave: The Truth of Fiction," *Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000): 110–25.

<sup>70</sup> *labora aselle quo modo lavoravi et roderit tibi*. Translation from Joshel and Petersen, *Material Life*, 143. For the image and notes, see Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 223–24, no. 289.

<sup>71</sup> Joshel and Hackworth Petersen, *Material Life*, 143.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. See also Joshel and Petersen's comparison between this graffito and frequent depictions of donkeys harnessed to mills on signs for shops and carved in relief on tombs of bakery owners. The images tend to place the mill in front of the donkey, emphasizing the tool, whereas the graffito has the donkey at the fore. "By distinguishing the donkey from the tool or object (mill), the slave scribbler opens up the possibility of playing with the legal equation of animal and slave" (ibid., 144).

and donkeys—this time from the perspective of the slave, we might become better attuned to the variety of ways slaves may have responded to and negotiated the circumstances of their lives, including through subtle forms of critique. Pertinent to the Alexamenos graffito, we do not need to think only about the donkey head in terms of a specific form of slander against Christians but more generally as signifying something of the slavishness of the crucified figure.<sup>73</sup>

The donkey-headed god is just one feature of the potentially humiliating slavish qualities the graffito is supposed to convey. Just as prominent as the apparent absurdity of a man with the head of a donkey is the representation of a man being crucified, another prime element of the image's shaming.<sup>74</sup> Citizens were not to be crucified; instead, crucifixion was a form of punishment reserved primarily for slaves and criminals.<sup>75</sup> On the occasion of a scandal involving the crucifixion of a citizen, Cicero expressed the horror to a free person even of hearing about crucifixion:

Even if death is held out [as a threat], we may die in freedom. For in truth the executioner and the veiling of the head and the very name of "the cross" should be absent not only from the body of Roman citizens but even from thought, eyes, and ears. For of all these things not only the occurrence and endurance but even the [legal] possibility, expectation, and finally the mention itself is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free person. Can truly the kindness of owners, by one assertion of freedom, not liberate our slaves from the fear of all those punishments; can neither our actions, nor the life we have lived, nor your honors [conferred on us] not free us from floggings, from the hook, and finally from the terror of the cross?" (*Rab. Perd.* 5.16)<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See also the controversial work of Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 23–53, on Christian appreciation for and representations of the figure of the donkey.

<sup>74</sup> See Cook, "Envisioning Crucifixion," who considers the Alexamenos graffito in light of lesser known Latin inscriptions mentioning crucifixion. See also Sheckler and Leith, "Crucifixion Conundrum," 74–76; Yarbrough, "Shadow," 249–51.

<sup>75</sup> Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), is the standard work on crucifixion.

<sup>76</sup> Translation from Cook, "Envisioning Crucifixion," 274. *Mors denique si proponitur, in libertate moriamur, carnifex vero et obductio capitis et nomen ipsum crucis absit non modo a corpore civium Romanorum sed etiam a cogitatione, oculis, auribus. Harum enim omnium rerum non solum eventus atque perpessio sed etiam*

Simply to contemplate crucifixion is abhorrent to the free person according to Cicero.<sup>77</sup> The implication is clear: crucifixion is synonymous with enslavement insofar as it is anathema to freedom. Among non-elites, it appears “Crux!” was used as a kind of profanity,<sup>78</sup> and there is even evidence for the expression “get crucified” being deployed similarly to the English “go to hell.”<sup>79</sup> The representation of crucifixion in the Alexamenos graffito conveys more than just a tool of death; it signifies a perversion of life and freedom.

Colleen Conway frames the stakes for Christians in gendered terms, primarily in the interests of protecting masculinity.<sup>80</sup> At issue especially in Paul’s writings is the centrality of weakness and suffering, both Christ’s and Paul’s own. To borrow again Puar’s expression, we see “queerness coming forth at [Paul and Christ] from all directions, screaming its defiance.”<sup>81</sup> Some of Paul’s primary theological themes and assertions seem to install (or come preinstalled with) a queerness that in multiple ways dissipates the philosophical ideal of the self-controlled elite male. This has led some to read in Paul a strong undercurrent against culture, but Conway

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*condicio, exspectatio, mentio ipsa denique indigna cive Romano atque homine libero est. An vero servos nostros horum suppliciorum omnium metu dominorum benignitas vindicta una liberat; nos a verberibus, ab unco, a crucis denique terrore neque res gestae neque acta aetas neque vestri honores vindicabunt?* (H. Grose Hodge, ed. and trans., *Cicero: Orations*, vol. 9, Loeb Classical Library 198 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927]).

<sup>77</sup> It is worth noting that Cicero himself was a slaveholder, and he frequently mentioned his slave Tiro in his letters. Cicero describes Tiro as integral to his writing process, taking dictation and deciphering his handwriting. The very act of writing about slavery cannot be separated from the presence and use of the enslaved.

<sup>78</sup> Sheckler and Leith, “Crucifixion Conundrum,” 75.

<sup>79</sup> Cook, “Envisioning Crucifixion,” 277.

<sup>80</sup> Colleen M. Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67–88.

<sup>81</sup> Puar, “Queer Times,” 127.

reveals instead Paul's borrowing of typical rhetorical moves to shore up manliness and its primary ideal of self-control, including the strategy of undermining opponents' masculinity.<sup>82</sup>

Christ's death is framed, not as passive and emasculating, but instead as a voluntary choice that functions vicariously to the benefit of others, the most heroic and manly of deaths.<sup>83</sup> As for the suffering that both Christ and Paul experience, this becomes the means for exhibiting manly endurance.<sup>84</sup> The salvation of Christ, in turn, becomes the means for Christians to achieve masculinity through oneness with Christ (Gal 3:28).<sup>85</sup> Conway reads Phil 2:6–11 as ultimately functioning to establish Christ among other “ideal men such as Caesar Augustus, Philo's Moses, and Philostratus's Apollonius, [presentations of whom] all include some language of apotheosis.”<sup>86</sup> Any queerness coming at Christ, Paul, and Christians generally is recast under the discursive terms of masculinity. The threat of shame, as we have seen before, is diverted, discursively concealing slavish and feminized elements.

While identification of the Alexamenos graffito has been contested, it is somewhat surprising that scholars who have argued for the crucified Christ have not read Phil 2:6–11 and the graffito together. Perhaps it speaks to the eventual and enduring success of the move to

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<sup>82</sup> Conway, *Behold the Man*, 68–70.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 70–73. See also Brent D. Shaw, “Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996): 269–312; Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, “Taking It Like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 249–73.

<sup>84</sup> Conway, *Behold the Man*, 74–78. Cf. the perspective of Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus: “How much more fitting then, it is that we stand firm and endure, when we know that we are suffering for some good purpose, either to help our friends or to benefit our city, or to defend our wives and children, or, best and most imperative, to become good and just and self-controlled, a state which no man achieves without hardships” (translation from Cora E. Lutz, *Musonius Rufus, “The Roman Socrates”* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000], 59).

<sup>85</sup> Jennifer Wright Knust, *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 86: “To Paul... the only men truly capable of mastering desire were those ‘in Christ.’”

<sup>86</sup> Conway, *Behold the Man*, 81.

convey a heroic rather than slavish Christ. The biblical text reflects the glory of Christ, while the graffito can apparently only stand for the mockery of the outsider. In both cases, we tend to look past the slave form. This tells us more perhaps about later interpreters—about ourselves—than it does about early Christian slaves. If we bring slaves to the fore and view the enslaved in all their queerness, we are forced to acknowledge a monstrosity we might rather not admit. That is, we too might prefer to avoid the perversion and shame that seems to have troubled early Christians, at least those whose voices are best preserved. Either that or we would have to recognize the exploitation of the slave form in the repetition of dominant kyriarchal ideology. Even still, it is in the queerness that there is the potential always already for the undoing of kyriarchy; indeed, that is why control over the queer must so desperately be maintained. Granted, we have the benefit of history, which demonstrates that kyriarchal patterns were not exploded by the centrality of the slave to early Christian thought. Still, this attention to the queerness of the enslaved provides possibilities for mapping out varied trajectories of Christian thought and practice that did play out, differences we might expect if we were attuned to indeterminacies and contingencies.<sup>87</sup>

Some recent work has done well to reflect specifically on slavery in relationship to the Alexamenos graffito, though mostly as a way to highlight the utter shame of crucifixion and to think, to some extent, about slavishness in the graffito's depiction;<sup>88</sup> however, this work stops short of considering the implications of multiple convergences of representations, bodies, and space in the Paedagogium. Especially given overwhelming scholarly concern over crucifixion,

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<sup>87</sup> See the implications I list below.

<sup>88</sup> Notably Cook, "Envisioning Crucifixion"; Yarbrough, "Shadow,"; and Sheckler and Leith, "Crucifixion Condendum."

here in a place primarily occupied by slaves, we might do well to bring the slave, and not necessarily the crucifixion, first to the fore, shifting for a time the perspective.<sup>89</sup>

Moreover, the force of the representation is not singular, as if slavery and crucifixion can only represent shame. As Cicero confesses, the crucified slave is a monstrosity threatening the very idea of freedom. Clearly, freedom and enslavement are mutually constitutive, i.e., they are only understood and operative in relationship to each other. Rhetoric and ideology suggest that if they come into contact, as Cicero imagines, freedom will be undone, and yet they always are touching and overlapping, ever becoming in relationship to one another, not just as detached ideas but as ideas that both shape and are shaped by the bodies meant to enact them. Thus, when a slave sketches a scene mocking the enslaved god who is worshipped by a fellow slave, we might read an element of play: nothing could be more shameful, and yet, nothing could be more quotidian. Perhaps the force of the image in its social-material context (as if it could be singular) is not so much to say, “How could you possibly admit to something as embarrassing as revering this pathetic character who is as distant from the divine as imaginable!” but to tease, “It seems a bit silly that you find inspiration in someone who is so much like yourself, but if you think this life of yours is meet for a god, go ahead, worship your god.”<sup>90</sup>

As scholars looking back with a broad perspective on earlier Roman and Christian discourses, especially now in contexts of centuries-long Christian dominance, the apparent shame of the crucifixion as something unquestionably central has become the lens through which

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<sup>89</sup> Though scholars of early Christianity have primarily taken interest in the crucifixion; again, attention is given to the primary figure whose shame is turned toward triumph, not to the slave. None of this is to suggest that these things, namely slavery and crucifixion, can or should necessarily be analyzed separately. Indeed, they do significantly overlap. Yet, slavery does more than just explain a feature of the image and is instead mutually constitutive of the representation and what it might evoke.

<sup>90</sup> See Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti*, 210, on perhaps a more playful tone.

the Alexamenos graffito is generally read. However, this is not the only option, nor is it even the most suitable for the context of the Paedagogium, the rooms of which are covered with all kinds of graffiti, some of it playfully teasing, some of it bawdy, some of it mundane, all of it perhaps a way to express and negotiate the circumstances of life. It is possible that the Alexamenos graffito represents something shameful or to be joked about at the same time that it may give expression to what at least one slave found inspirational about his God: that God would take the form of a slave much like himself. These are all variations within the same constellation of ideas and bodies: slaves and slavery as shameful, as essential, as not wholly predictable, as something with which to play and about which to joke—somehow serious and absurd at the same time, as means toward various ends, even as exemplary such that the divinity and enslavement merge. What anyone may have intended the graffito to mean or how others may have reacted, especially its referent Alexamenos, is not self-evident. But we can expand our understanding of the dynamics at play between the representation and what is represented, which likewise might inform our recognition of the potential effects and responses to the image of Christ as slave in Phil 2:6–7.

The Alexamenos graffito was not particularly public in the sense that it would not have been accessible to an audience beyond those who worked or dwelled within the Paedagogium. Similarly, the next earliest putative depiction of the crucifixion was not public either, appearing on a magical amulet, which includes the name of Christ and other magical names, from the Eastern Mediterranean in the late second to third century.<sup>91</sup> Allyson Everingham Sheckler and Mary Joan Winn Leith, quoting J. Z. Smith, consider that these images may have participated in

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<sup>91</sup> See Harley and Spier, “Magical Amulet with the Crucifixion,” in *Picturing the Bible*, 228–29; Sheckler and Leith, “Crucifixion Conundrum,” 70–74.

a “rich vocabulary of alterity.”<sup>92</sup> Magical amulets, like the one showcasing the crucifixion, “often depended on an underlying transgressive element involving demons and danger-laden materials and images.”<sup>93</sup> We have seen how crucifixion represents something “danger-laden,” and so while we have only these two pieces of evidence from before the fourth century, we might not be so surprised to find that representations of the crucifixion appear outside elite classes and beyond sanctioned practices. The implications of showcasing these subjects in all their queerness is that we call to the fore the nonexceptional, which may, for some, be taken as threatens to prevailing ideologies, but for others might offer alternative potentialities for being and becoming in the world.

### **Toward Ruptured Conclusions**

Reading the Alexamenos graffito and Phil 2:6–11 with attention to the queerness of imaging Christ as enslaved has the potential for contributing to deeper understanding in three areas. First, the graffito and Philippians text together highlight multiple trajectories of response to early Christian slavery discourses. In particular, the notion of Christ taking slave form calls attention to the ways discourses of slavery overlap and converge with other central themes, such as crucifixion. It may not be possible to delineate cause and effect, but we can better account for the kinds of affective responses generated within particular discourses that shape different modes of thought and practice. Specifically, emphasizing the queerness of Christ as a slave, as rooted in the queerness of slavery generally, is useful toward understanding anxieties evinced over the potentially shameful implications of Christian narratives and ideas and so then toward

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<sup>92</sup> Sheckler and Leith, “Crucifixion Conundrum,” 75.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

delineating how Christian discourses are sutured so as to contain and control queerness. At the same time, then, it is possible to understand variances in thought and practice as productions of the always already ripe potentials for ruptures and dispersions. We might consider how such disruptions open up the space for alternative practices, such a raising communal funds to purchase the freedom of slaves or rejecting kyriarchal order in ways that prompt the reassertion of hierarchies, as seen in the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>94</sup>

Second, viewing the Alexamenos graffito in light of the biblical image of Christ as slave contributes to further understanding of the graffito in its social-material context. Enslavement is integral to the theological-rhetorical force of the graffito. In turn, we might be attentive to the possible responses generated within the spaces of the Paedagogium to the theological-philosophical blurring of boundaries between divine and human. The stakes both in worshipping a God in slave form and in mocking that reverence are tied up in one another and may have variously animated life and relationality in the Paedagogium. This interplay is not unlike Eusebius's representation of Blandina. That the slave effectively stands, or hangs, as most paradigmatic of Christ's obedience to the point of death works precisely because the image is entwined with material-discursive treatment of slaves as gruesomely expendable. The queerness of the slave form is underscored by a death unbefitting of freepersons. This disturbance of elite sensibilities may be a cause for scorn, but it may also work toward the representation of an alternative set of ideals, which themselves may or may not take concern for slave lives. It is

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<sup>94</sup> Conway, *Behold the Man*, 83–87, notices that the trajectory from Paul's letters to the Pastorals moves from more explicit attention to the cross and crucifixion in Paul to the absence of such references in the Pastorals, instead favoring vaguer language like that of "co-sufferers." See also Jennifer A. Glancy, "Protocols of Masculinity in the Pastoral Epistles," in *New Testament Masculinities*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, Society of Biblical Literature 45 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 235–264. We might wonder if the crucifixion drops out of later letters because of its appeal in generating alternative modes of Christian practice, marked by fissures in differences of status and gender. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the crucifixion disappears where there are clear efforts to reinforce hierarchies.

precisely in contexts marked by the presence of the enslaved that the Alexamenos graffito and the image of Christ as slave can be seen to reflect the full range of their complexity.

Finally, the Alexamenos graffito presents the potential of seeing, literally, slave responses to early Christian slavery discourse. While we may not have first-hand prose elaborating the thoughts and feelings of ancient slaves, it is not that we entirely lack evidence for their lives. The graffito of the Paedagogium generally presents possibilities for thinking about slave sociality. The Alexamenos graffito specifically might demonstrate that the crucified Christ, in slave form, proved especially meaningful for at least one slave, whose devotion another made light of or mocked. It is possible that the one who etched the image and inscription misrepresented Alexamenos's understanding of Christ, choosing intentionally to emphasize slavishness in order to shame Alexamenos, similar to other reported strategies for shaming Christians. Even this would be interesting for its evidence of the perspective of another slave agreeing, in some way, with the embarrassment of Christ's slave form and crucifixion.

Can an enslaved god liberate? I agree with Sheila Briggs that it is problematic to answer in the affirmative in light of reiterations of patterns of domination in Phil 2:6–11 and its later interpretations. But an enslaved god—etched in plaster, crucified, left dwelling among slaves—threatens the very terms of liberation or freedom. As Cicero warns, this is not the stuff of dignified, free discourse. Yet, there, on the Palatine Hill, Christ with donkey head hangs, perversely, absurdly, but maybe even hopefully. For while dominant discourse always already dictates shame, the slave Christ modeled after the slave devotee always already poses the potential for disruption, to expose the contingent terms of liberation and enslavement.

Neither Phil 2:6–7 nor the Alexamenos graffito can themselves effect freedom, but they represent potentialities, moving through the bodies of the enslaved, for dispersing in unexpected

ways the forces that impose slavery. Perhaps the resistance to kyriarchal order that the Pastoral Epistles strive so bluntly to contain and the collective efforts to purchase freedom for slaves within the *ekklēsia* are the effects of these kinds of ruptures. The discourses Paul, Clement, Tertullian and others endeavor to control might not be so easily constrained. After all, the queerness installed in the project of naming the slave re-presents bodies and lives that, if uncontrolled, threaten to disrupt the coherence of Roman/Christian ideals, a coherence after which modern scholars still seek. When we bring the slaves represented by extant texts and images into focus in all their queerness and are affected by their presence—touched, so to speak—we are challenged to rethink their representations, recognizing that this queerness looms with potentials to break out into varied responses to and reformulations of Christian discourse.

## Conclusions

Early Christian discourses were so thoroughly entrenched with slavery that we ought to understand slavery as constitutive, in no small part, of early Christianity. In turn, we might also say that the historical propagation of Christianity depended, in no small part, on the remarkable, exemplary lives and labors of historical slaves. We see this when we look more closely at unnamed slaves effectively making gains for their masters and, we can imagine, for the advantage of the *ekklēsiai* in Christ, and at Onesimos and the bonds of kinship formed among the enslaved, and at Alexamenos and enslaved devotion to an enslaved Christ, and at Blandina and known and unknown slaves across the centuries. Bringing the enslaved to the fore of our history telling reminds us both of slavery's essential role within earliest Christian discourses and practices, and of the essential role of the enslaved in significantly bearing the weight of carrying forward the Christian tradition. Holding these realities in tension, we might look differently at the enslaved to see them standing at the intersection of some of the worst human capacity to inflict harm and the most resilient capacity to witness to life and to offer hope in solidarity.

I have proposed modes of reading that elucidate the dynamic social and material relations among slaves and free(d)persons in the period of early Christianity in order to bring the enslaved more clearly into focus. In this way, I have sought to elaborate the function of slavery discourse in the letters of Paul as tied up with, not abstracted from, the lives of the enslaved. Where other scholars have positioned Paul among the lofty ranks of philosophers in order to make sense of his treatments of slavery, I have read Paul among slaves. To see Paul relating more directly, and not so abstractly, with the lives of the enslaved is to see more clearly how Christianity emerged in direct relationship to slavery. By elaborating the interplay between discourses of slavery and the social-material circumstances of enslavement, this dissertation offers three particular

contributions to the fields of New Testament and Early Christianity, Roman history, and religious studies.

First, I have moved beyond a binary between metaphorical slavery and “real” slaves. I have done so by demonstrating how Paul’s designation of himself as a slave is not abstracted from the work of slaves in the world. To call himself a slave to all is not merely a rhetorical strategy that has little to do with the enslaved. The image and argumentation are legible only because they reflect the activities of slaves. To notice this is to see Paul’s use of the slave form not simply as a convenient metaphor but as way of further exploiting slaves’ labor, not only for physical work but also for thought. At the same time, reading Paul’s language of slavery as tied up with material-discursive practices of enslavement brings into view the multiple, contingent ways slaves and freepersons could relate to one another. As such, Paul’s slave form is not static, operating only according to his rhetorical aims, but produces any number of responses. This has implications for understanding how it is that Paul’s writings on slaves and slavery could be taken in such divergent directions.

Second, I have underscored the fact that slavery is marked by dynamic, contingent relationality and should be read as such. It is not simply that strict social hierarchies only ever contain possibilities for obedience or resistance. Instead, slavery is socially and materially produced through the ways slaves and free(d)persons relate and respond to one another. While slaveholders maintain significant advantages and power over slaves, the enslaved exhibit capacities to navigate their constraints with creativity and vitality. I have demonstrated this especially in the case of Paul’s letter to Philemon, Apphia, and Archippos. Paul participates in negotiations among freepersons over the status and role of a slave, Onesimos. Part of his rhetorical strategy includes the deployment of kinship language that reproduces Roman material-

discursive practices whereby slaves' relationality is subsumed by the master's family and so under the power of the master. However, this does not represent the whole story of enslaved kinship. Extant material evidence shows slaves to have claimed kinship ties legally and often socially denied to them. Reading this evidence alongside Paul's letter brings into sharp relief the interplay between masterly constructions of the slave and slaves' own responses and practices.

Finally, I have promoted historiography of slavery that views this contingent relationality across time. This is evident through my sketch of the early interpretive history of Phil 2:6–7. Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian write for their own contexts, but they do so in ways that reveal the stakes in how they come into contact with and use history. In looking back upon the figure of Christ, and particularly the description of his form as that of a slave, Clement and Tertullian evince the enduring nature of slavery's queerness. The slave is useful to put to work but is also potentially dangerous. Clement and Tertullian put forward Christ's slave form in ways that tamp down its queerly disruptive potential, but in contrast to this, the Alexamenos graffito puts it fully on display. In a space inhabited by slaves and freedpersons, the graffito highlights both how the slavishness of Christ could be a cause for derision, as well as perhaps a source of inspiration provoking reverence, particularly for the enslaved. My dissertation thus works toward viewing engagements with slavery throughout and across the historical record as never detached from the material-discursive practices of enslavement, as if its contingencies and contradictions can ever be excised, but always with responsive to the queerness of slavery.

Moreover, this dissertation lays groundwork for further interrogation of contemporary historiographical practices. I have written the dissertation at a particular moment in time when

systemic racism in the United States—an insidious legacy of slavery<sup>1</sup>—is being fiercely contested in the form of the Black Lives Matter movement, bringing into sharp relief creative capacities to act within and against dehumanizing social-material forces.<sup>2</sup> I also take inspiration from struggles for queer liberation, particularly the ways that the naming of some persons as queer—or non-normative, even non-human—in terms of gender and sexuality has created space for cultivating alternative non-traditional forms of life-sustaining kinship and for empowering alternative social-political identities.<sup>3</sup> Across different temporal and spatial contexts and against different forms of oppression, we see people acting within their constraints to make their lives and the lives of loved ones livable. We need not reduce the slaves of antiquity to the elite discourses that objectified them but can insist upon historiography that revivifies the enslaved in and for our own critical awareness of subjugation, resistance, and survival in the world.

For those of us who care about history in the sense of wanting to know “what really happened in the first century,” seeking after the lives and activities of the enslaved directs our attention away from Paul alone to the various strategies Christians have engaged in order to navigate the complexities of their circumstances. Ancient slaves’ own work at redirecting the dehumanizing forces of enslavement redirect also the force and direction of the words and ideas of Paul’s epistles. It should be no wonder, then, that interpretations of Paul’s writings on slavery,

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016); see also #BlackLivesMatter Syllabus, <http://www.blacklivesmattersyllabus.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” *GLQ* 1 (1993): 17–32; Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

and generally, have worked in such divergent directions across history; these potentials are intrinsic to the world of thought and practice re-presented in his letters themselves.

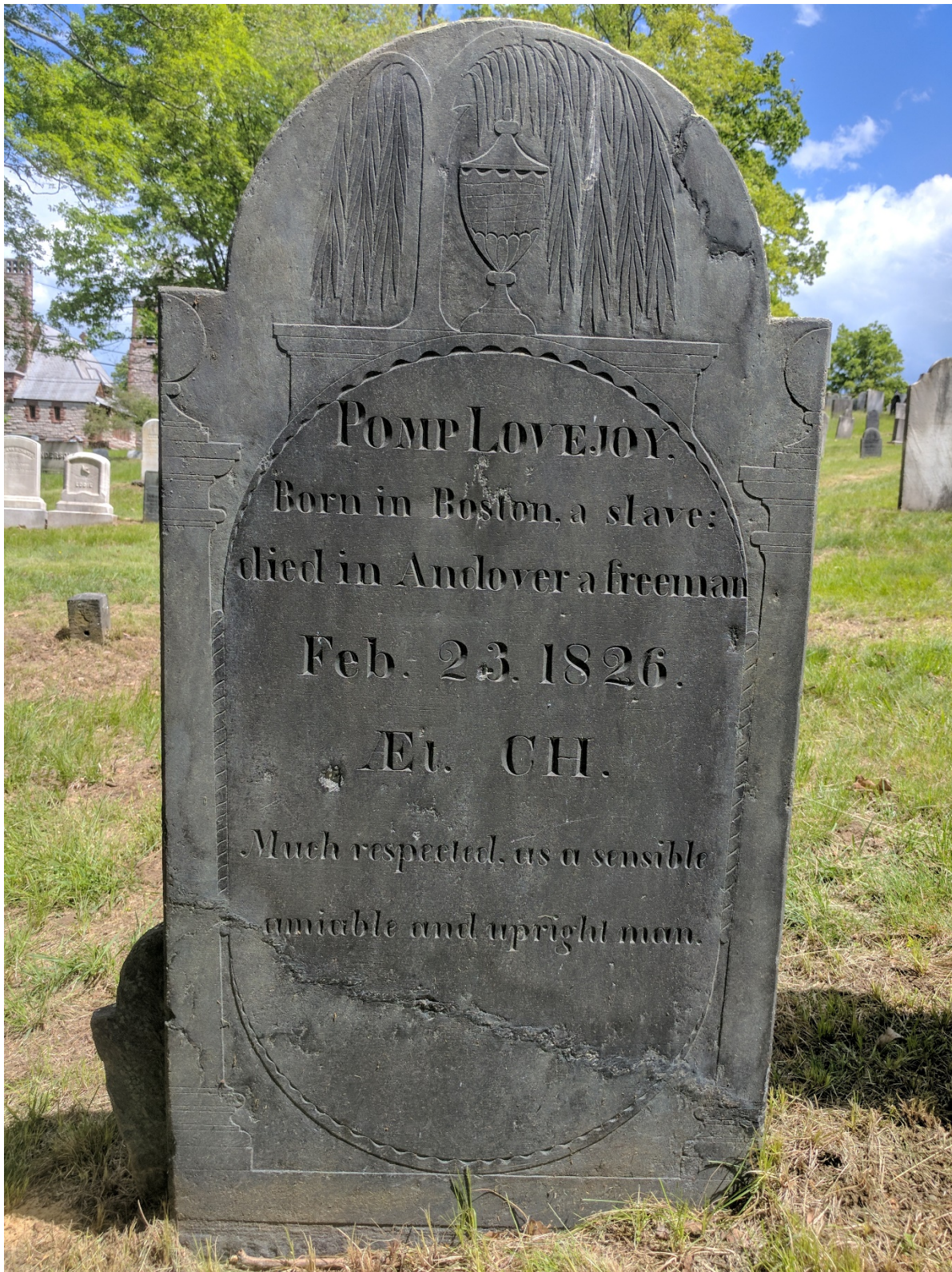
Moreover, traditional scholarly treatments of Paul on slavery are themselves time-bound. Much scholarship has been bound by a modernist, so-called progressive view of history, one that says we cannot hold Paul to our standards. In other words, “we” have become “enlightened” and now reject slavery (or so we think, despite pervasive forms of enslavement still today), while in Paul’s time, “any regular person” would have accepted slavery as normal and natural (except we know there were those who resisted slavery in both audacious and subtle ways). The notion of time as binding,<sup>4</sup> as an active process of bringing boundedness to what might otherwise spill beyond the expectations and desires of those with the capacity to do the binding of historical narratives, calls our attention to the active work of arranging time in particular ways. Whatever Paul meant and did is done. But perhaps too often our assertions of Paul’s temporal boundedness function to delineate a certain kind of timeline, one that underscores our own notions of, or desires for, progress. There are historical differences across time, of course, but the articulation of these historical differences does certain kinds of work. Perhaps we protect Paul from time, binding him to a period of enslavement’s dominant acceptance, in order to protect ourselves within time, binding ourselves to the concept of a “better,” “more enlightened” era, lest we have to face our own complicity in the systemic marking of others as ever available, in all times and places, to be dominated and exploited.

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<sup>4</sup> A concept I borrow from Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). Following Freud, Freeman identifies binding as “a way to manage excess” (ibid., xvi). Such management of excess, or that which exceeds prevailing ideals and norms, depends in no small part on temporal delineations—time for labor, for leisure, for family (that is, certain kinds of labor, leisure, and family). Proper subjects, then, are regulated according to how it is that they are bound to spend their time. “Yet,” Freeman writes, “this very binding also produces a kind of rebound effect, in which whatever it takes to organize energy also triggers a release of energy that surpasses the original stimulus” (ibid.).

For this reason, I have insisted upon asking question about the lives of the enslaved in early Christianity that may not be fully answerable due to the limits of extant evidences. This mode of inquiry has sought after a more vivid elaboration of the dynamic interplay between slaves and free(d)persons so to see the lives of both the free and the slave as entangled, as contingent upon one another. I have sought, therefore, to move beyond basic questions of accommodation or resistance to slavery, insisting instead on complex negotiations of enslavement that are never quite settled. This may provide for a more honest accounting of the history of slavery and Christianity insofar as it sheds greater light on the contributions of both slaves and free(d)persons to Christian thought and practice. Even more so, I hope that this work contributes to larger projects concerned with precarious lives at the intersections of resistance and complicity, cultivating sensitivity and responsiveness to what it takes for people to negotiate their social-material circumstances in the effort to survive.

**Figure 1.** Gravestone of Pompey Lovejoy, South Parish Burial Grounds, Andover, Massachusetts. Photo: Tyler M. Schwaller.



[illegible]

**Figure 3.** *Re-enactment of the Jefferson-Hemings Affair*, Carrie Mae Weems, <http://carriemaeweems.net/galleries/jefferson-suite.html>.



**Figure 4.** Candelabrum (lychnouchos), Casa di M. Fabius Rufus (VII.16.22) at Pompeii. Now in Boscoreale, Antiquarium, inv. 13112. Photo: Soprintendenza Speciale per I Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei. (Image from *Roman Slavery and Roman Material Culture*, ed. Michele George [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013], fig. 5.7.)



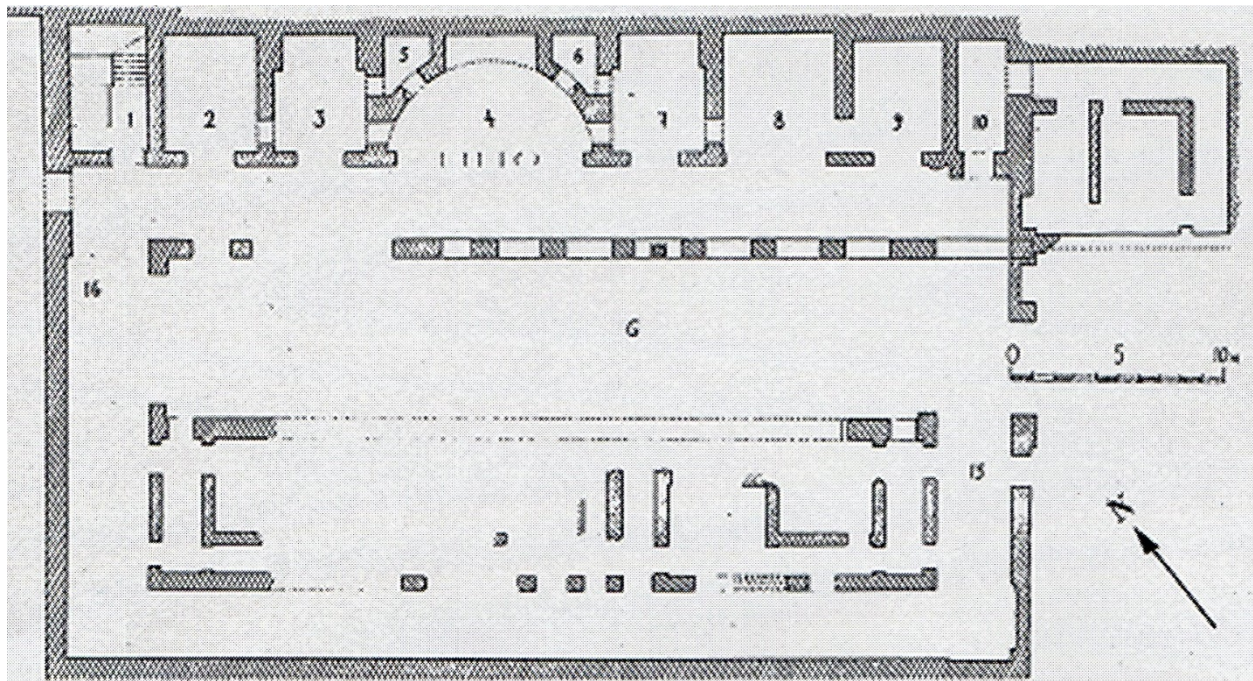
**Figure 5.** Bronze lamp. Kavala, Archaeological Museum, M392. Photo: museum. (Image from *Roman Slavery and Roman Material Culture*, fig. 5.3.)



**Figure 6.** Alexamenos graffito, Rome. (Image from Heikki Solin and Marja Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti del Palatino*, ed. Veikko Väänänen, vol. 1, *Paedagogium*, Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae 3 [Helsinki: Helsingfors, 1966], 209.)



**Figure 7.** Plan of the Palatine Paedagogium. (Image Solin and Itkonen-Kaila, *Graffiti del Palatino*, fig. 1).



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