Sexing the Jew: Early Christian Constructions of Jewishness

by

Susanna Laing Drake

Department of Religion
Duke University

Date: _____________________

Approved:

___________________________
Dr. Elizabeth Clark, Supervisor
___________________________
Dr. Bart Ehrman
___________________________
Dr. Kalman Bland
___________________________
Dr. Warren Smith

___________________________
Dr. Sheila Dillon

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Religion in the Graduate School of Duke University

2008
ABSTRACT

Sexing the Jew: Early Christian Constructions of Jewishness

by

Susanna Laing Drake

Department of Religion
Duke University

Date:_______________________

Approved:

___________________________

Dr. Elizabeth Clark, Supervisor

___________________________

Dr. Bart Ehrman

___________________________

Dr. Kalman Bland

___________________________

Dr. Warren Smith

___________________________

Dr. Sheila Dillon

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D. in the Department of Religion in the Graduate School of Duke University

2008
Copyright by
Susanna Laing Drake
2008
ABSTRACT

My dissertation analyzes early Christian representations of Jewish sexuality and explores how early Christian writers attacked opponents by depicting them as subjects of perverse or excessive sexual desires. Beginning with the New Testament, I examine how Paul employed sexual stereotypes to distinguish the community of believers in Christ from the wider Gentile world. In the decades after Paul, Greek writers such as Justin Martyr and the author of the Epistle of Barnabas turned accusations of sexual licentiousness and literalist interpretive practices against the Jews. Origen of Alexandria, moreover, utilized accusations of carnality, fleshliness, and sexual licentiousness to produce Jewish-Christian difference; he drew on dichotomies of “flesh” and “spirit” in Paul’s letters to support his argument for the superiority of Christian “spiritual” exegesis over Jewish “carnal” exegesis.

Examining the writings of major Christian writers such as Origen and John Chrysostom, I argue that Christian sexual slander against Jews intensified as Christian exegetes endeavored to claim Jewish scripture for Christian use in the third and fourth centuries. My research examines these literary constructions of Jewish sexuality in early Christian writings of Greek Fathers and illuminates how these constructions function in relation to the development of Christian biblical hermeneutics, the formation of Christian practices of self-mastery, and the expansion of Christian imperial power. By exploring how early Christian writers appealed to categories of gender and sexuality to produce Jewish-Christian difference, I aim to contribute to
recent scholarship on the variety of strategies by which early Christians negotiated identity and defined Otherness.
## CONTENTS

Abstract

iv

List of Figures

vii

Acknowledgments

viii

Introduction

1

1. Paul and Second-Century Constructions of Jewishness

37

2. How Origen Reads Jewishness

86


139

4. “A Synagogue of Malakoi and Pornai”: John Chrysostom’s Sermons against the Jews

181

Conclusion

230

Bibliography

251

Biography

279
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1  *Susanna and the Elders. Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome.*  141

Figure 2  *Susanna, Daniel, and the Elders. Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome.*  142

Figure 3  *Susanna and Daniel. Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome.*  142

Figure 4  *Susanna and the Elders. Catacomb of Praetextatus, Rome.*  179
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Elizabeth Clark first and foremost for her generosity and support during my years as a graduate student. Liz is my adviser and mentor, and I’m grateful not only for her critical comments and guidance as I wrote this dissertation but also for all that she taught me during my five years at Duke. If all graduate students could be so lucky…

I thank the other members of my dissertation committee for their insightful suggestions and timely help: Bart Ehrman, Kalman Bland, Sheila Dillon, and Warren Smith. I learned so much from these teachers, and I am grateful for the careful attention that they paid to each chapter of this dissertation.

Some of my friends in Durham were kind enough to read and comment on my writing. Thanks especially to Bart Scott, Kristi Upson-Saia, Christie and Tim Luckritz Marquis, Catherine Chin, Pam Mullins, and the members of the Franklin Humanities Institute Dissertation Working Group. To my friends and neighbors who supported me with company, comfort, and good food—Sarah and Josh, Maria and Justin, Christie and Tim, Bart and Daniel, Erin and Marcelo, Kristi and Steve, Lori and Jill, Kyle and Maggie, Kate and Chris, Emily, Ariel, and Maria—thank you. I am also grateful to my new friends, colleagues, and students at Macalester College who cheered me on in the final stages of this project.
Thanks to my family for their continual support and love: John and Frances, Emma and Hilary, Paul and Lenore, the Strickler family, the Drake family, the Butler family, and the Sunset Beach family.

Special thanks go to Michael Butler, who moved in as I began this project. Lucky for me he’s still there at the end of my day.
INTRODUCTION

Daniel Boyarin begins his book, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*, with a quotation from Augustine’s *Tractates against the Jews*: “‘Behold Israel according to the flesh (1 Cor 10:18). This we know to be the carnal Israel; but the Jews do not grasp this meaning and as a result they prove themselves indisputably carnal.’”\(^1\) Remark ing on these lines, Boyarin suggests:

This accusation against the Jews, that they are indisputably carnal, was a topos of much Christian writing in late antiquity. I propose . . . to account for this practice of Augustine and the others who characterize the Jews as carnal, indeed to assert the essential descriptive accuracy of the recurring Patristic notion that what divides Christians from rabbinic Jews is the discourse of the body, and especially of sexuality, in the two cultural formations.\(^2\)

I begin my dissertation by remarking on these lines of Boyarin.

How did the figure of the “carnal Jew” come to function as a topos of early Christian literature? When did this topos first appear, and what purposes did it serve? Did it begin with Paul, who coined the phrase “Israel according to the flesh”? How did the intertwined “discourses”\(^3\) of the body and sexuality function not only in the

---


3 My use of the term “discourse” is informed by the work of Michel Foucault, in particular *The History of Sexuality* volumes, and the work of scholars of early Christianity who have appropriated Foucault’s terminology. Judith Perkins’ explanation of “discourse” in the *The Suffering Self* has proved particularly helpful: “The power of discourse inheres precisely in this remarkable ability it has to set its agenda and mask the fact that its representation both has an agenda and that there could be other representations and other agendas. Every representation is by its very nature partial and incomplete. A representation of ‘reality’ must leave something out, even as it puts something in. A culture’s discourse represents not the ‘real’ world, but rather a world mediated through the social categories, relations and institutions operating in the specific culture. Another way of saying this is that every
construction of Christian identity but also in Christian representations of Jewish identity? In what follows, I examine literary representations of Jewish sexuality in Christian writings of Greek fathers from the first through fourth centuries. In particular, I explore how these representations of Jews as “carnal” subjects of perverse or excessive sexual desires function in relation to the formation of identity, the promotion of sophrosyne (bodily self-control), and the interpretation of biblical texts among Christians in late antiquity.

Sexuality is “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power;” so argues Foucault in Volume One of The History of Sexuality. This understanding of sexuality applies not only to modernity (Foucault’s concern in volume one) but also, I suggest, to late antiquity. In my investigation, I explore how sexuality functioned as a “dense transfer point” for power relations between Christians and Jews in late antiquity. I consider how such relations of power shifted according to the changing contexts and needs of specific communities and writers, from Paul to Origen to John

---


4 Although charges of Jewish “carnality” occur often in the work of Latin writers, such as Augustine, and Syrian writers, such as Ephrem and Aphrahat, I focus in this dissertation on the writings of Greek Fathers, particularly on the works of Origen and John Chrysostom.


Chrysostom. In the last chapter and conclusion, I explore how discourses of sexuality were deployed to construct, amplify, and reiterate Christian power in a time that witnessed not only the rise of Christian asceticism but also the alignment of Christian identity with that of the empire. Throughout this dissertation, I am interested in the ways that early Christian writers crafted discourses of sexuality to differentiate the “spiritual” Christian from his or her “carnal” Others.

Accusations of carnality and porneia (sexual immorality) were part of a wider repertoire of ancient rhetorical invective, as Catharine Edwards demonstrates in her book, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome*. Edwards analyzes how ancient Roman moralists charged their opponents with a variety of vices, including economic vices such as excess, indulgence, and luxury, and sexual vices such as adultery, licentiousness, and “effeminacy” (*mollitia*). She argues that these charges of immorality function in relation to the formation of Roman identity: “[A]ccusations and descriptions of immorality,” she writes, “were implicated in defining what it meant to be a member of the Roman Elite, in excluding outsiders and in controlling insiders.”


According to the Christian apologist Minucius Felix, early Christians themselves suffered charges of sexual impropriety, most notably at the hands of M.

---

Cornelius Fronto, who called Christianity a “religion of lust” and accused Christians of “debauchery,” “incestuous lust,” cannibalism, and worshipping their priest’s genitalia. Early Christians retaliated against their accusers by drawing on the same set of charges. For example, in his First Apology, Justin Martyr takes aim at Greeks and Romans who fashion false gods and worship them. First he argues that the material of which these idols are fashioned is recycled from “vessels of dishonor.” Then he contends that the “artificers” of these idols are “practiced in every vice,” including the corruption of young girls. Whereas Christians are recognized by their bodily self-control, pagans, idolaters, and heretics are defined by practices of *porneia*.

In *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity*, Jennifer Knust examines how early Christians, such as Justin, deployed these charges of sexual licentiousness to denounce pagans and heretics, in particular. She argues persuasively that accusations of *porneia* function as devices for the formation of identity and the creation of difference in early Christianity: “Sexualized invective,” she writes, “serves several purposes at once: outsiders are pushed further away, insiders are policed, and morality is both constituted and defined as ‘Christian.’” By portraying their opponents as sexually licentious, early Christian writers not only

---


10 Justin Martyr, *1 Apol*. 9.

accentuated the difference and distance between “us” and “them” but also promoted the ideal of *sophrosyne* as orthopraxis within their own communities.

Knust contributes to scholarship on ancient sexual invective by indicating the fallacies of previous interpretations that took ancient accusations of *porneia* at face value.\(^\text{12}\) Instead of reading these texts as “reports” of “what really happened,” she focuses on the rhetorical function of sexual slander.\(^\text{13}\) Her primary evidence is drawn from early Christian accusations against pagans and “heretics” in the first and second centuries. In her final chapter, she briefly takes up the question of Christian accusations of Jewish *porneia*, exploring how Justin Martyr, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, draws on biblical tales of Israel’s sexual misbehavior to slander his Jewish contemporaries. In regard to the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Knust argues that Justin “deloys familiar biblical tropes involving the sexual and religious misadventures of Israel in the wilderness to claim that the Jews had always been enslaved to desire, hard of heart, and prone to idolatry.”\(^\text{14}\) In my dissertation, I build on Knust’s work on

---

\(^\text{12}\) See the examples cited by Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 166 n.13. Even Peter Brown does not escape critique in this regard. Knust cites Brown’s *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988): “It is not altogether surprising that, at just this time, we hear shocked rumors that esoteric Christian groups had turned to free love. Their enemies claimed that these explore, through promiscuity, the nature of ‘true communion.’ . . . One cannot rule out the existence of such groups within second-century Christianity: they were not merely figments of a polemist’s imagination” (61).

\(^\text{13}\) Knust writes, “Some historians have adopted the views of church fathers, arguing that at least a few of the Christian heretics actually were sexually promiscuous promoters of orgies for Christ. Such historical reconstructions fail to take into account the rhetorical and discursive functions of accusations of sexual depravity. . . . Charges of debauchery, unrestrained lust, and the like illuminate cultural assertions about sex and morality while providing evidence of competitive power relations between individuals and the groups they claim to represent” (3).

\(^\text{14}\) Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*, 148-149.
the rhetorical function of sexual slander, but instead of focusing on accusations against pagans and Christian “heretics” in the first and second centuries, I analyze Christian representations of Jewish sexuality in the first through fourth centuries. Furthermore, in contrast to Knust, I explore how Christian sexual slander against Jews functions within the creation of a Christian “spiritual” hermeneutic practice in the third century, and I investigate how the development of this spiritualized hermeneutic practice, in turn, coincides with the rise of exhortations to ascetic practice.

Several scholars have noted the corresponding rise of Christian sexual slander against Jews and of Christian asceticism in the fourth century. Marcel Simon contends that Christian charges of Jewish licentiousness represent “an exaggerated expression of the conflict between Jewish and Christian conceptions of sexual morality.” Commenting on passages from Aphrahat, Jerome, and John Chrysostom, Simon notes that sexual slander against Jews occurred in a period “in which the ascetic ideal, an ideal that set a high value on virginity, was gaining ground in the Church.” Simon thus associates Christian accusations against Jews and Jewish sexual morality with the burgeoning ascetic movement among fourth-century Christians. For him, these accusations against Jews have their root in reality: Christians and Jews disagreed as to the centrality of asceticism and virginity to


16 Simon, Verus Israel, 212.
spiritual life, and such disagreement led to “exaggerated” claims about Jewish “carnality.”

In her 1974 book, *Faith and Fratricide*, Rosemary Radford Ruether briefly examines charges of Jewish “sensuality” in the works of fourth-century Christian writers, including Ephrem, Aphrahat, and John Chrysostom. Unlike Simon, for whom these charges are rooted in a historical difference in attitude toward sexuality and virginity, Ruether contends that such accusations are linked to “the general ontological dualism of Christian theology which describes the Jews as people of the outward ‘letter,’ against the Christian people of the ‘spirit.’” In this and the following passage, Ruether suggests that these charges of Jewish “sensuality” function not only in relation to the rise of Christian asceticism but also in relation to Christian interpretive practices. She writes, “The Fathers feel full license to describe Jewish ‘outwardness’ not merely in terms of literalism over against the Christian allegorical interpretation of Scripture, but as though the Jews were actually addicted to the vices of the flesh, in contrast to Christian asceticism.” In my dissertation, I take up this idea, first proposed by Ruether, that sexual slander against Jews relates to the development of “proper” Christian textual practices as well as “proper” Christian sexual practices. In my chapters on Origen, especially, I examine how negative

---


representations of Jewish sexuality function in the construction of Christian biblical interpretation as “spiritual,” on the one hand, and Jewish biblical interpretation as “carnal” and “literal,” on the other.

Pier Cesare Bori also raises questions about Christian representations of Jewish carnality in his book, *The Golden Calf and the Origins of the anti-Jewish Controversy*, published first in Italian in 1983.²⁰ Bori is especially interested in the ways in which early Christian writers employ the story of Israel’s apostasy with the golden calf (Exodus 32) against their Jewish contemporaries. He concludes that in early Christian literature the figure of the “carnal” Jew functions as a foil to the “spiritual” Christian. He writes, “[T]he Jewish people are the enabling condition for an operation which leads to the definition by antithesis of a Christian self-image. Christianity rests its case on this self-image achieved by contrast, thereby reserving for itself the sublime spaces of spirituality, and leaving to Judaism the base and vulgar space of carnality.”²¹ As Bori suggests in this passage, Paul’s dyadic pairings of spirit/flesh and spirit/letter loom large in the early Christian imagination. In the decades after Paul, the positive category of “spirit” comes to signify Christianess, while Jewishness is associated with the “flesh” and the “letter that kills” (2 Cor 3:6).²²

---


²¹ Bori, *Golden Calf*, 78.

²² Bori writes, “Within Christianity, this opposition [between spirit and flesh] soon serves to justify the distinction, the distance, the superiority of the Christian way over its Jewish counterpart. . . Christianity’s opposition to the law thus becomes opposition between the letter (the materiality, the
Thus, Jewish-Christian difference is theorized, in part, through the difference between flesh and spirit.\textsuperscript{23}

In an article published in 1994, Ross Kraemer contributes to scholarship on these early Christian representations of Jews by emphasizing the role that gender plays in the construction of the “Other” in religious propaganda of the ancient Mediterranean world.\textsuperscript{24} Kraemer turns to John Chrysostom’s \textit{Adversus Iudaeos} sermons as an example of one Christian writer’s deployment of gender as a way to slander opponents; she argues that Chrysostom frequently associates Jews with traits that are “typically associated with women.”\textsuperscript{25} By highlighting the “feminization” of Jews and Jewish spaces in Chrysostom’s sermons, Kraemer attends to the ways that sexual slander is linked intricately with gendered invective. From Kraemer we learn that any examination of ancient sexual slander should account for the ways in which such slander constructs, reinforces, or contests traditional understandings of gender identity and performance, an idea I take up in Chapters Three and Four.


\textsuperscript{25} Kraemer, “The Other as Woman,” 136.
With the phrase “Sexing the Jew” (the title of my dissertation) I signal not only the sexualization of Jews in early Christian literature but also the “sexing” of Jewishness as male or female.²⁶ I am thus concerned with the ways in which early Christian authors invoke sexuality, gender, and the body in the creation of Jewish-Christian difference and in the assertion of Christian dominance. In this study, I am indebted to recent scholarly work on early Jewish-Christian relations—especially those works that shift attention away from an examination of “Judaism” and “Christianity” as separate and coherent “religions” and toward an exploration of the strategies by which Jewish-Christian difference was produced, reiterated, and contested in late antiquity.²⁷ In the following section, I offer a brief history of nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century scholarship on Jewish-Christian

²⁶ With this title, I intend to invoke the titles of two other books, Anne Fausto-Sterling’s *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000) and Jeannette Winterson’s *Sexing the Cherry* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). Fausto-Sterling’s book challenges and contributes to previous feminist scholarship by arguing that the body—which is often considered “natural” and “pre-cultural”—is in fact culturally mediated and produced. Gender assignment, she argues, is a “social decision.” Winterson’s novel, which is set in seventeenth-century London, takes its title from a scene in which Jordan, the story’s protagonist, discusses the “sexing” of a new hybrid cherry tree: “Grafting is the means whereby a plant, perhaps tender or uncertain, is fused into a hardier member of its strain, and so the two take advantage of each other and produce a third kind, without seed or parent. In this way fruits have been made resistant to disease and certain plants have learned to grow where previously they could not . . . It was on the cherry that I first learned the art of grafting and wondered whether it was an art I might apply to myself.” Jordan’s mother then demands, “Of what sex is that monster you are making?” to which he replies, “The cherry grew, and we have sexed it and it is female” (79). Jordan’s meditation on “grafting,” hybridity, and sex has led me to rethink Paul’s famous comments on the grafting of the wild olive shoot in Romans 11:16-24. Taking cues from Jordan’s mother, we might fruitfully ask of Paul: “Of what sex is that monster you are making?”

²⁷ I am thinking in particular of the works of Daniel Boyarin, Judith Lieu, and Andrew Jacobs.
relations, and I indicate how my work on sexual slander fits into more recent models that understand late ancient religious identities as plural, “hybrid,” and overlapping.28

Scholarship on Jewish-Christian Relations

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Protestant scholars of ancient Christianity such as Wilhelm Bousset29 and Adolf von Harnack30 explained the relation of Christianity to Judaism in the following terms: The second-temple Judaism of which Christianity was born was in fact a religion in decline, and the final “death-blow” to Judaism occurred when Jews rejected Jesus as their messiah.31 Jesus, they argued, inaugurated a new religion, Christianity, which completely separated from the religious traditions of “late Judaism”; Christians thus “superseded” Jews by replacing them as the “true Israel” and the chosen people of God. For Harnack, especially, any mention of “relations” or “debates” between Christians and Jews in


the ensuing centuries was merely a fabrication of early Christian theologians, who aimed to advance Christian theology through comparison with imaginary opponents.\textsuperscript{32} Such Christian constructions of Jews and Judaism bore no relation, he argued, to historical Jews or Judaism, for the latter had become largely irrelevant in the centuries following the death of Jesus.\textsuperscript{33}

In his 1961 study, \textit{The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue}, James Parkes takes Harnack to task for reproducing the same negative “conception of the Jews as the theologians of the early centuries of the Church.”\textsuperscript{34} Parkes maintains that Harnack, like other Protestant scholars of the late-nineteenth century, takes at face value ancient Christian claims about the early and complete separation from and supersession of Judaism. Parkes argues, furthermore, that the “parting of the ways” between Christianity and Judaism happened at a later date, towards the end of the first century. He writes:

The generation of Jews and Christians which followed the destruction of Jerusalem, not the generation which first heard the preaching of Christianity,

\textsuperscript{32} See Harnack’s \textit{Die Altercatio Simonis Iudaei et Theophilii Christiani nebst Untersuchungen über die antijüdische Polemik in der alten Kirche} (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1883).

\textsuperscript{33} Andrew Jacobs offers an apt summary of Harnack’s view: “Such leftover dregs of Judaism could not ‘relate’ to Christianity, nor did Christianity have any need to ‘relate’ to the Jews. The Jewish Lion was toothless, and the Christian Lamb had found more satisfying pasture on which to graze. Harnack brought this vision of a listless Judaism withering on the vine to his study of early Christian literature, particularly those Christian texts that recounted ‘debates’ between Jews and Christians. These ‘debates,’ as well as most Christian writings about Jews, were usually, according to Harnack, thinly veiled fictions: these Jews were ‘imaginary opponents,’ devil’s advocates, stereotypes bearing absolutely no relation to real Jews or real Judaism. Christian writing about Jews, Harnack concluded, engaged in a ‘specious polemic,’ making Christians look smart and triumphant to themselves and their pagan neighbors” (Jacobs, “Lion and Lamb,” 99-100).

\textsuperscript{34} James Parkes, \textit{The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism} (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1961), xvi.
is responsible for the completion of the separation. That accomplished, it still required several centuries for the beliefs of each party to crystallize into the forms which they have historically assumed.\textsuperscript{35}

With this observation, Parkes contributes to scholarship on Jewish-Christian relations by indicating that Christianity’s separation from Judaism was more gradual and more complicated than previously thought. Although he maintains that “the definite separation into two religions” occurred at the close of the first century,\textsuperscript{36} Parkes also suggests that the “separation” did not appear so definite “on the ground.” He writes: “We should be wrong to assume that the distinction which we can now observe between Christians and Jews represents the situation as it appeared to those living at the time.”\textsuperscript{37} With Parkes’ work, the scholarly conversation advances to include an investigation of the date and manner in which Christianity and Judaism “parted ways.”

Another scholar of the mid-twentieth century who helps to reformulate the relationship between late ancient Christianity and Judaism is Marcel Simon.\textsuperscript{38} In Verus Israel: A Study of the relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425), originally published in French in 1948, Simon examines many of

\textsuperscript{35} Parkes, Conflict of Church and Synagogue, 70.

\textsuperscript{36} Parkes, Conflict of Church and Synagogue, 91.

\textsuperscript{37} Parkes, Conflict of Church and Synagogue, 95.

\textsuperscript{38} It is important to note that Simon and Parkes’ books build upon early-twentieth-century studies of late ancient Judaism and its impact on early Christianity, many of which challenged Harnack and Boussct’s thesis. See, for example, George Foot Moore, Judaism in the First Three Centuries of the Common Era: The Age of the Tannaim, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927-1930); Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch (Munich: Beck, 1922); and Claude Montefiore, Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings (New York: Macmilan, 1930).
the same *Adversus Iudaeos* texts that Harnack investigated. Instead of dismissing these texts as mere fabrications, however, Simon argues that they reflect actual conflicts and heated encounters between Christians and Jews. In the following passage, he outlines the primary question around which he organizes his study of Christian anti-Jewish literature: “The real question to decide is whether or not the Judaism with which these works come to grips represents a real threat to the Church.”

Simon’s answer to this question is unequivocal: Christian anti-Jewish sentiment in the second through fifth centuries is motivated and fueled by continuing competition for converts by Christians and Jews. Put differently: “The most compelling reason for anti-Semitism was the religious vitality of Judaism.”

For Parkes and Simon, Christianity and Judaism become separate and distinct “religions” in the beginning of the second century. According to both scholars, the primary model for how these two cultural formations relate to each other is a model of conflict. The primary questions that drive their investigations regard the extent to which the texts provide evidence for “what really happened”: When did the two religions separate? Did Judaism present a “real threat” to the Church? The methodology of Parkes and Simon’s studies thus involves the teasing out of historical relations and conflicts from the often-biased textual evidence.

---

39 Simon, *Verus Israel*, 145.

40 Simon, *Verus Israel*, 146.

41 Simon, *Verus Israel*, 232.

In my dissertation, I am interested in a different set of questions. Instead of inquiring as to when (or whether) “Christianity” separated from “Judaism,” I explore the rhetorical strategies that Christian leaders utilized to construct Christian identity as separate and distinct from Jewish identity. Instead of focusing on the ways in which these early Christian texts shed light on (or obscure) “what really happened,” I suggest that what these texts “reveal” are the strategies of slander and stereotype that were available to early Christian authors as they constructed Jewishness in dialectic relation to Christianess. In place of the question, “What really happened?” I ask, “What was thinkable and possible to say about Jews and Jewish sexuality in the first through fourth centuries of the Christian era?”

In this regard, my work builds on recent scholarly critiques of the “parting of the ways” model, including the work of Daniel Boyarin, Judith Lieu, and many of the scholars of late ancient Christianity and Judaism who contributed to the aptly-titled volume, The Ways that Never Parted. These scholars challenge the notion that

---

43 See Daniel Boyarin, Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Judaism and Christianity (Stanford: Stanford university Press, 1999) and Border Lines: The Partition of Judaico-Christianity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004). In the latter book, Boyarin argues that “[t]he question of when Christianity separated from Judaism is a question whose answer is determined ideologically. We need always to ask: Whose Judaism; whose Christianity?” (6).


45 Becker and Reed, Ways that Never Parted. In their introduction to this volume, Becker and Reed write, “Rather than approaching Judaism and Christianity as monolithic entities that partook in a single act of separation, we here attempt to illuminate the broad range of regional and cultural variation in the encounters between different biblically-based religious groups –including Jews and Christians, but also those so-called ‘Jewish Christians’ and ‘Judaizers’ who so strain the dichotomous definitions of modern scholarship. In the process, we hope to highlight the value of studying Judaism and Christianity as traditions that continued to impact one another, in constantly changing but consistently meaningful ways, throughout Late Antiquity and into the Middle Ages” (3).
Christianity and Judaism represented two distinct and fully-formed “religions” in the beginning of the second century. They contend, instead, that cultural identities continued to be negotiated, contested, and reiterated in late antiquity, and they suggest that scholars attend more closely to the ways in which difference is produced in sites of overlap, influence, contact, and debate.

In his 2004 book, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Boyarin explores the production of difference by identifying the ways in which “border lines” were constructed in different times and places in the partitioning of the hybrid “Judaeo-Christianity.” He argues:

> There seems to be no absolute point, theological or otherwise, at which we could say for this early period: It is this that marks the difference between Judaism and Christianity. I don’t wish to argue that this position is correct but rather consciously to make it the starting point in a search for “the boundaries that were also crossing points,” and for more glimpses of the folks, “even perhaps the majority,” who dwelt in the interstices of the texts and objected to or simply ignored the work of the religious custom officers. Moreover, adopting such a perspective—a perspective that refuses the option of seeing Christian and Jew, Christianity and Judaism, as fully formed, bounded, and separate entities and identities in late antiquity—will help us, I hope, to perceive more fully the work of those early Christian and Jewish writers as they were making the difference.⁴⁶

In my project, I build on Boyarin’s work as I investigate the ways in which early Christian writers utilized discourses of sexuality, in particular, as “they were making the difference” between Christians and Jews.

In the course of my investigation, I have found it helpful to read scholarly works that explore the deployment of sexuality in the creation of difference in a

---

different context—that of modern colonialism. I am aided in this regard by the work of three theorists of colonialism—Homi Bhabha, Ann Laura Stoler, and Robert J. C. Young—who, in separate works that investigate different colonial encounters, explore the various ways that discourses of sexuality function within literary representations of colonial subjects. The latter, they argue, are often represented as subjects of excessive, dangerous, or deviant sexual desires, and the threat of social and racial contamination is often depicted as a sexual threat.

In *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*, Elizabeth Clark asks whether decidedly postmodern theories (such as those of Bhabha, Stoler, and Young) can shed any light on premodern texts (such as those of Origen or John Chrysostom). She suggests:

> Several of [postcolonial theory’s] major themes . . . helpfully illuminate ancient texts. Despite the differing economic and governmental systems of capitalist Europe and late ancient Rome, both concern empires. For both, territorial conquest economically and politically advantaged the metropole, but was often alleged by the conquerors to be for the benefit of those conquered.47

Asymmetrical power relations, dynamics of domination and resistance, and simultaneous constructions of ethnicity, religion, and sexuality are some of the key issues that postcolonial theory helps illuminate.48 I find postcolonial discourse analysis especially helpful to my project insofar as it calls attention not only to the


complex intersections of discourses (sexual, cultural, religious, and otherwise) but also to the material effects of such discourses.49

In her ethnographic work on the Dutch West Indies, Ann Laura Stoler contends that sexuality often serves as a proxy for other relations of power; it is a “convenient metaphor for colonial domination.”50 She argues that “sexual asymmetries and visions convey what is ‘really’ going on elsewhere, at another political epicenter. They are tropes to depict other centers of power.”51 Stoler helps us investigate how early Christian Fathers used sexuality to “think with” as they “made the difference” between Jews and Christians in late antiquity.

In his analysis of Victorian race theory, Robert Young also argues that sexuality ‘stands in’ as a metaphor for cultural interaction and racial mixing in colonial discourse. Hybridity, conceived in this context as the “mongrel” product of illicit sexual encounters, threatens the “purity” of categories. This dangerous intermixture jeopardizes the clear boundaries between self and other, colonizer and colonized. As Young suggests in Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race, one effect of the sexual underpinnings of hybridity lies in the discursive

49 As Jacobs argues. See Jacobs, Remains of the Jews, 200-209.


51 Stoler, Carnal Knowledge, 44.
association of the colonized Other with dangerous fecundity or deviant sexuality. In European colonialist texts, he argues, racial degeneracy is often described as sexual degeneracy. In my project, I use Young’s insights to examine accusations of sexual deviance and *porneia* in a context of late ancient religious hybridity—a context in which Church Fathers, faced with messy “border lines” between Christians and Jews, nevertheless sought to define Christianity and Judaism as pure, bounded, and distinct categories.

Finally, Homi Bhabha’s work on the stereotype in colonial discourse provides a fruitful lens through which to examine Christian stereotypes of Jews. Bhabha argues that “[t]he objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.” The stereotype functions as “the major discursive strategy” by which this objective is accomplished. Moreover, the analysis of the stereotype exposes the *ambivalence* that underlies the colonialist desire to ‘fix’ the identity of the Other. The vacillation

---

52 Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 26. He elaborates: “Hybridity thus makes difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different. In that sense, it operates according to the form of logic that Derrida isolates in the term ‘brisure,’ a breaking and joining at the same time, in the same place: difference and sameness in an apparently impossible simultaneity” (26).


55 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 95.
between “fixity” and “fluidity”—Bhabha’s ambivalence—provides a helpful framework for understanding the formation of identity in early Christianity. Christian writers such as Origen and John Chrysostom relied upon the stereotype to “fix” the identities of their opponents, yet the contexts of their writings suggest that religious identity was anything but fixed in third-century Alexandria and Caesarea and fourth-century Antioch. Bhabha’s work helps to illuminate the “processes of subjectification” made possible through “stereotypical discourse,” especially with regard to Chrysostom’s sermons. In Chapter Four and the Conclusion, I use Bhabha’s theory to shed light on the ways in which Jews are interpellated as colonial subjects, worthy of domination and violence, not only in the writings of Church Fathers but also in Christian imperial legislation.

I thus employ theories of colonialism to help elucidate the variety of ways that sexuality functions as a “dense transfer point for relations of power” among late ancient Christians and Jews. In particular, I am interested in sexual slander as a rhetorical weapon that early Christians utilized to assert Christian dominance and to justify violence toward Jews. Before examining Christian sexual slander against Jews, however, it is important to place these early Christian representations of Jewish sexuality in context by analyzing not only Jewish accusations of Gentile immorality but also other non-Christian portrayals of Jewish sexuality in antiquity.

Not only was the accusation of sexual immorality a topos in early Christian literature, it was also a topos in ancient Jewish texts; in these latter texts, however, Gentiles are the primary culprits. As early as the Pentateuch, sexual immorality is associated with “outsiders”—Canaanites and Egyptians especially. For example, in Leviticus 18, the Lord commands Moses: “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bring you” (Lev 18:2-3). Following this command is a lengthy list of prohibitions against sexual intercourse with various relatives, menstruating women, and animals. The text declares that these forms of sexual relations are “perversions” (Lev 18:23), and as such they defile both people and places:

Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves. Thus the land became defiled and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statues and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations. (Lev 18:24-26)

In this passage, the Lord commands Moses to avoid the defiling sexual practices that characterize non-Israelite cultures.57 One implication of this command is that Israelite

---

57 In her examination of the Septuagint Pentateuch and its sexual prohibitions, Kathy Gaca argues that “[c]ertain kinds of sexual activity are marked as apostasy, and these fit into two groups. First, sexual activity constitutes rebellion against god if it occurs while worshipping gods other than or in addition to the Lord. When members of God’s people engage in such sexual relations, they transgress the premier commandment to worship God alone and no other gods . . . Second, sexual activity is rebellious if it is a specific kind of defiling act, a sexual ‘abomination’ (βδέλυγμα) in the eyes of God” (Kathy Gaca, The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity, Hellenistic Culture and Society 40 [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003], 122-123).
culture is defined, ideally and in part, by adherence to a strict sexual code.\textsuperscript{58} Gentile culture, by contrast, is associated with sexual immorality and moral impurity.\textsuperscript{59}

In the \textit{Letter of Aristeas}, a pseudonymous Jewish text composed in Greek in the second century B.C.E., sexual morality characterizes Jewish “insiders,” while Gentile “outsiders” are depicted as licentious and deviant. The \textit{Letter} contrasts Jews with non-Jews:

\begin{quote}
\textit{We are set apart from all men. For most of the rest of mankind defile themselves by intercourse, working great unrighteousness, and whole countries and cities pride themselves on these vices. Not only do they have intercourse with men, but they even defile mothers and daughters. But we have kept apart from such things.}\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

In this passage, male same-sex relations and incest are singled out as particularly “defiling” acts perpetrated by Gentiles. The third Sibylline Oracle also distinguishes Jews from other \textit{ethnoi} on the basis of sexual purity: “More than any men they are mindful of the purity of marriage. Nor do they hold unholy intercourse with boys, as do the Phoenician, Egyptians, and Latins, and \textit{spacious} Hellas, and many nations of

\begin{itemize}
\item Christine Hayes indicates the proximity of idolatry and sexual sin when she argues that “idols and idolatry defile in the same way that other heinous sins defile—most analogous, the sin of adultery or fornication. Idols do not generate a ritual impurity like that of a corpse, menstrual blood, or semen, that is communicable to persons and susceptible to removal by rituals of purification. The possession and worship of idols generate moral impurity; references to persons being defiled by idolatry, like references to persons being defiled by fornication, adultery, or sin generally, denote a moral rather than a ritual impurity” (Hayes, \textit{Gentile Impurities}, 42).
\end{itemize}
other men, Persians and Galatians and all Asia, transgressing the holy law of the immortal God.” These texts produce Jewish-Gentile difference, in part, by utilizing criteria of sexual practice. Whereas Jewish identity is formulated according to separation from sexual vices, Gentile identity is distinguished by a willingness to participate in defiling intercourse.

In several biblical texts, sexual immorality is linked more explicitly to Gentile idolatry. In the story of the renewal of the covenant in Exodus, for example, the Lord commands Moses and the Israelites to avoid making a covenant with the inhabitants of other (Gentile) lands, “for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, someone among them will invite you, and you will eat of the sacrifice . . . and their daughters who prostitute themselves to their gods will make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods” (Exod 34:15-16). Deuteronomy contains a similar linkage of prostitution and idolatry: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Soon you will lie down with your ancestors. Then this people will begin to prostitute themselves to the foreign gods in their midst, the gods of the land into which they are going’” (Deut. 31:16). In these passages, the worship of foreign gods is imagined as a type of prostitution; not only does idolatry of this sort lead to porneia, it is itself an act of porneia.  

---


62 Jennifer Knust writes of these biblical texts, ‘‘Idolatry’—itself a term of opprobrium meaning ‘worships other gods’—was figured as znh or porneia, one usually implied the other’’ (Knust, Abandoned to Lust, 53). She cites several biblical texts that contain this figuration, including Lev 18:24-30, 20:1-9; Exod 23:32-33, 34:15-16; Deut 31:16, Judg 2:17, 8:27; 1 Chr 5:25; and 2 Kgs 9:22. (Knust, Abandoned to Lust, 191 n.14).
This association of sexual immorality and idolatry continues in other Jewish writings of the second-temple period. For example, the Wisdom of Solomon, which is composed in Greek in the late first century B.C.E., states that “the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life” (14:12). According to this text, worship of idols leads to a litany of sins: “a raging riot of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury, confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favors, pollution of souls, sex perversion, disorder in marriage, adultery, and debauchery” (14:25-26). Several decades later, Paul reiterates this Jewish polemic against Gentile idolatry when he argues that sexual sin, lust, and impurity originate in—and are punishment for—the exchange “of the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles” (Rom 1:23). For Paul and the author of the Wisdom of Solomon, idolatry breeds porneia.

In his treatise On the Contemplative Life, Philo of Alexandria contrasts the idolatry and immoderation of various Greek, Roman, and Egyptian cultures to the piety and self-mastery of the Therapeutae, a Jewish ascetic community of philosophers reported to live outside of Alexandria. Philo depicts Greeks as lovers of luxury and wealth, fine food and drink, who indiscriminately sate their desires on

---

“baked meats and savory dishes” and “full-grown lads fresh from the bath and
smooth shaven.” In a description of a Greek symposium, Philo writes:

The chief part is taken up by the common vulgar love which robs men of the
courage which is the virtue most valuable for the life both of peace and war,
sets up the disease of effeminacy in their souls and turns into a hybrid of man
and woman those who should have been disciplines in all the practices which
make for valor.

The Therapeutae, by contrast, are skilled in healing arts that provide “therapy” for
souls “oppressed” by diseases of passion and pleasure (hence the name,
Therapeutae). According to Philo, these ascetic philosophers spend each day in
prayer, study, and other spiritual exercises.

In another treatise, On the Special Laws, Philo employs categories of gender
and sexuality to trace differences between Jews and the “many people” who inhabit
other lands (πολλοίς τῶν δῆμων). Philo argues that, in contrast to Jews, men from
other lands derive pride and reward from practices of immoderation (ἀκρασίας) and

64 Philo, Contempl. 50-53 (Colson, 143-145).
65 Philo, Contempl. 60 (Colson, 149).
66 Philo, Contempl., 2 (Colson, 113-115) “The vocation of these philosophers is at once made clear
from their title of Therapeutae and Therapuetrides, a name derived from θεραπεύω, either in the sense
of ‘cure’ because they profess an art of healing better than that current in the cities which cures only
the bodies, while theirs treats also souls oppressed with grievous and nearly incurable diseases,
inflicted by pleasure and desires and grief and fear, by acts of covetousness, folly and injustice and the
countless host of the other passions and vices.”
67 Philo, Contempl. 27-28 (Colson, 127-129). Erich Gruen summarizes part of Philo’s argument in
this text when he writes, “Philo denounces the extravagant luxury and ostentation, the gluttony and
vulgarly, and the encouragement to pederasty that mark Greek banquets. These are contrasted in the
strongest terms with the Jewish sect of the Therapeutae, whose symposia are a model of decorum and
piety. Philo further caricatures the rites of Demeter which, in his presentation, lend themselves to
licentiousness and transsexuality” (Erich Gruen, Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans
[Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002], 216). See also Gruen, “Jewish Perspectives on Greek
“softness” or “effeminacy” (μαλακίας). In the following passage Philo provides
details about these “soft” men from other lands, taking particular aim at the
worshipers of Demeter:

[N]ow it is a matter of boasting not only to the active but to the passive
partners, who become accustomed to enduring the feminizing disease (νόσον
θηλείαν), let body and soul waste away, and leave no ember of their maleness
to smolder. Mark how conspicuously they braid and adorn the hair of their
heads, how they scrub and paint their faces with cosmetics and pigments and
the like, and smother themselves with fragrant perfumes... In fact, without
blushing, they practice the transformation of the male nature to the female as
an art. These persons are rightly judged worthy of death by those who obey
the law, which ordains that the man-woman (ανδρόγυνον) who debases the
custom of nature should perish.  

Here Philo argues that non-Jewish “outsiders” are prone to engaging in sexual
practices that jeopardize their masculinity. As hybrids of men and women, they
“debase” themselves and threaten the order of nature. By contrast, Philo implies that
those who “obey the law” (i.e. follow the rules about sex laid out in the Torah) are
assured of their masculinity. In Philo’s text, gender is co-constructed alongside
ethnic and religious identities.

Josephus, like Philo, insists upon the unique sexual virtue of Jews. In Against
Apion, Josephus defends the “Jewish race” against Gentile detractions by arguing for
its antiquity, merit, and virtue. In the course of his defense, he contends that Jews,
unlike their Gentile counterparts, adhere to a strict sexual code. The Jewish law, he

68 Philo, De specialibus legibus. 3:40 (Colson, 501)
69 Philo, Spec. 3:37-38 (Colson, 499).
70 Ross Kraemer analyzes Philo’s use of gender as a means by which to construct the “Other” in her
article, “The Other as Woman: An Aspect of Polemic among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the
Greco-Roman World.”
writes, “recognizes no sexual connections, except the natural union of man and wife, and that only for the procreation of children. It abhors and punishes any guilty of such assault with death.” Furthermore, the law encourages the proper treatment of women: “It commands us, in taking a wife, not to be influenced by dowry, not to carry off a woman by force, nor yet to win her by guile and deceit.”

For Josephus, Jews are distinguished by their stringent sexual ethics and their proper treatment of women.

Similar recognition of Jewish “distinction” with regard to sexual virtue appears in the *Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides*. A Hellenistic-Jewish work written between 100 B.C.E. and 100 C.E., this text instructs Jews to avoid adultery (“Do not prostitute your wife, defiling your children; for an adulterous bed does not produce similar offspring”) and *porneia* (“Go not beyond natural sexual unions for illicit passion; unions between males are not pleasing even to beasts”). The *Sentences* provide specific instructions to women and men: “Let not women mimic the sexual role of men at all. Be not inclined to utterly unrestrained lust for a woman. For Eros is no god, but a passion destructive of all.”

As in the works of Philo and Josephus, the *Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* attempts to construct Jewishness, in part, by reference to a strict code of sexual ethics.

---


73 *Ps. Phoc*, 175-194 (Wilson, 187).
From Leviticus to Josephus, these authors endeavor to define Israelite or Jewish identity in and through its relation to proper sexual practices. Sexuality functions here as one of the predominant mechanisms by which Jewish identity is distinguished as superior to Gentile identity. Paul’s polemic against Gentile idolatry and porneia, I suggest, is rooted in this Jewish tradition, as I argue in Chapter One. Subsequent Christian authors, however, reformulate Paul’s arguments to contend that it is Jews themselves who are guilty of sexual immorality and Christians who uphold the mantle of sexual purity. As we will see in the next section, early Christians were not the first to level charges of sexual licentiousness against Jews. Greek, Roman, and even Jewish writers themselves at times accused Jews of sexually immoral practices.

**Ancient portrayals of Jewish Lust**

Perhaps the most famous non-Christian caricature of Jewish lust occurs in the fifth book of Tacitus’ *Histories*, where he writes that “although as a race, [Jews] are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; yet among themselves nothing is unlawful.”\(^{74}\) The Jews, he contends, “regard as profane all that

---

we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor.”

Their customs, he continues, are “base and abominable, and owe their persistence to their depravity.” With these depictions, Tacitus constructs the figure of the hypersexualized Jew, and he uses this figure as a foil against which to extol the sexual virtue and self-control of Romans. As Judith Lieu argues in regard to Tacitus’ sexualized portrayal of Jews:

That for such authors ‘otherness’ of customs should be most powerfully manifested in sex . . . should surprise no-one at home in Greek and especially Roman literature of the period; it will be equally familiar to readers of Jewish and Christian fulmination against the Gentile world, as well as of intra-Christian polemic. It is a rhetoric to which all subscribed.

Tacitus thus stands in a rhetorical tradition of ancient Greek and Roman moralists who utilize a discourse of sexuality to construct the Other.

Greek and Latin poets also weighed in on the subject of Jewish sexuality. Writing in the beginning of the first century, B.C.E. in Palestine, the Greek writer Meleager offered the following depiction of a “Sabbath-keeper’s” love: “White-cheeked Demo, someone is next to you and is taking his delight, but my own heart groans within me. If thy lover is some Sabbath-keeper no great wonder! Love burns hot even on cold Sabbaths.”

Over a century later, the Roman poet Martial wrote a poem to a certain Roman girl, Caelia, who, he noted, granted sexual favors to a


75 Tacitus, Hist. 5.4 (Stern, Greek and Latin Authors, 2:25).

76 Tacitus, Hist. 5.5 (Stern, Greek and Latin Authors, 2:26).


78 Meleager, in Stern, Greek and Latin Authors, 1:138.
variety of peoples, including Parthians, Germans, Dacians, Cilicians, and Cappadocians—nor did she “shun the lecheries of circumcised Jews.” It is worth noting that both Meleager and Martial link Jewish lust and lechery to other known Jewish practices, such as Sabbath observance (Meleager) and circumcision (Martial). For these poets, excessive and lascivious sexual behavior was one of several practices that marked Jewish identity.

Not only did ancient Greek and Roman writers characterize Jews as sexually immoral, but Jewish writers also depicted the Jewish people as subjects of porneia on occasion. When the rhetoric of sexual invective is deployed against other Jews, it often occurs in the context of inter-Jewish polemic. For example, in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, Levi relates his vision of “the end of days” when Israel “will transgress against the Lord” and “become a scorn to all the Gentiles.” According to the Testament of Levi, part of Israel’s transgression will include sexual sins:

Out of covetousness you will teach the commandments of the Lord, you will pollute married women, and you will defile the virgins of Jerusalem. With harlots and adulteresses you will be joined, and the daughters of the Gentiles,

79 Stern, Greek and Latin Authors, 1:524-525.

80 Ancient Greek and Roman accusations of Jewish macrophallia and sexual potency, which often occur alongside comments on circumcision, also function in this context of sexualized invective. See the discussion of the poems of Martial and Rutilius Namatianus in Peter Schäfer, Judeophobia, 100-102.

81 T. Levi, 14.1. The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs in The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, ed. R. H. Charles, 2:312. Scholars debate the origination of the Testaments and the level to which they have been Christianized. For more a discussion of this debate, see John J. Collins, Between Athens and Jerusalem, 154-156. See also J. Becker, Untersuchungen zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen, AGJU 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1970) and M. de Jonge, The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Study of their Text, Composition, and Origin (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1953).
you will take as wives, purifying them with an unlawful purification, and your union shall be like that of Sodom and Gomorrah.\(^\text{82}\)

Although it is difficult to identify the specific historical and social situation in which these Testaments were produced, it is most likely that this sexual invective originates in a community that opposes the Jewish leadership or priesthood of the time.\(^\text{83}\)

Such inter-Jewish polemic echoes and develops accusations of sexual immorality that are found in the prophets. In Ezekiel, for example, the Lord accuses Jerusalem of abandoning her status as the beloved bride of God and turning instead to “play the whore” (Ezek 16:15). The Lord states that Jerusalem’s lust and licentiousness exceeds that of the Egyptians and the Philistines (16:26-27); she is an “adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband” (16:32). In Hosea, the Lord brings similar accusations against the “people of Israel”: “A spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have played the whore, forsaking their God . . . thus a people without understanding comes to ruin” (4:12,14). In these passages, charges of adultery and prostitution function as ways in which the prophets communicate God’s anger at Israel’s apostasy and idolatry. In this context, deviant sexuality functions as a proxy for deviant practices of piety; thus, a discourse of

\(^{82}\) T. Levi, 14, 5-8. (Charles, 2:312-313).

\(^{83}\) See the comments of Collins: “It also seems likely that some of the material was composed in circles opposed to the Hasmoneans in the second century B.C.E., and that these circles were Hellenized in language and ethics. These circles could have been located in Palestine or may have been part of the Jewish emigration to Egypt during the period after the revolt. Ultimately the ethics of the Testaments cannot be pinpointed as the product of a specific situation. They are of interest for our purpose as material which seems to have accumulated and circulated in Hellenized Jewish circles over two hundred years and was eventually taken over by Christianity” (Collins, Between Athens and Jerusalem, 156).
sexuality is invoked to “convey what is ‘really’ going on elsewhere, at another political epicenter.” 84

When early Christian authors begin to direct accusations of porneia against Jews in the second century, they utilize these prophetic pronouncements against Israel as biblical “proof texts” to make their case. 85 In the chapters that follow, I explore how early Christian representations of Jews as sexually licentious are caught up in Christian endeavors not only to appropriate biblical texts (including the prophets) for their own communities but also to formulate a Christian hermeneutic practice that differs from that of the Jews. While early Christian authors “make the difference” between Jewish and Christian biblical interpretive practices, they also attempt to distinguish Christian sexual practice as different from (and superior to) that of the Jews, proving the veracity of Dale Martin’s claim that “anxiety about sex is coupled with anxiety about texts.” 86

Chapter Overview

My first chapter examines accusations of porneia from Paul’s letters to The Epistle of Barnabas and Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho. This chapter opens with an exploration of the ways in which Paul reiterates traditional Jewish polemics against Gentiles to argue that porneia is linked inextricably to Gentile idolatry. I

84 To use the phrase of Ann Laura Stoler, Carnal Knowledge, 44.

85 As Knust indicates of Justin Martyr, in the example discussed above.

contend that in 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and Romans, in particular, Gentiles (not Jews, and not humanity in general) are the objects of Paul’s sexual slander. By contrast, the Epistle of Barnabas and Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho identify Jews as the objects of sexual slander. In contradistinction to Paul and without reference to him, the author of Barnabas and Justin construe porneia as that which troubles Jews in particular. Along with identifying the beginnings of Christian sexual slander against Jews, I also trace the ways in which these accusations of Jewish sexual immorality are implicated in the construction of Christian biblical hermeneutics in Barnabas and the Dialogue.

In Chapter Two, I explore how Origen of Alexandria continues this co-construction of sexual ethics and biblical hermeneutics by aligning Jewish identity, literal interpretation, and carnality as the counterparts to Christian identity, spiritual interpretation, and sophrosyne. Unlike Justin and the author of Barnabas, however, Origen is explicit in his use of Pauline dichotomies (flesh vs. spirit; letter vs. spirit) to spiritualize Christian identity and em-body Jewish identity. In Origen’s hands, Paul becomes the ideal spiritual interpreter because he successfully subjugates the flesh to the spirit. According to Origen, Paul’s subjugation of flesh by spirit serves as a model for the subjugation of literal (Jewish) interpretive practices by spiritual (Christian) ones: in this way, the Christian “spirit” triumphs over the Jewish “letter.” In addition, this chapter explores Origen’s various performances of spiritual interpretation (in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, homilies on Genesis,
and Peri Archon, in particular) in order to identify the ways in which Jewish literalism and carnality are implicated in Origen’s interpretive theory.

Chapter Three provides a “test case” for the examination of the interaction between hermeneutics and sexuality in early Christianity. In this chapter, I explore patristic interpretations of the story of Susanna and the elders, with particular attention to Hippolytus’ interpretation in his Commentary on Daniel and Origen’s interpretation in his Letter to Africanus. I consider how their respective interpretations support the alignment of Christianness with chastity and Jewishness with sexual licentiousness, and I explore how both authors portray Jews as a sexual threat to virtuous Christians. I also note how Origen and Hippolytus utilize categories of “male” and “female” in their constructions of the Christian interpreter as a “chaste” woman, vulnerable to Jewish attacks.

Chapter Four analyzes John Chrysostom’s sermons Adversus Iudaeos—sermons that contain some of the most explicit sexual slander against Jews in the early Christian period. In these sermons, delivered in Antioch in 386 and 387, Chrysostom utilizes sexual stereotypes against Jews to produce Jewish-Christian difference and to urge members of his congregation to refrain from participating in Jewish fasts and festivals. He portrays Jewish men variously as “soft” (malakoi), licentious, predatory, and bestial; he depicts Jewish women as prostitutes (pornai) and compares the synagogue to a brothel. By contrast, he imagines Christians as pure, chaste, and modest. In this chapter, I examine Chrysostom’s accusations of Jews’ “undisciplined passion” and explore how these accusations function not only in
his representation of Jewishness but also in the construction of gender and sexuality in fourth-century Antioch.

In my conclusion, I briefly explore how early Christian representations of Jews as carnal and sexually licentious serve to justify Jewish suffering and Christian violence against Jews, especially in Chrysostom’s sermons. In the case of Chrysostom, I argue that themes of violence and sexuality are linked by the portrayal of Jews not only as lustful beasts but also as animals “fit for slaughter.”87 I analyze the interaction and mutual construction of the images of Jews as licentious and bestial in order to ask whether such images were deployed to support programs of Christian violence against Jews. Furthermore, I investigate how the literary representation of Jews as immoral and lascivious functions within imperial Roman legislation against Jews in the fourth and fifth centuries.88 Several laws of the late fourth and early fifth centuries utilize the alignment of Jewishness with immorality, including sexual immorality, to justify the contraction of Jewish autonomy in the empire. At the same time, some of the legislation inaugurates protections for the Jews and places limits on the destruction of synagogues and anti-Jewish rioting. I consider how patristic constructions of Jewishness function in relation to legal rhetoric, paying close

87 John Chrysostom, Sermons against the Jews, 1.2.6.

88 Codex Theodosianus. Theodosiani libri xvi cum constitutionibus sirmondiannis, ed. T. Mommsen (Berlin: Weidmann, 1905). For laws regarding Jews, I use The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, ed. Amnon Linder (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987). Leonard Rutgers has argued that “not much can be learned about the Roman Jewish community from the Codex Theodosianus, except in a very general way; the laws in question relate to the Jews in the later Roman empire as a whole rather than to the Jewish community of Rome specifically.” Rutgers, The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 211-212. My focus will remain on the literary representation of Jews in the Codex Theodosianus, with some speculation as to how legal discourses were brought to bear on the material situation of Jews in the empire.
attention to how both deploy the image of the Jew as licentious in order to limit Jewish legal status. In addition, I ask whether we can use these patristic and legal texts to come to any conclusions about the material situations of Jews in the late empire.
CHAPTER ONE

PAUL AND SECOND-CENTURY CONSTRUCTIONS OF JEWISHNESS

This chapter traces accusations of *porneia* from Paul to Justin and explores how the object of such accusations shifted in the first and second centuries of Christianity. I begin by indicating how Paul reworks previous Jewish polemics against Gentiles to craft an argument in which *porneia* is linked inextricably to religious idolatry. Instead of depicting *porneia* as a problem that afflicts humanity as a whole, Paul, like many Jewish polemicists before him, conceives of *porneia* and idolatry as paradigmatic sins of Gentiles. Apart from Paul and in contradistinction to him, Christian writers of the second century begin to identify *porneia* as a Jewish characteristic. Texts such as the *Epistle of Barnabas* and Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, I suggest, stand at the beginning of a tradition that not only differentiates Christian from Jew on the basis of sexual behavior but also constructs Jewish men, in particular, as lustful, carnal, adulterous, and polygamous. This discourse develops, at first, without reference to or transformation of Paul’s language.

Such sexualized representations of Gentiles and Jews occur within the context of ancient discourses of ethnicity. In the first-century Roman world, it was a commonplace in both texts and images to construct the ethnic Other as strangely and excessively sexual. The discourse of alterity that Paul participates in is one in which

---

Otherness is defined in religious, ethnic, and sexual terms. As Denise Kimber Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge suggest, “Ethnic identity, religious practices and loyalties, and moral standing are inextricable in Paul’s description of ‘others.’” A focus on accusations of sexual immorality generates insight into the ways in which sex and gender function in the production of religious and ethnic Others in early Christian texts.

Porneia as a Gentile problem: 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians

Paul is the earliest surviving writer to encourage believers in Christ to follow a stricter set of sexual guidelines than their “non-Christian” counterparts. In his earliest extant letter, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to “abstain from porneia” [ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμῶν ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας], for “this is the will of God”; he urges each member of the community to possess his “vessel [σκεύος] in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust [πάθημα ἐπιθυμίας], like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thess 4:3-5). Believers in Christ gain sanctification and holiness by abstaining from


3 For the various translations of skeuos as wife, body, or penis, see John W. Bailey, “The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians,” in The Interpreter’s Bible (New York and Nashville: Abingdon, 1955) 11:294-295; George Carras, “Jewish Ethics and Gentile Converts: Remarks on 1 Thess 4:3-8,” in The Thessalonian Correspondence, ed. Raymond F. Collins (Leuven: University Press, 1990), 306-315. For more on utilization of this phrase by early church fathers, see Elizabeth Clark, Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 332-335. Church fathers such as Tertullian, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Augustine also recognized the multivalence of skeuos and translated it variously as body, penis, and wife, depending
fornication and controlling their bodily desires: “For God did not call us for impurity, but in holiness” (1 Thess 4:7). For Paul, “the passion of lust,” like impurity, originates outside of the community and is characteristic of non-believing Gentiles. His exhortation to self-mastery functions in this passage to differentiate the community of believers on the basis of sexual practice; Gentiles provide the foil.

In this passage and others, Paul reworks traditional Jewish arguments against Gentile impurity and combines them with Greek and Roman “discourse[s] of self-

mastery.” As indicated in the Introduction, many ancient Jewish writers warned against sexual immorality and impurity, which they imagined as symptomatic of the Gentile culture of idolatry. Greek and Roman writers likewise warned against indulging excessive pleasures and desires; virtues such as sophrosyne and enkrateia served as antidotes to unrestraint. In his letters, Paul borrows language from these Jewish, Greek, and Roman discourses. In 1 Thess 4:3-7, in particular, Paul warns against the “passion of lust” associated with Gentile culture while encouraging his audience to practice sexual self-control. As Stanley Stowers suggests, 1 Thess 4:3-5 “combines the ethnic other (gentiles), ignorance of God, sexual or gender impurity, and loss of self-mastery due to passion and desire; moreover, it expresses anxiety that gentiles, because of their enslavement to passions, will not properly use their sexual property.”

In 1 Corinthians Paul similarly warns the community of believers to “flee sexual immorality” [φεύγετε τὴν πορνείαν] (1 Cor 6:18). To Paul’s dismay, however, sexual deviance finds its way into the Corinthian congregation: “It is actually reported that there is porneia among you, and of a kind that is not found even among Gentiles; for a man is living with his father’s wife. And you are arrogant!

---


6 Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, 63-93.

7 Indeed as Jennifer Knust argues, Paul conflates “a biblical polemic against gentile idolaters with Greco-Roman arguments that figured corruption in terms of sexual vice.” In Knust, Abandoned to Lust, 51.

8 Stowers, Rereading of Romans, 97.
Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?” (1 Cor 5:1-2). In this passage, the nature of sexual sin is such that it “is not found even among Gentiles”; the underlying assumption of this verse is that in most cases the worst sexual sins are indeed found among Gentiles.

A few lines later, Paul urges believers to flee from immorality within the community, even if they cannot escape its prevalence in the non-believing Gentile world:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with fornicators— not at all meaning the fornicators of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother who is sexually immoral, or greedy, or is an idolater, slanderer, drunkard, or robber.

(1 Cor 5:9-11)

Here, sexual immorality is associated with economic sins (greed and robbery), religious sin (idolatry), and other common vices that divide the community (drunkenness, slanderous speech). Paul warns against this behavior whether it occurs outside the community of believers (in Gentile culture) or inside (among brothers and sisters).

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul advocates celibacy, and, if necessary, marriage, as antidotes to sexual immorality such as that found in 1 Cor 5. He advocates certain ascetic practices, or practices of self-mastery, by which believers in Christ distance

---


10 For the use of “asceticism” in reference to Paul, see Vincent Wimbush, Paul, the Worldly Ascetic: Response to the World and Self-understanding according to 1 Corinthians 7 (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987).
themselves both ethnically and religiously from non-believing Gentiles and from the immoral bodily practices sanctioned by wider Gentile culture. These ascetic practices include virginity (1 Cor 7:8-9; 7:25-26), sexual self-control within marriage (1 Cor 7:3-6), avoidance of *porneia* and those who engage in it (1 Cor 5:9-11, 1 Cor 6:18), and disassociation with prostitutes (1 Cor 6:13-17). Again, the distinction between a believer in Christ and a non-believing Gentile depends upon a system of ethnic and sexual markers that caricatures the latter as the sexually immoral counter-example to the former.

Paul thus ascribes sexual immorality to Gentile identity, and he encourages believers to hold fast to a new identity in Christ—one that distances itself from *porneia*, idolatry, and other vices associated with Gentiles. In passages such as 1 Thess 4:3-7 and 1 Cor 5:1-2, Paul associates certain sexual practices and moral qualities with ethnicity (Gentile-ness) and argues that religious and ethnic identity is transformed (to being-in-Christ) by “fleeing” immoral Gentile practices. Sexual practice thus forms one of the cruxes of Paul’s argument for religious and ethnic transformation to being-in-Christ.

*Porneia and Idolatry in Paul’s Vice Catalogs*

Paul often responds to practical concerns of the community of believers by offering a catalog of vices aimed at first identifying and then curtailing immoral

---

11 For the language of self-mastery in Paul’s letters, see Stanley Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 42-82.
behavior. In these catalogs, he often groups together certain sins in order to reiterate the association of porneia and Gentile idolatry; in so doing he frustrates the boundaries between sexual and religious sin. In the following vice lists, he places porneia and aselgieia alongside other (Gentile) sins such as idolatry and impurity:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication (porneia), impurity, licentiousness (aselgieia), idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

(Gal 5:19-21).

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators (pornoi), idolaters, adulterers (moichoi), “soft” men (malakoi), exploiters (arsenokoitai), thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.

(1 Cor 6:9-10)

The proximity of sexual sins (porneia, aselgieia, moicheia) and religious sin (eidololatria) in these lists indicates how Paul attempts to “fix” Gentile religious identity as especially susceptible to the perils of sexual vice. Such characterization of Gentile culture is central to his more general project of identifying practices that distinguish the believer-in-Christ from communities of non-believers.

In the past, scholars such as Hans Conzelmann maintained that Pauline vice lists repeated earlier traditional material and thus had little to do with the contemporary situation of the letters. More recently, however, scholars have argued

---


that the vice lists are related closely to the epistolary situation. Peter Zaas writes:

“These catalogues specifically serve to relate Paul’s prior moral instruction of the community to the ethical issues he addresses in these chapters, and are therefore no mere recitation of traditional material, but artfully constructed rhetorical devices.”

As we have seen, Paul organizes the catalogs by associating sexual and religious vice, an association that informs much of 1 Corinthians as a whole.

Some of the earliest interpreters of Paul reiterate his association of sexual immorality and Gentile culture. The authors of Ephesians and Colossians, for example, echo the Pauline and hellenistic Jewish associations of sexual vice, practices of idolatry, and Gentile identity. Writing in Paul’s name, the author of Ephesians warns his audience:

example, we had to do with a realistic description of conditions in Corinth. The table is intended to operate as such, as a typification. The contents are essentially Jewish.”


15 Zass, “Catalogues and Context,” 625. For more on the organization of vices in the catalogs, see Dale Martin, “Arsenokoitês and Malakos: Meanings and Consequences” in Sex and the Single Savior, 37-50; and Fredrik Ivarsson, “Vice Lists and Deviant Masculinity: The Rhetorical Function of 1 Corinthians 5:10-11 and 6:9-10” in Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, eds., Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 174. Analyzing the vice lists in 1 Cor 5-6, Ivarsson argues that Paul exploits the relationship between Gentiles and sexual vice to shame his audience. He claims that because Gentile identity is caught up in a web of idolatry and porneia, the conferral of Gentile status on a believer or group of believers functions as a shaming device. The vice catalogs thus reflect Paul’s stake in ethnic reasoning as a tool for managing and defining group identity, especially when it comes to sexual morality. The shaming device turns on the relationship between ethnic and gender status. That is, emasculated gender and lack of sexual self-control adhere to ethnic Gentile identity in such a way that the latter constitutes the “other” to the community of believers that Paul addresses. Through sexual self-mastery, the believer in Christ attains a “more manly” gender status and a less Gentile ethnic status.

No longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds, darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them and because of their hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have handed themselves over to licentiousness (aselgeia) so that in their greediness they practice each impurity. But you did not learn Christ in this manner! (Eph 4:17-20)

Similarly, in Colossians the author depicts Gentile sin as the old way of life that followers of Christ must abandon: “Put to death [νεκρώσατε], therefore, the things which are earthly: porneia, impurity [ἀκαθαρσία], passion [πάθος], evil lust [ἐπιθυμία κακίνα], and greed; this is idolatry. . . These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. But now even you must get rid of these things” (Col 3:5, 7-8). Here, the author warns against an old way of life (Gentileness), that was characterized by idolatry, porneia, and other vices, and urges the community to adopt a new way of life (being-in-Christ), that “puts to death” lusts and passions. Vice lists such as those found in Gal 5, 1 Cor 6, Eph 4, and Col 3 not only extend Jewish arguments that associate idolatry and porneia with Gentile identity but also define the new community of believers in Christ based on their disassociation with licentious behavior.

**Gentiles, Idolatry, and “Degrading Passions”: Romans 1-2**

Paul’s most vivid depiction of idolatrous Gentiles as sexually depraved occurs in Rom 1:18-32. Indeed, in this passage Paul contends that sexually immoral practices are a result of and punishment for Gentile idolatry:

Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. Therefore God handed them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! (Rom 1:22-25)

Paul goes on to describe the nature of their sexual sins:

Because of this God handed them over to degrading passions, for their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatual, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. (Rom 1:26-28)

Here, Gentiles are the objects of Paul’s accusation of sexual immorality. As in 1 Thess and 1 Cor, he builds on a Jewish tradition that associates the ethnic Other with idolatry and sexual sin. Stanley Stowers argues that in Rom 1:18-32 Paul describes Gentiles in terms of an “ethnic caricature” that activates two cultural codes: “the ethic of self-mastery and a Jewish code of purity and pollution.”

By depicting Gentiles as particularly susceptible to sexual sin, Paul contributes to a discourse of alterity that characterizes the ethnic Other as morally and sexually depraved.

Several commentators on Rom 1:18-32 argue that in this passage Paul indicts not only Gentiles but also Jews—that is, all humanity—as idolatrous and sexually depraved. Richard Hays, Jouette Bassler, and Robert Jewett support this position by,

---

17 After explicating the nature of sexual sin, Paul lists other (non-sexual) vices in Rom 1:29-31: “They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.”

18 Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 94.
first, indicating that Paul uses biblical stories of Adam’s “fall” or Israel’s apostasy as intertexts and, second, demonstrating how such intertexts implicate Paul’s present-day Jewish audience because of their connection with biblical Israel. Following Ernst Käsemann, Hays interprets Rom 1:18-32 as follows: “The passage is not merely a polemical denunciation of selected pagan vices; it is a diagnosis of the human condition. The diseased behavior detailed in vv. 24-31 is symptomatic of the one sickness of humanity as a whole.” Hays then reaches to a verse in Romans 3 to defend his reading of Romans 1: “Because they have turned away from God, ‘all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin’ (3:9).” Hays here universalizes Paul’s condemnation of sexual sin as applicable to all humanity by appealing to Genesis 1-3 as an intertext for Rom 1:18-32. According to Hays, Genesis 1:27-28 and 2:18-24 demonstrate that the “complementarity of male and female is given a theological grounding in God’s creative activity.” On this reading, Paul’s identification of sexual sins in Rom 1 functions as an indictment of humanity as a whole on account of egregious departures from God’s original plan (for heterosexual love).

Taking a different tack, Jouette Bassler argues that Israel’s apostasy in the golden calf incident of Exodus 32 lies behind Paul’s logic in Rom 1:18-32 and behind

---

19 Richard B. Hays, “Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell’s Exegesis of Romans 1” Journal of Religious Ethics 14 (1986): 190. Hays recognizes that Paul draws on previous Hellenistic Jewish traditions of condemning Gentile idolatry and sexual sin, but he maintains that the universalizing of this condemnation is Paul’s original contribution: “The radical move that Paul makes is to proclaim that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, stand equally condemned under the just judgment of a righteous God” (195).

the reference to idolatry in v. 23 in particular. Jer 2:11 and Ps 106:20 also function as intertexts, she contends. Because of the allusions to Jewish apostasy and idolatry, Bassler argues, Jews are implicated in the sexual and religious sins of Rom 1:18-32. She claims that because of these intertexts from the Hebrew tradition, “one cannot maintain that in Chapter 1 Paul had only Gentiles in mind. Although he employs an argument traditionally directed against the Gentiles, he clearly signals that it was also, if not primarily, appropriate to the Jews.”\(^{21}\) In this passage, Bassler focuses attention away from Gentiles and toward Jews as the object of Paul’s ire in Rom 1. According to this view, porneia was a problem not only for Gentiles but also for Jews in Paul’s day. In fact, for Bassler, the Jews might be the primary culprits.\(^{22}\)

Robert Jewett also interprets Rom 1:18-32 as an indictment of Jews and Gentiles alike. He rests his case, in part, on the word “all” in 1:18:

> The target of divine wrath is against ‘all impiety and wrongdoing of humans,’ an encompassing description of what is wrong with the human race as a whole. Despite a later reference to characteristically pagan failures (1:23), the formulation ‘all’ indicates that Paul wishes to insinuate that Jews as well as Romans, Greeks, and barbarians are being held responsible.\(^{23}\)

---


Like Bassler, Jewett also suggests that the golden calf incident as portrayed in Ps 106 lies behind Rom 1:23, and like Hays, Jewett views Adam’s “fall” in Genesis as a background to Rom 1:18-32.

By interpreting Rom 1:18-32 through the lens of the “fall” of humanity in Genesis, however, Hays and Jewett fall into a trap of anachronism; they read an Augustinian concept of the original “fall” and sin of humanity into Paul’s text. Stowers challenges this interpretation by indicating that there exists no Jewish precedent for such a reading of Genesis in the first century, CE:

We lack evidence for a Jewish cultural text, a reading of Genesis, available to Paul and his readers that resembles the one traditionally thought to underlie Rom 1-3. Equally important, another way of reading Genesis did exist. Jews, not surprisingly, read Genesis as the story of a chosen nation emerging from among other nations . . . . Jewish writings before 70 do not locate the origins of evil in the act of the first man and woman resulting in an ontological flaw which the whole race then inherited. Rather, they account for evil by means of primordial history that becomes ethnohistory, what late twentieth-century people might call cultural history.

According to Stowers, readings of Rom 1 that understand Paul as describing the fall or sin of all humanity, such as those offered by Hays, Bassler, and Jewett, fail on account of the introduction of a later Christian theology of the fall into the

24 Jewett, Romans, 160.

25 Jewett, Romans, 161: “Paul wishes to include more than Jewish idolatry in the scope of his argument, intending instead to cover the entire sinful spectrum of human experience. In keeping with this wider scope, which reaches back to the fall of the human race, the fourfold designation [of 1:23b] is reminiscent of Gen 1:20-27.”


27 Stowers, Rereading of Romans, 88.
interpretation of a first-century text. As Dale Martin points out, in Rom 1 Paul never mentions “Adam, Eve, Eden, the fall, or the universal bondage of humanity to sin.” Rather, in Rom 1 Paul alludes to the story of the origins of Gentile idolatry and its related sin, porneia, rather than the story of the fall of humanity.

Rom 1:18-32 thus draws on and contributes to a well-established Jewish tradition that identifies Gentiles with idolatry and sexual vice. Paul does not consider the situation of Jews vis-à-vis sin until Rom 2:17f. In Rom 1:18-32 Paul presents porneia (1:26-27) and other vices (1:28-31) as consequences of the Gentiles’ rejection of God through their turn to worship mere “images resembling a mortal being” (1:23). This story of Gentile idolatry and vice would have been familiar to

---

28 Moreover, Bassler and Hewitt’s claims regarding Paul’s reference to the golden calf episode are also problematic because the equation of first-century Jews with biblical Israel is not self-evident. Furthermore, as Stowers maintains, the supposed allusion to Ps 105:20 (LXX) does not support the claim that Jews are implicated in the condemnation in Rom 1. Ps 105:20 “clearly refers to gentile practices and to a larger account of gentile decline” (93). He concludes: “[A] vague allusion to the golden calf incident would in no way support the claim that Jews have consistently failed to honor God and have instead instituted the worship of idols, the very claim being made about the idolaters in 1:18-32” (93).

29 Martin, “Heterosexism,” 52. Anachronism is not the only trap for interpreters of Rom 1:18-32. Martin illustrates how heterosexist bias also contributes to a misunderstanding of this passage. Critiquing Hays’ interpretation of Rom 1, Martin indicates a certain inconsistency. He writes, “Hays recognizes that Paul’s contemporary readers would have heard the passage ‘as a condemnation of the pagan Gentiles.’ This makes it especially notable when Hays shifts the rhetoric from Paul’s condemnation of Gentile polytheism to a general condemnation of perverse human nature. Such inconsistencies betoken the ideological bias at work in the interpretations—a bias I identify as ‘heterosexist’ . . . . [M]odern scholars read the fall into Romans 1 because it renders the text more serviceable for heterosexist purposes.” (“Heterosexism,” 54-55) Here, Martin shows how present-day biases (such as heterosexism) combine with anachronistic interpretative techniques to misrepresent biblical passages as supportive of ideological claims.


Jewish listeners. Martin accentuates this point most forcefully: “For Jews, the [decline of civilization] stories served to highlight the fallenness not of Jewish culture or even of humanity in general, but of the Gentiles due to the corruption brought about by civilization. *Porneia*, as the sin of the Gentiles par excellence, is a polluted and polluting consequence of Gentile rebellion.” 32

Although Paul shifts from the third person plural to the second person singular in Rom 2:1, in 2:1-16 he continues the argument of 1:18-32. In the following passage, he offers a hortatory speech that addresses an imagined “pretentious person” who judges others for the very sins that he also commits. Because 2:1-16 continues the argument of 1:18-32, Paul most likely imagines his addressee as a Gentile implicated in the sins he has just rehearsed:

Therefore [διό], you have no excuse, O man [ὁ ἄνθρωπος], when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. But you say, “We know that God’s judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth.” Do you imagine, man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? (Rom 2:1-3).

Some scholars identify the object of Paul’s condemnation in 2:1-16 as a “hypocritical Jew,” but I contend that Paul has a Gentile in mind and continues the argument of Rom 1:18-32.33 Jewett, following Bassler, maintains that the *dio* at the beginning of...


2:1 signals “a further consequence of the preceding argument, that those who know God’s decree cannot be excused by virtue of their being able to judge others when they themselves act in a similarly arrogant manner.” Moreover, Stowers contends that a first-century audience would have had no reason to equate Paul’s “pretentious” addressee with a Jew.

Paul does turn to an imagined Jewish interlocutor in Rom 2:17-29 after he has presented his message of God’s impartial treatment of Jews and Gentiles alike in 2:6-16. He writes:

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law, and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You that forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you rob temples? You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” (Rom 2:17-24)

Viewed in the context of Paul’s emphasis on God’s impartiality vis-à-vis Jews and Gentiles, this passage claims that Jews, like Gentiles, are capable of hypocrisy and pretension, especially when they preach against certain actions (robbery, adultery) yet

34 Jewett, Romans, 196. See Bassler, Divine Impartiality, 131-134 for a linguistic analysis to support her claim that 2:1-16 continues the argument of 1:18-32.

35 Stowers writes, “There is absolutely no justification for reading 2:1-5 as Paul’s attack on ‘the hypocrisy of the Jew.’ No one in the first century would have identified the ho alazon with Judaism. That popular interpretation depends upon anachronistically reading later Christian characterizations of Jews as ‘hypocritical Pharisees.’ The text simply lacks anything to indicate that the person is a Jew. First-century readers might have recognized Paul’s characterization of the pretentious person but they, like the students in Epictetus’s classroom or the readers of Seneca’s letters, would have understood that Paul was admonishing their pretentious attitudes and not thought that he was attacking Jews” (Rereading of Romans, 101).
persist in engaging in these activities themselves. Paul’s mention of adultery
[μοιχεία] in Rom 2:22 represents one of the only instances in his letters in which
sexually immoral behavior is ascribed to a Jew.

_Porneia_, on Paul’s model, is a Gentile problem. Indeed, Dale Martin contends
that the term _porneia_ “was used to denote Gentile culture and idolatry in general.”
Since the primary ethnic-religious dichotomy in Paul’s worldview is that between
Jews and Gentiles, the charges of Gentile sexual immorality in 1 Thess 4:3-5, 1 Cor
5:1-2, and Rom 1:18-32 comprise a caricature of the ethnic and religious Other to the
Jews. In these passages, Paul constructs a sexualized Gentile subject that functions as
the negative counterpart of the sexually pure brother or sister in Christ. Rather than
viewing Paul’s condemnations against _porneia_ as theological commentary on human
sin or as philosophical and anthropological speculation, I locate his condemnations
within the context of “ethnic cultural stereotype” and ancient discourses of alterity.

---

36 Martin, _The Corinthian Body_, 169. The full quote is helpful: “For many Jews of Paul’s day, _porneia_
could refer to sexual immorality of a number of types; it was used to denote Gentile culture and
idolatry in general and, often, prostitution in particular. The condemnation of porneia in Jewish circles
was a way of solidifying the boundary between the chosen people and everyone else with their idols
and loose morals: porneia was something ‘they’ did.”

37 See Krister Stendahl, “Paul among Jews and Gentiles.”

38 The most vivid expression of Paul’s exhortation to sexual purity occurs in 1 Cor 7. For Boyarin’s
portrait of Paul as a Jewish cultural critic, see his _A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity_
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

39 Here I follow the lead of Stowers, who writes, “Paul’s perspective is not philosophical anthropology,
the human essence, but what moderns would call ethnic cultural stereotype” (_A Rereading of Romans_,
108-109).
“Israel according to the Flesh”

Passages such as 1 Thess 4:3-7, 1 Cor 5:1-2, and Rom 1:18-32 suggest that Paul consistently conceives of porneia as symptomatic of Gentile culture; he utilizes accusations of porneia to create difference and distance between the community of believers in Christ and wider Roman culture. In addition to acting as boundary markers, accusations of porneia also function as negative examples for Paul and his addressees. His condemnations of porneia have meaning in the context of Paul’s own self-styling as an ascetic and his exhortations to self-mastery among community members. By contrast, his understanding of sarx, the flesh, is neither consistent nor easily mapped onto the terrain of Jewish-Gentile difference. Rather, Paul alternates between valuating sarx negatively, often in radical opposition to pneuma, and utilizing sarx as a morally neutral term that signals literal hermeneutics, historicity, kinship, ethnicity, or the body. The various connotations of sarx become evident only in context.

Most of the time, Paul evaluates sarx negatively, opposing it to pneuma and using it to characterize “this world.” In Gal 5:16-17, Paul instates a radical dualism

---

40 For the interchangeability of sarx and soma in, for example, 1 Cor 7:28, see Robert Jewett, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms*, 454. For an alternative view, see Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, who writes, “Paul … distinguishes between the flesh and the body. The flesh, i.e., sexuality, has been dispensed with in the Christian dispensation, precisely in order to spiritualize the body” (172).


42 Dale Martin writes, “Sarx and pneuma constitute a radical dualism in Paul’s ethical cosmos. In spite of the way Paul can sometimes speak of sarx as an apparently neutral agent or substance, the overwhelming bulk of his references to sarx place it in the category of ‘this world’ in its opposition to the plan of God” (The Corinthian Body, 172).
between *sarx* and *pneuma*: “I say, walk by the spirit, and do not gratify the desires of
the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit
are against the flesh.”[[43]](footnote)

Often, when Paul mentions *sarx, porneia* is not far behind:

“Now the works of the flesh are obvious: *porneia*, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry,
sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy,
drunkenness, carousing, and things like these” (Gal 5:19-20). A way of life that
gratifies desires of the flesh is one that is filled with unclean and divisive practices.

Sexual immorality is among these. For Paul, the choice to conduct oneself according
to the desires of the flesh is a grave one indeed, for it excludes you from inheriting the
kingdom of God (Gal 5:21b).

Paul offers a more forceful association of *sarx* and sexuality in Rom 7:5-6.

Here, *sarx* stands for a former way of life, one characterized by sexual reproduction
and endless cycles of life and death (“bearing fruit for death”).

While we were living in the flesh [ἐν τῇ σαρκί], our passions of sin
[τὰ θήματα τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν], aroused by the law, were at work in our
members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law,
dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old
written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

Note that living “in the flesh” is rooted here in observance of the law, according to
Paul.[[44]](footnote)
The “new life of the Spirit” stands opposed to the life in the flesh and is

---

[[43]] For a longer passage in which Paul opposes *sarx* and *pneuma*, see Rom 7-8.

[[44]] Paul may have in mind here God’s commandment to the first couple in Genesis 1:28: “Be fruitful
and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it.” See Jeremy Cohen, “‘Be Fruitful and Multiply, Fill the
Earth and Master It’: The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text” (Ithaca: Cornell University
Press, 1989), for an examination of Jewish and Christian interpretations of this verse from antiquity to
medieval times.
achieved, in part, by putting to death sinful passions. Paul summarizes this dualism in Rom 8:4: “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace.”

Paul describes the movement from a life guided by observance of the law to life in Christ by referring to a corresponding movement from flesh to spirit. Considered in this way, “flesh” functions as a euphemism for the old way of life under the law—a life that privileged and safeguarded signs of kinship and ethnic difference (i.e., circumcision) and cycles of procreation and death. In addition to Rom 7:5-6, Phil 3:2-3 offers a glimpse into Paul’s association of flesh with circumcision and confidence in the law. Referring to those who insist upon circumcision for all male believers in Christ, he warns: “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.” Caught up in Paul’s privileging of spirit over flesh is his rejection of these signifiers of ethnic particularity and his extirpation of sexual

45 Boyarin explains his understanding of Paul’s use of “flesh” as a signifier of sexuality and ethnic particularity in the following passage (note how he also differentiates his project from Jewett’s in this passage): “The upshot of my dispute with Jewett and the premise of this book is that for Paul the term flesh enters into a rich metaphorical and metonymic semantic field bounded on the one hand by the metaphorical usages already current in biblical parlance and on the other hand by the dualism of spirit and flesh current in the milieu of Hellenistic—that is, first-century—Judaism. It was the working out and through of these multiple semantic possibilities that generated Paul’s major semantic innovations. Flesh is the penis and physical kinship; it is the site of sexuality, wherein lies the origin of sin; it is also the site of genealogy, wherein lies the ethnocentrism of Judaism as Paul encountered it” (A Radical Jew, 68).
desire. As Daniel Boyarin suggests, Paul is disturbed by desire and ethnicity, and his turn to “spirit” enables his “escape” from both.

In some cases, however, Paul’s use of *sarx* is morally ambiguous and does not function as a pejorative term. In his interpretation of Phil 1:22, 24 (“If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me . . . but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you”), Jewett claims that in passages such as these Paul uses “flesh” in a “neutral sense to depict the worldly sphere.” Moreover, Jewett argues that in 1 Cor 10:18 (“Behold Israel according to the flesh” [Βλέπετε τὸν Ἰσραήλ κατὰ σῶρκα]), Paul “avoids drawing negative conclusions from the ‘flesh’ category.”

Boyarin develops Jewett’s view of 1 Cor 10:18 by suggesting that the phrase “*kata sarka* itself is morally neutral, although always subordinated to *kata pneuma*.” Since Paul alternates between negative and morally neutral valuations of *sarx*, context must provides clues. As we have seen, in Gal 5:16–21, flesh functions as the site of desires gone awry—desires for excessive and polluting sex, magical cures, quarrels, and excessive drink and pleasure. Other times, as in Rom 9:3, flesh signals physical kinship and genealogy: “For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off

---


from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.” The
latter usage is more morally neutral than the former.51

*Kata sarka* also signifies a hermeneutic practice for Paul—one that attends to
the literal, the “body” of the letter, as opposed to the spiritual or allegorical sense.

Boyarin offers a helpful explanation:

Language is thus a representation in two senses—in its ‘content’ it represents
the higher world; in its form it represents the structure of the world as outer
form and inner actuality. The human being is also a representation of world in
exactly the same way; in his/her dual structure is reproduced the very dual
structure of being. It is for this reason that the literal can be referred to by
Paul as the interpretation which is “according to the flesh” (*kata sarka*), while
the figurative is referred to by him as “according to the spirit” (*kata pneuma*).
Literal interpretation and its consequences; observances in the flesh, for
example, circumcision; commitment to the history of Israel; and insistence on
procreation are all linked together in Paul’s thinking.52

Boyarin’s exploration of the relationship between hermeneutics and Paul’s
understanding of the body helps to make sense of the function of *sarx* in the phrase
“Islam according to the flesh” in 1 Cor 10:18. Boyarin’s analysis registers the layers
of signification that adhere to the phrase *kata sarka*, and it militates against an
interpretation that would too easily align Jewishness (Israel) with sexual vice (flesh).

For some late ancient interpreters of Paul, however, this supposed alignment of

51 See Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, p. 68 for a discussion of how biblical and Hellenistic-Jewish uses of
*sarx* inform Paul’s varied usage of the term: “For Paul the term *flesh* enters into a rich metaphorical
and metonymic semantic field bounded on the one hand by the metaphorical usages already current in
biblical parlance and on the other hand by the dualism of spirit and flesh current in the milieu of
Hellenistic—that is, first-century—Judaism. It was the working out and through of these multiple
semantic possibilities that generated Paul’s major semantic innovations. Flesh is the penis and
physical kinship; it is the site of sexuality, wherein lies the origin of sin; it is also the site of
genealogy, wherein lies the ethnocentricism of Judaism as Paul encountered it.”

52 Boyarin, “Paul and the Genealogy of Gender,” in *Feminist Companion to Paul*, 19. See also
Jewishness with flesh is precisely the prooftext they need to differentiate Christians from Jews on the basis of fleshliness and sexuality.  

Although fathers of the third and fourth centuries use Pauline dichotomies such as flesh and spirit to distinguish between Jews and Christians, Paul, I suggest, has other aims in mind. When Paul writes, “Behold Israel according to the flesh,” he does not identify Jewishness with fleshliness and sexuality; writers in the centuries following Paul burden the verse with this weight. Rather, “Israel according to the flesh” is a hermeneutical term that signals Paul’s focus on the literal/historical practices of Israel, especially circumcision and sacrifice. As Boyarin argues, “Paul is here appealing to the Corinthians to consider the verse/practice in its literal sense, not to concern themselves with axiological judgments of the Jews!” “Israel according to the flesh” refers to “the literal, concrete history talked about in the Torah and to the literal concrete, embodied practices of the Torah.” It functions hermeneutically for Paul, and it serves as a foil to spiritual, allegorical Israel, which includes not only Jewish but also Gentile believers in Christ. With the advent of Christ, Israel kata sarka becomes subordinate to Israel kata pneuma, but for Paul this subordination entails no condemnation of Israel kata sarka as especially vulnerable to

53 See Augustine, *Tractate against the Jews*, 7.9: “Behold Israel according to the flesh (1 Cor 10:18). This we know to be the carnal Israel; but the Jews do not grasp this meaning and as a result they prove themselves indisputably carnal.”

54 Augustine, *Tractate against the Jews*, 7.


sexual immorality or inordinate “desires of the flesh.” Paul simply does not recognize *porneia* as a problem that consistently afflicts his Jewish contemporaries.

Examples in which Paul associates Jewish identity with sexual vice are scarce. As registered above, in one instance he accuses an imagined Jewish teacher of practicing adultery while preaching against it (Rom 2:22); and in another instance he chastises those who insist on practicing circumcision as having excessive “confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:2-3). For the most part, he does not view *porneia* as a particularly Jewish trait. Porneia, for Paul, like other Hellenistic Jewish writers before him, is a Gentile problem. Yet the dyadic (and often hierarchical) pairings of spirit and flesh, on the one hand, and Jew and Gentile, on the other hand, provide rich imagery for Paul’s late ancient interpreters, who redeploy these pairings to form a dichotomous structure in which Jewishness, carnality, and *porneia* are set against Christianness, spirituality, and sexual renunciation. By the time John Chrysostom delivers his sermons against the Jews in the 380s, *porneia* has become the Jewish sin *par excellence*.

**Paul in the Second Century**

Whereas writers such as Origen and John Chrysostom explicitly borrow Paul’s language and transform Paul’s categories in their respective constructions of

---

58 It is, in fact, Paul’s opponents (so-called Judaizers) about whom Paul complains when he writes, “Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh” (Gal 6:13). The same goes for Phil 3:2-4. Thus the accusations about “boasting in the flesh” or “mutilating the flesh” are aimed not at all Jews, in general, but, rather, at those Christian Jews who hold that circumcision is necessary for believers in Christ.
Jews, several writers of the second century are hesitant to appropriate Pauline language for their own purposes. Adolf Harnack and Walter Bauer contend that this second-century “silence” in regard to Paul originated because of a “gnostic” and Marcionite monopoly on Paul’s writings. Orthodox Christians, they argue, either were hesitant to quote Paul or rejected him outright so as to distance themselves from Marcion and other heretics. On this model, the “rescue” and subsequent canonization of Paul’s letters (by Irenaeus and other “orthodox” apologists) was prompted by a need to counter Marcion’s co-optation of Paul.

More recently, Andreas Lindemann and David Rensberger have countered the arguments of Harnack and Bauer by suggesting not only that the appropriation of Paul varied by region but also that the allegiance to Paul failed to fall neatly on orthodox/heretical lines. Using 1 Clement, Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians, and

---


Ignatius’s letters as examples, Lindemann argues for an early and positive appropriation of Paul. Moreover, Rensberger contends that the failure of many second-century writers to mention Paul lies not in a fear of aligning themselves with “gnostics” but rather in the fact that Paul’s letters were not yet universally authoritative:

[I]t is only relatively late in the second century that we find widespread treatment of Paul as on a level with authoritative and normative Christian writings, namely the Old Testament. Prior to the entry of a writing into the sphere of the normative—and most particularly an occasional writing like a letter, making no claim to be a divine revelation—there is no real reason why later authors should always have felt obliged to show themselves in agreement with it or acquainted with it.

In my analysis of two second-century texts, *The Epistle of Barnabas* and Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, I make no attempt to claim that each author’s failure to mention Paul constitutes a strategic rejection or avoidance of Paul. Rather, I argue that the incipient trope whereby Jews are represented as sexually deviant develops, at first, without reference to Paul. By proceeding in this fashion I hope to underscore how the re-emergence of Pauline language in Origen’s sexualized representation of Jews (the topic of my next chapter) reflects a departure from and radical transformation of Paul’s thought.

---


63 Rensberger, “As the Apostle Teaches,” 331.
The Epistle of Barnabas

The Epistle of Barnabas was a popular and revered document in some early Christian communities in the second and third centuries. Codex Sinaiticus includes Barnabas as one of the writings of the New Testament, and Alexandrian church fathers such as Clement and Origen refer to Barnabas as scripture. Modern scholars present different views of the date and provenance of the text, but most agree that it was written in the late first or early second century in the Greek-speaking Eastern Mediterranean, most likely in Egypt or Syria-Palestine. The first part of the letter (Chs. 1-17) claims that “Israel” misunderstood Hebrew scripture and its laws so that the “true” interpretation of scripture lies solely with the followers of Christ. The

---


65 For example, on Clement’s use of Barnabas in relation to animals and Jewish dietary laws, see Strom. 2.67.1-3 and Paed. 2.84-88. See also Robert M. Grant, “Dietary Laws among Pythagoreans, Jews, and Christians” HTR 73 (1980): 299-310. For more on Barnabas as a venerated text in early Christianity, see Paget, Epistle of Barnabas, 248-258.

66 For a summary of the scholarship on the date and provenance of Barnabas, see Hvalvik, Struggle for Scripture, 17-42. For a provenance in Alexandria, see Paget, Epistle of Barnabas, and L. W. Barnard, “The Date of the Epistle of Barnabas: A Document of Early Egyptian Christianity,” JEA 44 (1968): 101-107. For Syria-Palestinian provenance, see Prigent and Kraft, 23. For an early date (96-99 CE), see Peter Richardson and Martin B. Shukster, “Barnabas, Nerva, and the Yavnean Rabbis,” JTS 34 (1983): 31-55 and Paget, Epistle of Barnabas. Hvalvik concludes that we cannot know the exact date and provenance: “It would be easier to interpret Barnabas if we could be fairly sure about its place of origin. But since this is not the case, the letter has to be seen against the more general background of an Eastern Mediterranean milieu in the early second century. Since there is no compelling argument for a Palestinian provenance, the sort of Judaism we have to take into consideration is the Judaism of the Diaspora” (42).
second part of the epistle (Chs. 18-20) presents the “two ways” teaching, urging believers in Christ to follow the “path of light” by behaving virtuously.\textsuperscript{67}

Robert Kraft and Pierre Prigent draw attention to the sources employed by the author of \textit{Barnabas} in composing the text; they focus especially on the use of Christian “testimonia” and the “two ways” material. For example, Kraft notes that the “two ways” tradition in Barnabas is similar to that found in the \textit{Didache} and posits a prior common source for both: “Barnabas 18-20 and Didache 1-5 provide strong indications that the Two Ways ethic which they share had already been through a significant amount of development in the respective background traditions from which these two documents come \textit{before} it was finally incorporated into the present forms of Barnabas and the Didache.”\textsuperscript{68} The common source most likely originated in Jewish ethical instruction,\textsuperscript{69} and it contains within it warnings against sexually immoral practices such as \textit{porneia}, adultery, and pederasty.\textsuperscript{70}

Questions about \textit{Barnabas’s} knowledge of Paul’s letters have also been subject to scholarly analysis and debate.\textsuperscript{71} Nowhere in the letter does \textit{Barnabas} quote

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{67} Barnabas uses a similar source as that found in the \textit{Didache}. See Bart Ehrman, \textit{The Apostolic Fathers}, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), “Introduction” to The Epistle of Barnabas, 4-5.
\bibitem{69} Ehrman, “Introduction,” 5.
\bibitem{70} \textit{Ep. Barn.} 19.4.
\bibitem{71} For a summary of the positions taken up by different scholars on the question of Barnabas and Paul, see Andreas Lindemann, \textit{Paulus im ältesten Christentum}, 272-282; and James Carleton Paget, “Paul and the Epistle of Barnabas” \textit{NovT} 38 (1996): 359-381.
\end{thebibliography}

64
Paul; yet this fact has not stopped scholars from speculating on the author’s engagement with Paul and Pauline theology. O. Pfleiderer understands the Epistle of Barnabas as an extension of Pauline theology, describing the epistle as a Wendepunkt in the history of Paulinism. Others have found echoes of specific Pauline passages in the text of Barnabas, especially 2 Cor 3:12-16 and Rom 4. I agree with Reidar Hvalvik and James Carleton Paget insofar as they suggest that there is little evidence with which to support an argument for Barnabas’s dependence on Paul. For example, Paget writes, “We can find no conclusive evidence that Barnabas had read any of Paul’s extant letters, or that he was consciously developing or correcting a Pauline position. At times there may be distant echoes of Pauline texts, . . . but these do not indicate any intimacy with the Pauline corpus.” Hvalvik agrees: “[T]here is no basis for interpreting the theological position of Barnabas as some sort of response to Paul—whether it is called agreement, disagreement, misunderstanding


73 O. Pfleiderer, Paulinismus: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der urchristlichen Theologie (Leipzig: J. Hinrichs, 1890), 393.


or opposition. The theological agenda of *Barnabas* is nowhere set by Paul.”

According to these scholars, we have no ground upon which to claim that *Barnabas* presents a reworking of Pauline ideas or terms, especially in relation to its construction of Jewish identity. Rather, *Barnabas* offers an alternative avenue for the construction of Jewishness and Jewish hermeneutics—one that is separate from Paul’s construction but nevertheless engaged in similar work of identity formation and scriptural exegesis.

Recently, scholars have been less interested in the sources of *Barnabas* and more interested in the relationship of the text to Judaism. Paget, Hvalvik, and William Horbury debate the role of Judaism in Barnabas and variously locate Barnabas in relation to *Adversus Ioudaeos* literature. Paget recommends that anti-Jewish rhetoric should function as the initial lens through which *Barnabas* is viewed: “The anti-Judaism of the epistle should play a significant role in the epistle’s interpretation.” He continues by indicating that the historical purpose of *Barnabas* is best viewed in relationship with other early Christian anti-Jewish texts: “[P]art of *Barnabas’s* perspective can be seen in the work of certain Christians who were themselves involved in the ‘Christianization’ of the Jewish Bible,” such as Justin Martyr and Origen of Alexandria. Like Paget, Hvalvik and Horbury contend that the role of Judaism is central to the purpose of the epistle, and they explore the

---

77 Hvalvik, *Struggle for Scripture*, 34.
historical circumstances that may have led to such a critique of Jewish hermeneutical practice.\textsuperscript{79}

What unites scholars such as Paget, Hvalvik, and Horbury is the conviction that Judaism and Christianity were separate entities by the time of the composition of the \textit{Epistle of Barnabas}. Horbury puts this most forcefully: “The ways have parted already, for the writers considered here. The author of the \textit{Epistle of Barnabas} saw Christians and Jews as ‘us’ and ‘them.’”\textsuperscript{80} Hvalvik also maps the dichotomous language of “us” and “them” onto the supposedly coherent categories of “Christianity” and “Judaism,”\textsuperscript{81} and he uses this dichotomous language as an opportunity to posit a historical reality behind the text. According to Hvalvik, Judaism represented a dire threat to Christians in the community in which \textit{Barnabas} was composed; the concern is not with Judaizers but with the continual attraction of Judaism and its practices.\textsuperscript{82} Horbury refers to the threat felt by the author of \textit{Barnabas} as “the overshadowing presence of the Jewish community,” and he

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{80} Horbury, “Jewish-Christian Relations,” 315.
\bibitem{81} Hvalvik, \textit{Struggle for Scripture}, 63: “[T]he contrast between ‘they’ (the Jews) and ‘us’ (the Christians) is very important for the understanding of the letter. . . . It is thus not only one people, the Jews, which is in focus. It is ‘they’ \textit{in contrast to} ‘us’. The author of Barnabas deals with two different peoples.” See also p. 65 where he writes that the “two ways” tradition may be the governing idea of the letter.
\bibitem{82} Hvalvik, \textit{Struggle for Scripture}, 87, 97, 328.
\end{thebibliography}
imagines a renewed Jewish interest in the rebuilding of the Temple as the occasion of the letter.\textsuperscript{83}

The author of the \textit{Epistle of Barnabas} uses a discussion of biblical hermeneutics as an occasion to map differences between Jews and the community of interpreters that he addresses.\textsuperscript{84} According to the epistle, the Hebrew bible belongs not to Israel, whose people never interpreted scripture properly in the first place, but to believers in Christ, the true heirs of God’s promises to the biblical patriarchs.\textsuperscript{85}

There exists yet another group of interpreters against which the author of \textit{Barnabas} writes; these are the adherents of a certain hybrid interpretive practice who hold that “the covenant is both theirs and ours.”\textsuperscript{86} On the contrary, writes the author of \textit{Barnabas}: “[I]t is ours.” Upon receiving the covenant, the people of Israel promptly lost it:

But they permanently lost it, in this way, when Moses had just received it. For the scripture says, “Moses was on the mountain fasting for forty days and forty nights, and he received the covenant from the Lord, stone tablets written with the finger of the Lord’s own hand.” But when they turned back to idols they lost it. For the Lord says this: “Moses, Moses, go down quickly, because your people, whom you led from the land of Egypt, has broken the law.” Moses understood and cast the two tablets from his hands. And their covenant was smashed—that the covenant of his beloved, Jesus, might be sealed in our hearts, in the hope brought by faith in him. (\textit{Ep. Barn.} 4.7-8)

\textsuperscript{83} Horbury, “Jewish-Christian Relations,” 325. Similarly, S. Lowy understands the epistle’s “confutation of Judaism” as a reaction against a Jewish messianic movement that hoped for the restoration of the Temple. See Lowy, “The Confutation of Judaism in the Epistle of Barnabas” \textit{JJS} 11 (1960): 1-33, see esp. p. 32.

\textsuperscript{84} The author occasionally refers to this community as “the children of love,” see \textit{Ep.Barn} 21.9.


\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Ep. Barn.} 4:6. It may be that some people in his own community are espousing the view that the covenant belongs to both Israel and the followers of Christ. See \textit{Ep.Barn.} 9:6.
For the author of *Barnabas*, there is only one covenant, and its only legitimate interpreters are the followers of Christ.\(^{87}\)

The practices that Jews embraced as a result of misunderstanding the law are thus erroneous and indicative of their allegiance to the “literal.” Sacrifices (2.8), fasting (3), temple-worship (6), circumcision (9), dietary regulations (10), and Sabbath observance (15) comprise the list of inappropriate and vain practices of Israel since the breaking of the covenant on Sinai. In the discussion of dietary laws in Barn 10, the author aligns the scriptural interpretation of Israel with lust in order to denigrate Israel, its practices, and its biblical hermeneutics. Unlike Paul, who understands lust as that which troubles Gentiles in particular, the author of *Barnabas* imagines *epithymia* as a problem for Israel that results from its mistaken adherence to literal interpretation.

In Chapter 10, the author registers Moses’s commandments regarding the consumption of certain animals such as pigs, eagles, hawks, crows, certain types of fish, hares, hyenas, and weasels.\(^{88}\) According to the author of *Barnabas*, “they” (the Jews) misunderstood these commandments, thinking they were really about food. “We” (believers in Christ) possess the true, spiritual understanding of these commandments; according to the spiritual understanding, these commandments warn

---

\(^{87}\) See Hvalvik, 122. Paget argues that on the point of the “one covenant” the Epistle of Barnabas presents a unique and non-Pauline outlook on Jewish interpretation of scripture. Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 114-123.

\(^{88}\) Most of these commandments are found in Lev 11 and Deut 14.
against imitating or associating with certain types of people. For example, when Moses said, “Do not eat the pig,” he meant: “Do not cling to such people, who are like pigs.” In a stroke of imaginative exegesis, the author of Barnabas explains what kind of people these are: “That is to say, when they live in luxury, they forget the Lord, but when they are in need, they remember the Lord. This is just like the pig; when it is eating, it does not know its master, but when hungry it cries out.”

By interpreting the commandment as truly about the consumption of food, the people of Israel abide by the most literal—and in this case, “carnal”—of readings and miss the spiritual truth of the commandment.

The consequences of Israel’s literal interpretation become especially thorny where questions of sexuality are concerned. Prohibitions about three animals, the hare, the hyena, and the weasel, represent not a literal bar on eating such animals but warnings against improper sexual practices:

But also “do not eat the hare.” For what reason? “You must not,” he says,” be one who corrupts children or be like such people.” For the rabbit adds an orifice every year; it has as many holes as years it has lived. “Nor shall you eat the hyena.” “You must not,” he says, “be an adulterer or a pervert nor be like such people.” For what reason? Because this animal changes its nature every year, at one time it is male, the next time female. And he has fully hated the weasel. “You must not,” he says, “be like those who are reputed to perform a lawless deed in their mouth because of their uncleanness, nor cling to unclean women who perform the lawless deed in their mouth.” For this animal conceives with its mouth. (Ep. Barn. 10.6-8).

---

89 Ep. Barn. 10.3.

90 See Mary Pendergraft, “‘Thou Shalt not Eat the Hyena’ A Note on ‘Barnabas’ Epistle 10.7” VC 46 (1992): 75-79, for an examination of the zoological speculation about the genitalia of hyenas in antiquity and today. See also Robert M. Grant, “Dietary Laws among Pythagoreans, Jews, and Christians,” HTR 73 (1980): 299-310, for a description of Clement’s reception of Ep. Barn. 10.6-8: “What Clement did not like was Barnabas’s account of the hare, the hyena, and the weasel. He agreed that ‘the all-wise Moses’ referred to sexual aberrations when he mentioned these animals, which one
According to the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the spiritual understanding of these commandments properly conveys the divine injunctions against the sexual corruption of children, adultery, and oral sex. If “Israel” remains mired in the literal, than the people of Israel miss this important distinction between dietary and sexual regulation.

Immediately following this “spiritual” explication of Moses’s commandments about animals, the author of *Barnabas* states the reason for Israel’s misinterpretation: “And so, Moses received the three firm teachings about food and spoke in the Spirit. But they received his words according to the desires of their own flesh, as if he were actually speaking about food.”\(^91\) In this passage, inordinate desire and fleshliness are associated explicitly with the people of Israel and their interpretive practices. Sexuality and textuality are linked. Not only is the inferior, literal reading of the text rooted in the “lusts of the flesh,” but it also produces an interpretation that leaves Jews vulnerable to the snare of illicit sex, since the latter does not properly understand the divine commandments regarding sex (and takes them to be about food instead).

Followers of Christ, by contrast, live and interpret texts “according to the spirit,” which accords them a virtue higher than that of Israel and enables them to

---

way or another symbolize pederasty or at least non-reproductive sex. Clement kept Barnabas’s conclusions but explicitly rejected his supporting evidence, appealing instead to more reliable accounts of hare and hyena in Aristotle and simply reinterpreting the badness of the weasel” (307).

achieve the correct interpretation of Mosaic laws.\textsuperscript{92} In chapter 10, the author of \textit{Barnabas} consigns the Jews to more literal interpretive practices than Christians and argues that the root of Jewish misinterpretation lies in their “lust of the flesh,” a phrase that signals excessive desire for both food and sex.\textsuperscript{93} As Judith Lieu claims, the author of \textit{Barnabas} “rewrites Jewishness for [his] own purposes,”\textsuperscript{94} and I would add that this rewriting aligns Jewishness with literal, fleshly interpretation, on the one hand, and Christianness with spiritual interpretation, on the other.

\textit{Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho}

Another example of this correlation of Jewishness, fleshly desire, and literalist hermeneutics occurs in Justin Martyr’s \textit{Dialogue with Trypho}.\textsuperscript{95} This text purports to

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{92} Ep. Barn. 10 and 19.4. See also Epistle to Diognetus 5.8.

\textsuperscript{93} For an account of the association of desire for food and sexual desire in antiquity, see Teresa Shaw, \textit{The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). For more on the Christian ascription of literalism to Jews, see Karen King, \textit{What is Gnosticism?} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 47. King identifies three steps in the process of early Christian interpretation of Jewish scripture: appropriation, negation, and erasure. “Christians claimed that they alone could properly interpret Scripture. They negated the claim of the Jews to their own scriptures by reading them differently, even counter to how (other) Jewish groups would read them. They erased the processes of this appropriation by claiming that the Christian reading was in fact the ancient and original truth; the Jews had never understood the true meaning of their own Scripture.”


record a conversation between Justin, a Christian, and Trypho, a Jew, in the town of Ephesus soon after the Bar Kokhba revolt, in 135. Most likely, Justin composed the Dialogue in the 160s in Rome, where he was later martyred during the reign of Marcus Aurelius.

Scholars such as Tessa Rajak, Timothy Horner, Michael Mach, and David Rokéah debate the social and historical context of the Dialogue, differing over the identification of audience, historicity, and purpose. In his apologies, Justin inscribes a Gentile “pagan” audience from the outset, but in the Dialogue, there is little indication of the intended audience. Rajak summarizes the various scholarly opinions about the identification of the readership of the Dialogue, including “pagans,” Jews, and Christians. Like most recent scholars, Rajak argues for intra-Christian readership, noting that “the struggle to define Christianity through opposition with Judaism is of benefit primarily to Christians themselves.”

In regard to the historicity of the


96 For the most part, I follow the translation of Thomas Falls, Saint Justin Martyr, Fathers of the Church 6. See p. xv for discussion of date and provenance.
97 Tessa Rajak, “Talking at Trypho: Christian Apologetic as Anti-Judaism in Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho the Jew,” in Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians, ed. Mark
account, Horner argues for the authenticity of the *Dialogue* by demonstrating that Justin may indeed preserve actual sayings of Trypho that correlate with other writings from the Jewish diaspora of the time.98 Others maintain that a historical situation of Jewish persecution of Christians underlies the *Dialogue* and prompts Justin to respond.99 Many scholars, from A. Lukyn Williams to David Rokéah and Judith Lieu, note the conciliatory and courteous tone of the dialogue,100 and some suggest that this tone lends historicity to the text.

Such theses are challenged by Michael Mach, who views the *Dialogue* “mainly as a document of an intra-Christian process, which is not necessarily to be understood as a historical disputation between Justin and some Jews who had fled to Ephesus from the Bar-Kokhba war.”101 Rajak similarly disputes those who read the *Dialogue* as the “last ‘nice’ dialogue between Christians and Jews” when she writes:

---


98 See Horner, *Listening to Trypho*, for an attempted reconstruction of Trypho’s thought.


101 Michael Mach, “Justin Martyr’s *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo* and the Development of Christian Anti-Judaism,” in *Contra Iudaos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Christians and Jews*, ed. Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996), 30. For another argument against historicity see Rajak, “Talking at Trypho,” who writes, “There has been, from Eusebius on, a long tradition of treating this dialogue as a straight historical report. But there is nothing in the text to
That the later *adversus Judaeos* literature is more intemperate should not lead us to exaggerate the moderation of the *Trypho*. Moreover, a modern reader’s preference for Trypho’s quietness over Justin’s assertiveness is hardly likely to have been shared by the ancient audience, with all the fondness of the period for vigorous—and long-winded—rhetoric.102

Moving away from depicting the dialogue as a generous exchange between equals, scholars such as Rajak, Mach, and Knust have examined the function of the text’s anti-Jewish rhetoric. Rajak notes that Jews fare particularly badly in Justin’s presentation and interpretation of Hebrew Scriptures. His biblical citations “include some of the angriest of prophetic utterances in the Bible, equipped with exegesis designed to spell out the sins of the Jews, the justice of their suffering, and their rejection by God.”103 Moreover, Knust suggests that Justin justifies acts of violence against Jews by coding their suffering as deserved “divine punishment.” Justin depicts acts of violence against Christians, by contrast, as “sacrifice or divine fulfillment.”104

As in the commentaries on the *Epistle of Barnabas*, many commentators view Justin’s *Dialogue* as indicative of a past “parting of the ways” between Jews and

support such a view. A certain amount of circumstantial detail was required by Justin’s chosen form” (64). See also, Goodenough, *Theology of Justin Martyr*, 58-61.

102 Rajak, “Talking at Trypho,” 68.


Christians. By contrast, Boyarin, building off of the work of Alain Le Boulluec, submits that in Justin’s “heresiological representation,” particularly in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin participates in the construction of the categories “Christian” and “Jew,” the very categories that he hopes will be read as natural, bounded, and dichotomous. Justin’s *Dialogue*, Boyarin claims, constitutes “one of the earliest texts that is self-consciously engaged in the production of an independent Christianity.”

The attendant construction of the Other to Christianity—Judaism—likewise occurs within this nexus of heresiological discourse and religious self-definition in the second century.

Throughout the *Dialogue*, Justin registers many ways in which Christians have replaced Jews as heirs to God’s promises to Israel; in his view, Christians now constitute the “true people of Israel” and the “true seed of Abraham.”

Jewish practices (circumcision, sabbath observance) and Jewish obedience to the law are rendered obsolete by the advent of Christ. Justin employs biblical examples to emphasize the disobedience, stubbornness, false worship, and *porneia* of the Jews. He levels charges against his Jewish interlocutors by redeploying prophetic

---


106 Dial. 119.5, 135.3, 140.1.

107 Dial. 92.3-4. Justin insidiously argues that the only use of circumcision after the advent of Christ is to “mark [the Jews] off for the suffering [they] now so deservedly endure” (19.2). For an analysis of this claim, see Jennifer Knust, “Roasting the Lamb.”
injunctions against Israel and stories of Israel’s idolatry, apostasy (with the golden calf), and fornication with the daughters of foreigners.\textsuperscript{108}

One way in which Justin produces difference between Jews and Christians is by depicting the latter as morally superior to the former. In the following passage, he argues that his Jewish interlocutors should adopt Christian virtues, here symbolized by unleavened bread, and abandon the life of vice, the bad leaven: “Wash your souls free of anger, of avarice, of jealousy, and of hatred; then the whole body will be pure. This is the symbolic meaning of unleavened bread, that you do not commit old deeds of the bad leaven.”\textsuperscript{109} Justin then turns on his interlocutors and accuses them not only of carnal interpretative practices but also of embracing lives of sin: “You, however, understand everything in a carnal way, and you deem yourselves religious if you perform such deeds, even when your souls are filled with deceit and every other kind of sin.”\textsuperscript{110} Here, Justin constructs Jewish understanding of scripture as carnal—a construction he reiterates and embellishes in his exegesis of Hebrew bible passages.

For example, Justin performs a remarkable reading of the stories of Abraham and Jacob’s offspring in Genesis 22-28 by reversing the links between carnality and fruitfulness, chastity and barrenness:

For the offspring is divided after Jacob, and comes down through Judah and Perez and Jesse and David. Now, this was a sign that some of you Jews

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Dial.} 19.5, 132.1, 133. Jennifer Knust writes, “Justin employs biblical tales of Israel’s porneia (sexual misbehavior/apostasy) to distance Jews from the new and supposedly pure Christian genos” (\textit{Abandoned to Lust}, 149).

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Dial.} 14.2.

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Dial.} 14.2.
would certainly be children of Abraham, and at the same time would share in the lot of Christ; but that others, also children of Abraham, would be like the sand on the sea shore, which though vast and extensive, is barren and fruitless, not bearing any fruit at all, but only drinking up the water of the sea.  \textit{(Dial. 120.2)}

In this passage, he argues that the Jews are “barren and fruitless” apart from Christ. By contrast, those who accept Christ and practice chastity become “fruitful vines,” joining the company of all who are “children and co-heirs of Christ.”\(^{111}\)

Near the end of the \textit{Dialogue}, Justin again constructs his Jewish interlocutors as lustful. He argues that Jewish leaders of his day, due to their lust for women, misinterpret scriptural passages about Jacob’s multiple marriages. Instead of reading for the “true” spiritual meaning of Jacob’s marriages, which is found in the typological understanding of Leah and Rachel as types of the synagogue and church, Jews utilize scripture to justify the satisfaction of their sexual desires. Addressing Trypho and his friends, Justin writes,

\begin{quote}
It would be better for you to obey God rather than your stupid, blind teachers, who even now permit each of you to have four or five wives; and if any of you see a beautiful woman and desire to have her, they cite the actions of Jacob . . . and the other patriarchs to prove there is no evil in such practices. How wretched and ignorant they are even in this respect. \textit{(Dial. 134.1)}
\end{quote}

\(^{111}\textit{Dial. 140.1.} \) See also 110.3 where Justin argues for Christian marital chastity: “We cultivate piety, justice, brotherly charity, faith, and hope, which we derive from the Father through the crucified Savior; \textit{each one of us sitting under his vine,} that is, each one living with only his own wife. For, as you know, a prophetic writing says, \textit{His wife shall be as a fruitful vine.}” Justin is here quoting from Micah 4:2-3 and Psalm 127:3. For more on how Justin inscribes sexual chastity as a marker of Christian identity (especially vis-à-vis the Romans), see his two apologies in Miroslav Marcovich, ed. \textit{Iustini Martyris. Apologiae pro Christianis.} Patristische Texte und Studien 38 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994). English translations of Justin’s apologies in L. W. Barnard, \textit{Saint Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies}, Ancient Christian Writers 56 (New York: Paulist Press, 1997). See also Jennifer Knust’s excellent analysis of Justin’s \textit{First and Second Apologies} in \textit{Abandoned to Lust}, 89-112, 143-163.
Justin claims that biblical exegetes cannot access the “divine” meaning of such texts apart from Christ. Jewish exegetes, he contends, “never considered the more divine in the purpose for which each thing was done, but rather what concerned base and corruptible passions.”¹¹²

In this passage, Justin simultaneously constructs and rejects a Jewish interpretation of Jacob’s marriages. His argument depends upon a tautology, one that is first developed in Barnabas and continued in Origen: Jewish misunderstanding of scripture is rooted in Jewish lust; simultaneously Jewish lust is rooted in and authorized by Jewish (mis)understanding of scripture. For Justin, like the author of Barnabas, the way out of both dilemmas—sexual desire and heterodox hermeneutics—lies in utilizing Christ as the necessary interpretive lens with which to read the Hebrew scriptures.¹¹³ Justin’s interpretation of this problematic story from the Hebrew Bible attempts to illustrate the superiority of Christian biblical interpretation, on the one hand, and associate Jewish identity with insatiable lust and plural marriages, on the other.

Justin presents the story of David’s adulterous affair with Bathsheba in a similar fashion by using the interpretive moment not only to acquit biblical patriarchs of any sexual sin but also to slander present-day Jews:

Indeed, gentlemen, this one deed of transgression of David with the wife of Uriah shows that the patriarchs took many wives, not to commit adultery, but

¹¹² Dial. 134.2

¹¹³ See Origen, On First Principles 4.1.6: “And we must add that it was after the advent of Jesus that the inspiration of the prophetic words and the spiritual nature of Moses’ law came to light. For before the advent of Christ it was not at all possible to bring forward clear proofs of the divine inspiration of the old scriptures.”
that certain mysteries might thus be indicated by them. For, had it been permissible to take any wife whomever, or as many as one desired (as women are taken under the name of marriage by your countrymen all over the world, wherever they live or are sent), David certainly would have been permitted this by much greater right. *(Dial. 141.4)*

By suggesting that Trypho’s “countrymen” marry as many women as they desire, Justin portrays Jewish men as excessively lustful and polygamous.\(^{114}\) In other words, Justin claims that whereas Jewish men have a wife in every port, Christian men restrict themselves and “live with only one wife.”\(^{115}\) Sexual slander such as this serves to distinguish Christians from Jews on the basis of the former’s more stringent and controlled sexual practices.

Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* thus fashions Jewish men as “carnal,” misguided interpreters of their own biblical traditions. According to him, Jews utilize stories of the sexual exploits of biblical patriarchs to justify deviant practices, including polygamy. More so than in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, Justin’s *Dialogue* presents a systematized representation of Jews as illicitly sexual and carnal—fitting counterparts to sexually restrained Christians. That Justin performs this reading of Jewishness with no reference to Paul is not surprising, for Paul offered no explicit association of Jewish identity and sexual immorality.\(^{116}\) Justin, like the author of

---

\(^{114}\) S. Krauss contends that this is the only instance in which a church father accuses Jews of polygamy: Krauss, “The Jews in the Works of the Church Fathers” *JQR* 5 (1892): 122-157, see especially 129-130.

\(^{115}\) *Dial.* 110.3.

\(^{116}\) For more on Justin and his knowledge of Paul, see Rodney Werline. “The Transformation of Pauline Arguments in Justin Martyr’s ‘Dialogue with Trypho.’” *HTR* 92 (1999): 79-93.
Barnabas, develops this caricature of “carnal” Jews apart from—and in contradistinction to—Paul.

Sexual Slander against Jews in the Century after Paul

Justin and the author of the Epistle to Barnabas stand at the beginning of a tradition that produces Jewish-Christian difference, in part, by depicting Christians as superior in sexual purity and chastity. Jews, by contrast, are portrayed as sexual deviants: carnal, lustful, adulterous, and polygamous. In closing, I suggest that this sexualized representation of Jews was not widespread in the century after Paul’s death. Ignatius’ letters, the Epistle to Diognetus, and Meltio of Sardis’ Paschal homily, for example, bear little if no traces of an association of Jews and sexual vice. Justin and the author of Barnabas thus offer rare glimpses of an incipient (and insidious) trope that is more fully developed only in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries.

I briefly present the constructions of Jewishness in Ignatius’s letters, the Epistle to Diognetus, and Melito’s On Pascha in order to set in context second-century representations of Jews such as those in the Epistle of Barnabas and Justin’s Dialogue. Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch in the early second century, writes his letters while en route to his martyrdom in Rome.117 Like other Christian writers of the

---

period, Ignatius encourages his addressees to embrace a life of virtue that distinguishes them from non-Christians: “In response to their anger, show meekness; to their boasting, be humble; . . . to their savage behavior, act civilized.” This they should do, argues Ignatius, in order to “abide in Jesus Christ both in the flesh and in the spirit, with all holiness [ἀγνεία] and self-control [σωφροσύνη].” Ignatius also invokes this “discourse of self-mastery” in order to bolster his own authority not only as a leader but also as a renunciant: “My passion [ἐρως] has been crucified,” he writes to the Romans, “and there is no burning love [πῦρ φιλόουλον] within me for material things.”

Yet for all Ignatius’s insistence on virtuous and ascetic behavior among Christians, nowhere does he present Jews as sexually depraved counterparts to Christians. Rather, in Ignatius’ mutual construction of Judaism and “Christianism,” the former represents the “old way” of life whose beliefs and practices are to be cast aside in order to embrace “a new hope” in Christ. For Ignatius, belief in Christ renders obsolete any observance of Jewish practices: “It is outlandish to proclaim Jesus Christ and practice Judaism. For ‘Christianism’ [Χριστιανισμός] did not

---


120 Ignatius, “To the Magnesians,” 9:1.
believe in Judaism [יוודאיסיס], but Judaism in ‘Christianism.’** The proper prioritization of these two cultural formations is of absolute necessity to Ignatius. Although in these passages Ignatius works to create difference and distance between Christianness and Jewishness, he does so without characterizing Jews as carnal or licentious.

The *Epistle to Diognetus* likewise maintains that believers in Christ distinguish themselves, in part, by superior practices of sexual virtue.** Written in the middle of the second century, the author of the epistle maintains that Christians “share their meals but not their sexual partners. They are found in the flesh but do not live according to the flesh.”** The author urges Christians to shun Jewish practices (anxiety over food, sabbath, circumcision, fasting): “Christians are right to abstain from the vulgar silliness, deceit, and meddlesome ways of the Jews.”** Christian is distinguished from Jew here on the basis of religious practices and behavior; yet

---

121 Ignatius, “To the Magnesians,” 10:3. See also, “To the Philadelphians,” 6:1, where he writes, “But if anyone should interpret Judaism to you, do not hear him. For it is better to hear Christianity from a man who is circumcised than Judaism from one who is uncircumcised.”


nowhere does the author of the epistle charge Jews with the sexual vices leveled against them in Justin’s *Dialogue*.

Both the *Epistle to Diognetus* and Melito’s *On Pascha* distinguish between a past that was marked by sexual depravity and a present marked by righteous behavior, but each text fails to map this “difference in times” as Jewish-Christian difference. Rather, both authors present the unrighteous past as collectively-owned—as “our past.”

And so, having arranged all things by himself, along with his child, he permitted us—while it was still the former time—to be borne along by disorderly passions, as we wished, carried off by our pleasures and desires. He took no delight at all in our sins, but he endured them. Nor did he approve of the former time of unrighteousness, but he was creating the present age of righteousness, so that even though at that time our works proved that we were unworthy of life, we might in the present be made worthy by the kindness of God. (*Ep. Diog.* 9.1)

For Melito, sexual depravity is part of the inheritance Adam left to all of his children: “The destruction of men upon earth,” he writes, “became strange and terrible. For these things befell them: they were seized by tyrannical sin, and were led to lands of lusts [τοὺς χῶρους τῶν ἐπιθυμίων], where they were swamped by insatiable pleasures, adultery [μοιχείας], porneia, licentiousness [ασελγείας], avarice, murders, bloodshed, evil and lawless tyranny.”

For Melito, as for the author of

125 For more on how church fathers invoked the “difference in times” between the Hebrew past and Christian present, see Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 145-152.

Diognetus, the state of unrighteousness, porneia, and disorderly passion reigned over the entire human race until the coming of Christ, who inaugurates the period of righteousness and chastity. Although each author utilizes anti-Jewish rhetoric in his articulation of Jewish-Christian difference, neither includes sexual slander against Jews.  

This examination of Ignatius’s letters, the Epistle to Diognetus, and Melito’s On Pascha suggests that the developing discourse of Christian sexual morality often operated apart from the discourse of Jewish-Christian difference. Where the two discourses coincided, as in Justin’s Dialogue, Jews became objects of sexual invective. In our earliest examples of Christian sexualized representation of Jews (Epistle of Barnabas and Justin’s Dialogue), sexual slander occurs within the framework of biblical exegesis. Unlike Paul and without reference to him, Justin and the author of Barnabas constructed the Jew as a literal, “carnal” interpreter of biblical texts and, simultaneously, as lustful, adulterous, and polygamous. Two subsequent readers of Paul, Origen and John Chrysostom, rework and transform key Pauline texts in order to construct, authorize, and “naturalize” the association of a “literalistic” Jewish hermeneutic with its paradigmatic practitioner: the carnal, lustful Jew.

127 For Melito’s strident anti-Judaism, which includes the charge of deicide, see On Pascha 72-80.
“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

I think each word of Divine Scripture is like a seed whose nature is to multiply diffusely, reborn into an ear of corn or whatever its species be, when it has been cast into earth. Its increase is proportionate to the diligent labor of the skillful farmer or the fertility of the earth.

—Origen, *Homily on Exodus* 1.1

Origen begins his first homily on Exodus with a reflection on the proliferation of meaning of the words of scripture. Instructing his congregation on spiritual interpretive practices, Origen warns that the words of scripture can appear at first “small and insignificant,” but with the proper “cultivation,” each seed of scripture “grows into a tree and puts forth branches and foliage.” All that these seeds need is a “skillful and diligent farmer”—one who, like Origen himself, adheres to “the discipline of spiritual agriculture.”¹

Paul, for Origen, is this “skillful and diligent farmer” who demonstrates to the church how to cultivate “the seeds of spiritual understanding.”² Paul is the first to

---


² *Hom. Exod.* 5.1 (GCS 6, 184; FC 71, 277). Origen most likely has in mind Paul’s imagery in 1 Cor 3:6-9: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.” Paul returns to agricultural imagery in 1 Cor 9:10-11 and 1 Cor 15:37-38.
gather the Church “from the Gentiles” and teach the Church the proper interpretation of “the books of the Law.” According to Origen, one of Paul’s signal contributions lies in distinguishing between Christian and Jewish interpretation of the law. Origen writes:

[Paul] feared that the Church, receiving foreign instructions and not knowing the principle of the instructions, would be in a state of confusion about the foreign document [the Law]. For that reason he gives some examples of interpretation that we also might note similar things in other passages, lest we believe that by imitation of the text and document of the Jews we be made disciples. He wished, therefore, to distinguish disciples of Christ from disciples of the Synagogue by the way they understand the Law. The Jews, by misunderstanding it, rejected Christ. We, by understanding the law spiritually, show that it was justly given for the instruction of the Church.3

Within his claim for Christian interpretive superiority with regard to the Jewish law, Origen contends that the failing of the Jews is a result of their “misunderstanding” of scripture. He develops this point a few lines later by indicating that Jewish “misunderstanding” is rooted in Jews’ literalist reading practices. He argues, for example, that whereas Jews understand the crossing of the Red Sea to be merely a crossing, Paul understands this historical incident as a type of baptism.4 Whereas Jews think that the manna from heaven is mere “food for the stomach,” Paul calls the manna “spiritual food.” According to Origen, Paul performs the proper “cultivation”

3 Hom. Exod. 5.1 (GCS 6, 183; FC 71, 275): Doctor gentium in fide et veritate Apostolus Paulus tradidit ecclesiae, quam congregavit ex gentibus, quomodo libros legis susceptos ab aliis sibique ignotos prius et valde peregrinos deberet advertere, ne aliena instituta suscipiens et institutorum regulam nesciens in peregrino trepidare instrumento. Propterea ergo ipse in nonnullis intelligentiae tradit exempla, ut et nos similia observemus in ceteris, ne forte pro similitudine lectionis et instrumenti Iudaeorum nos effectos esse discipulos crederemus. Hoc ergo differre vult discipulos Christi a discipulis synagogae, quod legem, quam illi male intelligendo Christum non receperunt, nos spiritualiter intelligendo ostendamus eam ad ecclesiae instructionem merito datam.

4 Hom Exod. 5.1 (GCS 6, 185; FC 71, 276).
of biblical texts by uncovering the spiritual meanings contained within the “small and insignificant” words of scripture. I suggest that within this homiletic presentation of Paul and Pauline interpretive practices lies a simultaneous construction and denigration of Jewish interpretive practices as intrinsically literalistic.

Origen frequently encourages biblical interpreters to imitate Paul by attending not to the literal meaning but to the “elevated sense” (ἀναγωγή) of scripture.\(^5\)

Drawing on Hellenistic rhetorical techniques,\(^6\) Philo’s discussions of allegory,\(^7\) and

\(^5\) For a helpful description of how Origen uses the term ἀναγωγή and other Greek exegetical terms, such as ἀλληγορία and ἔρωτις, see Robert Grant, *The Letter and the Spirit* (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), Appendix II, pp. 120-142.


Paul’s figural interpretation of Abraham in Galatians 4, Origen presents a theory of interpretation that privileges the “inner,” spiritual meaning of the text over the “outward” and literal. In his explication of his hermeneutical theory in Book Four of On First Principles and in many of his commentaries and homilies, he recommends that Christians attend to this “elevated” understanding of the biblical text and avoid the error of the Jews, who concern themselves with base, literalistic interpretive practices.

In this chapter, I offer a critical analysis of Origen’s representational practices with regard to Jewish biblical interpretation, in particular, and Jewish identity, in general. I argue that Origen consistently reads Jewishness as aligned with carnality

---

8 See especially, Origen, Hom. Gen. 6.1 (GCS 6, 66; FC 71, 121-122); Cels. 4.44 (GCS 1, 317); and Hom. Num. 11.1 (GCS 7, 76-77).

9 As noted in Chapter One, the author of The Epistle of Barnabas and Justin Martyr also depict Jews as literalist interpreters. R. P. C. Hanson notes that Clement of Alexandria, too, associates literalistic hermeneutics with Jewishness. Hanson writes that “Clement of Alexandria before [Origen] had used the word ‘Jewishly’ (Ἰουδαϊκώς) to mean ‘literally.’” (R. P. C. Hanson, Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen’s Interpretation of Scripture [Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1959], 237). Hanson also notes that Clement “associates literalism” with the adverb “carnally” (σαρκίως). See Clement, Paid. 1.6.34 (PG 8.292) and Quis Dives 18.

and literal interpretive practices; such a reading of Jewishness is particularly apparent in Origen’s exegetical treatises and homilies, including his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* and his homilies on Genesis. Furthermore, I suggest that Origen develops his theory of Christian spiritual interpretation with reference not only to the carnal hermeneutics of “Israel according to the flesh” but also to the ascetic practice and sexual chastity of the ideal Christian interpreter, Paul. In this context, Origen’s construction of the figure of the carnal Jew functions as an insidious implication of the intertwining of his exposition of Christian spiritual interpretation, his reading and representation of Paul, and his exhortation to sexual chastity.

Building on the work of Ruth Clements, Daniel Boyarin, and Karen Jo Torjesen, I argue that Origen’s “rhetoric of Jewish interpretation” consistently associates Jewishness with a particular mode of reading: literalism.\footnote{Ruth Clements, “*Peri Pascha*: Passover and the Displacement of Jewish Interpretation within Origen’s Exegesis” (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1997). Clements writes, “This rhetoric of Jewish interpretation is a unified hermeneutical strategy that … functions both to enhance the scholarly authority of Origen’s construal of the [Jewish scriptures], and to persuade listeners and readers of the theological necessity of the subordination of Jewish texts and their interpreters to the authority of the Christian Logos” (12). Roger Brooks makes a similar point about Origen’s strategic construction of “Jewish literalism” in his discussion of Origen’s *Homilies on Leviticus*. He writes, “In providing the ‘Jewish understanding’ of corpse uncleanness and in pointing out the inconsistencies in Jewish practice, Origen showed himself rather ignorant of the Rabbinic system, both in its details and as a whole. Instead, Origen imputed to the Jews merely a straightforward reading of Scripture. In his view, Judaic practice was simply ‘Old Testament’ law, acted out directly and without change. This of course ignores all those places where Rabbinic interpretation of the laws of uncleanness innovated and...
argues, “Origen’s sensus literalis (which is closely allied with the Jewish meaning) is a foil for his sensus spiritualis (his Christological meaning).”

By equating Jewish meaning with the literal sense, Origen renders literalism and Jewish interpretation “superficial, simple, and elementary.”

Drawing on Torjesen’s analysis, I suggest that within Origen’s rhetorical production of Jewish literalism and his argument for Christian interpretive superiority, he formulates a certain “discourse of sexuality” that characterizes Jews as more fleshly and sexually depraved than their Christian counterparts. His hermeneutical method is thus imbricated with a theory of alterity that differentiates Christian identity from Jewish identity on the basis of relationship to the flesh.

Origen wrote On First Principles while living in Alexandria, which was at that time the center of intellectual life in the Roman empire and the seat of Roman administration of Egypt.

The majority of Origen’s commentaries and homilies, added to the biblical law, as well as those places where the Rabbis simply ignored biblical law. The Jews were Origen’s ‘straw dogs’—he had no attachment to them, and sacrificed them as a set up for his own allegorical understanding of Scripture” (Roger Brooks, “Straw Dogs and Scholarly Ecumenism: The Appropriate Jewish Background for the Study of Origen,” in Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy, 63-116, see esp. pp. 91-92). See also Daniel Boyarin, A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Interpretation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Karen Jo Torjesen, “The Rhetoric of the Literal Sense: Changing Strategies of Persuasion from Origen to Jerome,” Origeniana Septima (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 633-644.


Joseph Trigg, Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church, 3-7. Trigg states that Origen also began commentaries on Genesis and John while in Alexandria, but he completed these while living in Caesarea (Trigg, Origen, 17). For more on Jews in Alexandria and the Roman suppression of the Jewish revolt in 115 C.E., see Peter Schäfer, Judeophobia: Attitudes toward Jews in the Ancient World (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); E. Mary Smallwood, The Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 20 (Leiden: Brill,
however, were composed during the period when his primary residence was Caesarea Maritima, a cosmopolitan center of Roman rule in Palestine.\(^{15}\) By the third century, Caesarea boasted an unusually diverse population, as Lee Levine describes:

> Under the later Empire, Caesarea claimed an unusual population distribution. Four separate minority groups functioned within the city: pagans, Jews, Christians, and Samaritans. Each community was well represented numerically, and each produced outstanding leaders and spokesmen. Such demographic composition was without parallel, at least among Palestinian cities. This diversity added immeasurably to the cosmopolitan nature of the city, a characteristic which in turn influenced the component communities.\(^{16}\)

Compared to Jerusalem, Caesarea “was the hellenized city of Palestine par excellence,” where Herod’s temple to Augustus and Roma served as the “symbolic entrance” to the city.\(^{17}\) In this site of cosmopolitan pluralism, economic and social contact among members of different religious groups was frequent.\(^{18}\)


\(^{16}\) Levine, *Caesarea Under Roman Rule*, 2.

\(^{17}\) Levine, *Caesarea Under Roman Rule*, 63; McGuckin, “Caesarea Maritima as Origen Knew It,” 5.

\(^{18}\) So Levine: “Interaction with other factions in the city was a . . . characteristic of the local Jewish community. Economically and perhaps socially (although sources regarding the latter are deficient), Jews came into constant contact with their neighbors. Jew and Gentile traded with one another in the local markets and shared other commercial and agricultural interests as well. Relations in the religious sphere were ambivalent. Each group claimed ultimate legitimacy for its practices and beliefs, and the resultant disputes are reflected in homiletic statements, as well as polemical and proselytizing efforts. Yet members of the various communities exchanged knowledge: Origen and Eusebius learned of
Cultural hybridity was unavoidable in such a site of contact and intermingling. In several homilies, Origen struggles against a hybrid “Judeo-Christianism” by warning his audience of the dangerous mixing of Jewish and Christian practices. For example, in one of his homilies on Leviticus, he states, “If you bring that which you learned from the Jews yesterday into the Church today, that is to eat the meat of yesterday’s sacrifice.” Similarly, in his twelfth homily on Jeremiah, Origen chastises Christian women, in particular, for observing the Jewish sabbath. He writes:

Concerning the sabbath, women, by not hearing the Prophet, do not hear in a hidden way (Jer. 13:15-17), but hear outwardly. They do not bathe the day of the sabbath; they go back to the “poor and weak elements” [στοιχεία] (Gal 4.9), as if Christ had not yet appeared, he who perfects [τελειουσ] us and Jewish traditions from a ‘Hebrew’, and Rabbi Abbahu had amicable relations with Christian interlocutors who, on one occasion, were local agoranomoi” (61).

By use of the phrase “cultural hybridity” I mean to invoke Homi Bhabha’s terminology. Hybridity, for Bhabha, signals “the ‘inter’—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.” Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) 38. Daniel Boyarin and Virginia Burrus discuss the usefulness of Bhabha’s concept for late ancient studies in their essay, “Hybridity as Subversion of Orthodoxy? Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity,” Social Compass 52 (2005): 431-441. See especially p. 431, where they write, “Hybridity inflects Jewish and Christian identity in precisely the places where ‘purity’ is most forcefully inscribed. In the formative texts of both traditions, heresy is pushed ‘outside’ via its syncretistic representation, even as the other religion is brought ‘inside’ through its close identification with heresy . . . Bringing the discursive analysis of ancient texts into dialogue with present contexts, the authors acknowledge both the promise of a ‘Third Space’ of hybridity opening onto inter-religious negotiation and the menace potentially conveyed by such hyphenated identities as the ‘Judeo-Christian.’” For a similar use of “hybridity,” see Daniel Boyarin, Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 13-22. For a discussion of “hybridity” as a critical term in postcolonial studies, see Robert J. C. Young, Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 78-79: “Hybridity works in different ways at the same time, according to the cultural, economic, and political demands of specific situations. It involves processes of interaction that create new social spaces to which new meanings are given.”

Origen, Hom. Lev. 5.8.3 (GCS 6, 349; FC 83, 105).
carries us across from the elements [στοιχείων] of the Law to the perfection [τελειότητα] of the Gospel.21

Later in this same homily he addresses those among his congregation who fast with the Jews: “All of you who keep the Jewish fast so that you do not understand the Day of Atonement as that which is in accord with the coming of Jesus Christ, you do not hear the atonement in a hidden way, but only outwardly.”22 Here, Origen exhorts Christians to “hear in a hidden way,” that is, attend to the spiritual meaning of the prophetic and legal texts. In this way Christians can avoid the error of the Jews, who, in Origen’s rhetorical presentation, hold fast to the “letter” and thus regress to the “poor and weak elements” of religious practice. Confronted with this situation of cultural and religious hybridity, Origen thus endeavors to construct (and subsequently naturalize) “border lines” between Christian and Jewish communities—lines that are drawn not only around interpretive practices but also around practices of piety such as observance of the sabbath and participation in fasts and festivals.23 As we have seen, one mode of Origen’s boundary-marking is his rhetorical association of Christians with spiritual interpretation and Jews with literal interpretation.


23 See Daniel Boyarin, Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity.
Twentieth-Century Scholarship on Origen’s Allegorical Interpretation

For several decades, scholars of early Christianity took for granted the historicity of this association of Christianity and spiritual or figural interpretation, on the one hand, and Judaism and literal interpretation, on the other. That is, these scholars assumed that the “border lines” between Judaism and Christianity—and between literalist and spiritual interpretative methods—were “natural,” when, in fact, they were “constructed” and “imposed.”

For example, Jean Daniélou, writing in 1948, praises Origen for the distinction he draws between Christian spiritualism and Jewish literalism. Taking up Origen’s supersessionist tone in one of his homilies on Joshua, Daniélou highlights Origen’s explanation of “the unwillingness of the Jews to give up the letter of the Law which had once been their teacher.” Daniélou continues: “[Origen’s] picture of the Jew standing before the Wailing Wall is a picture of the human race refusing to let go of its childhood and enter on maturity. Such is the mystery of growth and the renunciation it entails.”

24 Boyarin, Border Lines, Ch. 1, for a description of the “naturalization” of the border lines between Jews and Christians in late antiquity.

25 Jean Daniélou, Origène (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948), 154-155. Here is the entire passage in French: “Pour que l’ordre nouveau apparaisse, il faut que l’ordre ancien soit aboli dans son existence particulière. Pour que l’Eglise apparût, il fallait que le judaïsme fût détruit. Déjà, dans l’Ancien Testament, nous voyons ce problème dela souffrance apparaître quand Dieu commence à détacher son peuple de l’économie charnelle qui avait été la première. Pour que l’homme s’accomplisse, il faut qu’il accepte de se détacher de son enfance. Nous avons vu Origène nous expliquer cela tout à l’heure à propos du judaïsme qui ne veut pas se détacher de la lettre de la loi qui a été son pédagogue. Le Juif devant le mur des pleurs que vient de nous montrer Origène, c’est l’humanité qui ne veut pas se détacher de son enfance pour accéder à la plénitude. Ceci est le mystère des croissances et des renoncements qu’elles entraînent.” For a discussion of this passage, see David Dawson, Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity, 8-9.
rejection of Christ with Jews’ strict adherence to the letter: “It thus becomes perfectly clear what the hostility of the Jews toward Christ really meant: it was the visible embodiment of the refusal of the figure to accept its own dissolution.”

In these passages, Daniélou accentuates Origen’s characterization of Jews as doomed to an outdated hermeneutic in order to confirm the superiority and “maturity” of Christian spiritual readings of the bible. Here, the absolute difference between Jewish and Christian reading practices, as portrayed by Origen, is taken for granted.

This presumption of Jews as literalist readers also appears in twentieth-century scholarship on the so-called divide between Antiochene and Alexandrian exegesis. For example, in The Letter and the Spirit, Robert Grant describes the “exegetical school” of Antioch as “more sober and literal” than its Alexandrian counterpart. “At Antioch,” he writes, “there was a much stronger feeling for the human element in the biblical writers and a better understanding of the historical reality of the biblical revelation.”

Grant maintains that this emphasis on the literal,

---


27 Note that Daniélou also distinguishes between two types of spiritual interpretation, arguing that whereas typology represents “an authentic prolongation of the literal sense,” allegory remains overly dependent on “gnostic” and Philonic modes of interpretation. Allegorical exegesis, he claimed, derives from “foreign” sources and fails on account of its inattention to the historical meaning of scripture (Daniélou, *Origène*, 180-190). For a critique of this distinction between typology and allegory, see Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 128.


historical, and “human” elements originates, in part, from the Antiochene exegetes’ “closer relationship to Jewish exegesis.”

Christoph Schäublin was one of the first to challenge this thesis by arguing that neither the Alexandrian nor Antiochene theologians had much knowledge of Hebrew or Jewish exegetical practices. More recently, scholars such as David Dawson, Elizabeth Clark, Brevard Childs, and Margaret Mitchell have disputed the traditional view by exposing the “literal meaning” itself as a rhetorical construction—one that is co-produced alongside allegorical or other non-literal meanings to do


cultural work. For example, in *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, Dawson writes:

> “Meaning” is thus a thoroughly rhetorical category—it designates the way composers of allegory and allegorical interpreters enact their intentions toward others through the medium of a shared text. Consequently, although the “literal sense” has often been thought of as an inherent quality of a literary text that gives it a specific and invariant character (often, a “realistic” character), the phrase is simply an honorific title given to a kind of meaning that is culturally expected and automatically recognized by readers. . . . The “literal sense” thus stems from a community’s generally unself-conscious decision to adopt and promote a certain kind of meaning, rather than from its recognition of a text’s inherent and self-evident sense. An “allegorical meaning” obtains its identity precisely by its contrast with this customary or expected meaning.

As Dawson argues in regard to ancient biblical interpreters, “literal meaning” is mutually constructed alongside nonliteral meaning in order to shore up the authority of the exegete, who claims to “surpass” the common, “literal” meaning and to provide exclusive access to the “true” meaning of the text.

In a discussion of Origen’s homily on the “witch” of Endor (in 1 Kingdoms 28), Margaret Mitchell makes a similar claim to that of Dawson when she argues that Origen’s differentiation of “literal” and “allegorical” constitutes a learned rhetorical

---


This differentiation, moreover, serves not only to narrow interpretive options but also to support the exegete’s interpretive authority: “The appeal to the literal,” writes Mitchell, “is itself a rhetorical move that, in the way presented, greatly constricts the interpretive options for his hearers and funnels them toward his particular spiritual interpretation.”

Mitchell, like Dawson, challenges previous scholarly assumptions that aligned literalism and Jewishness by demonstrating that “literalism” itself is a rhetorical construction of early Christian exegesis, who conveniently grouped together Jewishness and literalist hermeneutics in order to denigrate both.

In *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, Daniel Boyarin explores how Christian supersessionary claims are implicated in Origen’s privileging of allegorical meaning over the literal, the “inner” over the “outer.” First, he argues that Origen’s positive evaluation of spirit over flesh works in tandem with his allegorical practice. He writes that Origen compares “the structure of the Bible as outer form and inner meaning to the ontological structure of the world. The human being is also a representation of world in exactly the same way; in her dual structure of outer body and inner spirit is reproduced the very dual structure of being.”

---


35 Mitchell, “Patristic Rhetoric on Allegory,” ciii. For more on the influence of Greek rhetorical training in the works of Origen, see Bernhard Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe*.

Boyarin, Origen creates a congruent relation between hermeneutics and anthropology—between modes of textual interpretation and understandings of the body.\textsuperscript{37} Within this congruent relation lies a hierarchical and dichotomous structure that privileges the figural meaning over the letter, on the one hand, and spirit over flesh, on the other.

Second, Boyarin demonstrates how this privileging of spirit over flesh and figural over literal works in tandem with early Christians’ claims for Christian superiority with respect to Judaism. For example, after quoting a passage from Augustine’s \textit{Tractatus adversus Judaeos},\textsuperscript{38} Boyarin writes:

When Augustine consigns the Jews to eternal carnality, he draws a direct connection between anthropology and hermeneutics. Because the Jews reject reading “in the spirit,” therefore they are condemned to remain “Israel in the flesh.” Allegory is thus, in his theory, a mode of relating to the body. In another part of the Christian world, Origen also described the failure of the Jews as owing to a literalist hermeneutic, one which is unwilling to go beyond or behind the material language and discover its immaterial spirit. This way of thinking about language had been initially stimulated in the Fathers by

\[\text{there is an outer shell and an inner meaning. We see accordingly the metaphysical grounding of the allegorical method used by Origen, and indeed by Philo as well} (\textit{Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash}, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature [Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990], 109).\]

\textsuperscript{37} Boyarin, \textit{A Radical Jew}, 13: “For both Paul and Philo, hermeneutics becomes anthropology.” David Dawson makes a similar point when he writes, “Philo and Origen closely connect the text’s body (its textuality) and soul (its meaning) with the bodies and souls of the text’s allegorical readers” (Dawson, “Plato’s Soul and the Body of the Text in Philo and Origen,” in \textit{Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period}, ed. Jon Whitman [Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History, Leiden: Brill, 2000], 89-107, see esp. p. 89).

\textsuperscript{38} See the first page of my Introduction. The passage that Boyarin quotes is from Augustine, \textit{Tractatus adversus Judaeos 7.9}: “Behold Israel according to the flesh (1 Cor 10:18). This we know to be the carnal Israel; but the Jews do not grasp this meaning and as a result they prove themselves indisputably carnal.”
Paul’s usage of “in the flesh” and “in the spirit” to mean, respectively, literal and figurative.  

In this passage, Boyarin suggests that when Origen constructs his “rhetoric of Jewish literalism,” he draws on ideas already present in Paul’s texts.\(^{40}\) Clements and others have demonstrated, however, that Origen’s association of Jewishness and literalism constitutes a reshaping of Pauline ideas. As Clements, Boyarin, and McGuckin have argued, Origen mobilizes key Pauline passages, including Romans 7:5-6,
1 Corinthians 10:18, and 2 Corinthians 3:6, to support his dichotomous structuring of spiritual interpretation over literal and, more generally, spirit over flesh.\textsuperscript{41} In what follows, I contribute to this scholarly discussion by, first, registering the ways in which Jewishness is co-constructed with the categories of “literal” and “flesh” in some of Origen’s texts and, second, analyzing how Origen’s scriptural justification for his “rhetorics of Jewish literalism” lies in his rewriting (and misrepresentation) of Paul. I submit that, unlike Justin Martyr and the author of Barnabas (who figured Jews as carnal without any reference to Paul’s letters), Origen is explicit in his use of Pauline dichotomies to spiritualize Christian identity and \textit{em-body} Jewish identity.

I focus on four texts, in particular, to illumine the associative lines that Origen draws between Jewishness, fleshliness, and literalism. \textit{On First Principles}, a theological treatise written in Alexandria in 229, presents Origen’s early theory of interpretation and reflection on allegorical method.\textsuperscript{42} His \textit{Homilies on Genesis}, delivered in Caesarea a decade or so after the composition of \textit{On First Principles}, provide Origen with an occasion to appropriate biblical narratives in support of his construction of Jewish literalism and Jewish carnality, including the story of Abraham’s circumcision and the story of Lot and his daughters. Origen’s \textit{Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans}, composed in Caesarea in 246, exemplifies the ways in which Origen “reconstructs” Paul not only to authorize the association of

---


Jewish identity and literal reading practices but also to justify the superiority of Christian biblical interpretation and sexual practices. Finally, his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, written in Athens a year or so before the commentary on Romans, offers a theory of biblical interpretation that associates advanced spiritual understanding with sexual chastity (*castus*) and bodily self-control (*continentiae*).43

**Jews, Flesh, Letter: On First Principles**

In Book Four of *On First Principles*, Origen presents a theory of interpretation that consistently aligns literalist reading practices—reading according to the “bare letter”44—with Jewishness and carnality.45 Like Justin Martyr before him, Origen begins by arguing that the correct understanding of Old Testament passages is not possible until the coming of Christ: “[I]t was after the advent of Jesus

---


45 Ruth Clements argues that *On First Principles* “represents a midpoint in the shaping of Origen’s exegetical practice. It follows the completion of commentaries on Psalms 1-25, Lamentations, and Genesis, and precedes the *Commentary on John*, the first five books of which were completed in Alexandria. It precedes as well Origen’s move to Caesarea and first substantial encounters with contemporary Judaism. The theology of interpretation which crystallizes in *Peri Archon* becomes formative for the later period, but the move to Caesarea prompts other developments as well, particularly in terms of the way Origen begins to value and use rabbinic interpretation” (Clements, “(Re)Constructing Paul,” 154-155). For a different opinion, see Joseph Trigg, who argues that *On First Principles* “represents [Origen’s] mature theological position” (Trigg, *Origen*, 18).
that the inspiration of the prophetic words and the spiritual nature of Moses’ law came to light. For before the advent of Christ it was not at all possible to bring forward clear proofs of the divine inspiration of the old scriptures.”

Origen contends that the “light that was contained within the law of Moses” was at first “hidden away under a veil”; this veiled light, however, “shone forth at the advent of Jesus, when the veil was taken away.”

According to Origen, Jewish readers persist in misunderstanding their own scriptures because they continue to read as if through a veil—a veil that obscures the light of the text’s spiritual meaning, which is accessible only through Christ.

---

46 Origen, Princ. 4.1.6. On the point of Origen’s expropriation of Jewish scriptures and, in particular, the prophets, see Torjesen, “The Rhetoric of the Literal Sense,” 639: “Under Origen’s oracular theory of the Jewish scriptures its meanings become obscure to Jewish readers. By making all of scripture oracular Origen is able to redefine the relationship between scripture and its community. Under this theory of inspiration the Jewish prophets no longer mediate between God and the Jewish community, the Jewish prophets as visionaries become mediators between God and the Christian community. By making all of scripture oracular Origen is able to substitute the Christian community for the Jewish community as the addressee, as the audience for the prophetic message and more importantly he is able to make a wholesale substitution of a Christian meaning for a Jewish meaning. He can then follow with the claim that a Christological hermeneutic is the only way to decipher the encoded Christian meaning of the Jewish scriptures.”

47 “To this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds, but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.”

48 Origen, Princ. 4.1.6 (SC 268, 282). Compare Homilies on Joshua 17.1. Joseph Trigg comments on this idea in book four of On First Principles when he writes: “It is only with the advent of Jesus that the divine presence in the prophetic discourses and spiritual character of the Mosaic law, previously hidden, came to light, so that anyone who brings care and attention to the Bible will feel a ‘trace of enthusiasm’ from that divine presences” (Trigg, Origen, The Early Church Fathers [London and New York: Routledge, 1998], 32). For more on Christian supersession and the imagery of Moses’ veil, see Daniel Boyarin, “The Subversion of the Jews: Moses’s Veil and the Hermeneutics of Supersession,” Diacritics 23 (1993): 16-35.

49 See also Origen, Homilies on Genesis 6.1.1 (GCS 6, 66): “Although no one of us can by any means easily discover what kind of allegories these words should contain, nevertheless one ought to pray that ‘the veil might be removed’ from his heart, ‘if there is anyone who tries to turn to the Lord,’ —‘for the
Because Jews do not utilize Christ as an interpretive lens, they never advance beyond the “bare letter” to the spiritual meaning of the text. Origen emphasizes the theologically devastating consequences of Jewish literalism when he writes:

For the hard-hearted and ignorant members of the circumcision have refused to believe in our Savior because they think that they are keeping closely to the language of the prophecies that relate to him, and they see that he did not literally “proclaim release to the captives” or build what they consider to be a real “city of God.”

Here, Origen argues that Jewish interpretive practice is the very thing that keeps Jews from believing in Christ. Later, in his twelfth homily on Jeremiah, Origen develops this idea by arguing that the “murder of Jesus” by Jews results from the fact that they are unable to “hear” scripture “in a hidden way.” Because Jews understand scripture “outwardly” instead of “inwardly,” they continue to be “liable” for the death of Jesus. Origen claims that “this ordinary Jew killed the Lord Jesus and is liable today also for the murder of Jesus, since he did not hear in a hidden way either the Law or the Prophets.” Unlike his Jewish counterpart, the Christian interpreter, in Origen’s view, Lord is spirit’—that the Lord might remove the veil of the letter and uncover the light of the Spirit” (FC 122).

50 Origen, Princ. 4.2.1 (SC 238, 292-294): ὃ ἰ τε γὰρ σκληροκάρδιοι καὶ ἰδιώται τῶν ἐκ περιτομῆς εἰς τὸν σωτήρα ἡμῶν οὐ πεπιστεύκασι, τῇ λέξει τῶν περὶ αὐτοῦ προφητείων κατακολουθείν νομίζοντες, καὶ αἰσθητῶς μὴ ὅροις αὐτοῦ κηρύσσαντα αἰχμαλώτως ἀφείν μὴ δείκνυσιν ἄλλης ἀληθείας. See also Princ. 4.2.2 (SC 268, 300), where Origen writes, “Now the reason why all those we have mentioned [Jews, heretics] hold false opinions and make impious or ignorant assertions about God appears to be nothing else but this, that scripture is not understood in its spiritual sense, but is interpreted according to the bare letter.”

51 Origen, Hom. Jer. 12.13.1 (SC 238, 44-46; FC 97, 127): “He who hears in a hidden way the matter ordained concerning the Passover eats of Christ the lamb. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed, and since he knows of what nature is the flesh of the Word and since he knows that it is truly food, he shares in this; for he has heard about the Passover in a hidden way.”
should approach scripture by “praying” that “the Lord might remove the veil of the letter and uncover the light of the Spirit.”

According to Origen’s theory of interpretation, outlined in Book Four of On First Principles, the “bare letter” of scripture represents the “bodily meaning,” the messy “flesh” of the biblical text to which the Jews mistakenly cling. He posits that the “divine character of scripture” functions as the “hidden splendor” of biblical teachings, yet this “splendor” remains “concealed under a poor and humble style”—an “earthen vessel” comprised of the “bare” words and phrasings of the biblical text.

Echoing Paul’s phrase in 2 Corinthians 4:7 (“We have this treasure in earthen vessels”), Origen offers a corresponding characterization of the relationship between the spiritual and literal meanings of scriptural texts: “A treasure of divine meanings,” he writes, “lies hidden within the ‘frail vessel’ of the poor letter.”

---

52 Origen, Hom. Gen. 6.1.1 (GCS 6, 66).

53 See Origen, Princ. 4.2.8 (SC 268, 334): “For the intention was to make even the outer covering of the spiritual truths, I mean the bodily part of the scriptures [τὸ σωματικὸν τῶν γραφῶν], in many respects not unprofitable but capable of improving the multitude in so far as they receive it”; and Princ. 4.2.4 (SC 268, 310): “One must therefore portray the meaning of the sacred writings in a threefold way upon one’s soul, so that the simple man may be edified by what we may call the flesh of the scripture [σαρκὸς τῆς γραφῆς], this name being given to the obvious interpretation [τὴν πρόχειρων ἐκδοχήν]; while the man who has made some progress may be edified by its soul. . . and the man who is perfect,. . . this man may be edified by the spiritual law.” For more on the comparison of the text of scripture to a body, see Anniewies van den Hoek, “The Concept of σώμα τῶν γραφῶν in Alexandrian Theology,” StPatr 19 (1989): 250-254 and David Dawson, “Plato’s Soul and the Body of the Text in Philo and Origen.”. For more on the influence of Philo on Origen’s conception of the “bodily meaning” of scripture, see van den Hoek, “Philo and Origen: A Descriptive Catalogue of their Relationship,” 88, 110.

54 Torjesen notes, “In order to weight the hidden Christological meaning more heavily Origen uses another set of rhetorical terms to create an opposition between a surface meaning and a hidden one. The surface meaning (his literal sense) is a cloak, an image, a fleshly body, it covers, hides, and encloses” (Torjesen, “The Rhetoric of the Literal Sense,” 639-640).

55 Origen, Princ. 4.3.14 (SC 268, 392).
literal words of scripture comprise a “shameful text,” to use Virginia Burrrus’ phrase.\(^{56}\)

On this model, Jews, unlike Christians, attend solely to these “fleshly” aspects of scripture, and thus they prove themselves to be not only carnal interpreters but also performers of shameful acts, more generally, as Origen argues in later texts.

In her analysis of the fourth book of *On First Principles*, Ruth Clements suggests that Origen’s “rhetorics of Jewish literalism” depend upon his (mis)representation of Paul’s language. In particular, she argues that Origen draws upon Pauline statements about the “flesh” to crystallize the connection between Jewish literalism and the “works of the flesh.” She writes,

> Origen develops a contrast between the spiritual meaning of scripture and the ‘fleshly’ or ‘bodily’ meaning (ἠ σάρξ τῆς γραφῆς, 2.4; τὸ σωματικόν, 2.5, passim). The designation of the literal meaning as the bodily sense of scripture denotes its theological distance from the spiritual meaning; the appellation ‘fleshly,’ drawn from Paul, increased the rhetorically negative casting thus given to the literal sense.\(^{57}\)

By linking Paul’s distinction between spirit and flesh to the (post-Pauline) distinction of Christian and Jew, respectively, Origen recasts Paul’s understandings of “letter” and “flesh” to produce Jewish-Christian difference and to subordinate Jewish identity and interpretation.

---

\(^{56}\) Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) 70. Commenting on *On First Principles* 4.1.7, Burrrus writes, “If the aesthetic imperfections of scripture may seem to some a source of shame, for Origen these very imperfections reveal scripture as an ‘earthen vessel’ that hides a treasure.” Compare Joseph Trigg, who, commenting on *Princ.* 4.1.6-7 states, “Origen the grammateus readily admits that the style of Holy Scripture is mediocre (compared, presumably, to Homer or Plato) because, as Paul wrote, ‘We have this treasure in earthen vessels’ (2 Cor 4:7), but, even so, this is the pattern of the divine *oikonomia*: just as we must seek a profound cause when people from all over the world commit their lives to an obscure Galilean, so the Bible’s divine power clothed in a humble style impels us to seek a profound hidden meaning” (32-33).

\(^{57}\) Clements, “(Re)Constructing Paul,” 157.
For example, Paul’s phrase in 1 Cor 10:18—“Behold Israel according to the flesh”—lies at the heart of Origen’s alignment of literalist reading practices with Jewishness and carnality. Indeed, as Clements has argued of Origen’s subsequent exegetical texts, 1 Cor 10:18 functions as a “hermeneutical key to the reading of scripture.” In one passage, Origen redeployed this verse to conflate Jews, whom he identifies as “God’s former people,” with “the flesh”; he writes, “Let not ‘Israel after the flesh,’ which is called by the apostle ‘flesh,’ ‘glory before God.’” Origen includes a similar conflation of Jewishness and fleshliness in his Commentary on Romans when he interprets Romans 8:5: “‘Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh’; that is, the Jews whom he calls Israel according to the flesh. They set their minds upon the fleshly aspect of the law in that they understand the law according to the flesh.” Here, Origen reads Jews into

---

58 Clements, “(Re)Constructing Paul” 164. Clements writes: “Origen’s deployment of 1 Cor 10:18 as the hermeneutical key to the reading of scripture is a unique exegetical move in relation to both his predecessors and immediate contemporaries; however, the opposition between ‘Israel according to the flesh’ and ‘Israel according to the spirit,’” drawn somewhat tentatively in Peri Archon, becomes a taken-for-granted assumption in Origen’s later exegetical writings. This revolutionary reading of 1 Cor 10:18 emerges from the way Origen has read across the Pauline corpus” (164-165).

59 Origen, Princ. 4.1.4 (SC 268, 274).

60 Origen, Comm. Rom. 6.12.6. The entire passage reads: “‘For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh; but those who are according to the Spirit, of the Spirit.’ Here [Paul] now plainly sets the law of Moses in the middle, as it were, between us and the Jews. He says, ‘Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh’; that is, the Jews whom he calls Israel according to the flesh. They set their minds upon the fleshly aspect of the law in that they understand the law according to the flesh … For surely the one who will have understood the law spiritually possesses life and peace, which is Christ” (Comm. Rom. 6.12.6). See also Comm. Rom. 6.12.9 where Origen reiterates this idea, this time with allusion to Hagar and Sarah: “As we have said, since he divides the law of Moses into two aspects, into the spirit and the flesh, to us he has handed down those things that are of the spirit, which he also called the spiritual law. But the things that are of the flesh he has left to the fleshly Jews. After all, this is how he has interpreted the passage about Abraham when he said, ‘But the one who was from the slave woman was born according to the flesh…’(Gal 4.23-29). For it is certain that those who are the Jews according to the flesh would
Paul’s argument about “flesh” versus “spirit” by identifying “those who live according to the flesh” as Jews. In other words, Origen imports the Jew/Christian dichotomy to make meaning of Paul’s flesh/spirit dichotomy.

Later in *On First Principles*, Origen turns again to the phrase, “Israel according to the flesh,” and adds a corresponding phrase that is not present in Paul’s letters—“Israel according to the spirit”—in order to highlight the opposition between Jews and Christians.⁶¹ Here, Origen contends that “Israel after the flesh” represents Jews of his own day who embrace a literalist hermeneutic and attend solely to the bodily meaning of the text. “Israel according to the spirit,” by contrast, represents followers of Christ, who recognize that “the whole of divine scripture . . . has a spiritual meaning” that “raises apprehension to a high level.” Again, Paul’s dyadic structure of flesh/spirit is mobilized by Origen to construct a hierarchy between Jewish and Christian modes of interpretation. Such a construction depends upon a “transformative reading of Pauline building blocks” that strategically aligns “Israel according to the flesh” with Jews of Origen’s own day and assigns to the latter a particular “fleshy” mode of biblical interpretation—a misplaced devotion to “the letter that kills.”⁶² In the next section, I explore how Origen connects his rhetorical persecute us, who are Jews not outwardly but in secret and who keep the law according to the spirit, not according to the flesh.”


⁶² See Clements, “(Re)Constructing Paul, 152): “In *Peri Archon*, Origen constructs his theological oppositions between ‘fleshy Jews’/‘Jewish literalism’ and ‘spiritual Christians’/Christian ‘spiritual interpretation by transformative readings of its Pauline building blocks, with particular attention to texts from Romans.”
construction of Jewish literalism to his representation of Jewish bodies and Jewish sexuality via his “spiritual” interpretation of circumcision.

Circumcision and Jewish Flesh: Origen’s Third Homily on Genesis

Origen finds in the Jewish practice of circumcision an exemplary correspondence of fleshly interpretive practices, literal observance of the law, and Jewish sexual depravity. Indeed, he utilizes circumcision as a vivid example of the way in which Jewish hermeneutics are mapped onto the Jewish body. In his third homily on Genesis, Origen explores the story of Abraham’s circumcision in Genesis 17 and discovers there the spiritual meaning “behind” God’s commandment to Abraham to circumcise himself and all his male offspring as a sign of God’s covenant. Such a fleshly commandment troubles Origen and prompts him to ask whether “the omnipotent God, who holds dominion of heaven and earth, when he wished to make a covenant with a holy man put the main point of such an important matter in this, that the foreskin of his flesh and of his future progeny should be circumcised.” In his response, Origen castigates Jewish leaders for putting their

63 After making a set of promises to Abraham, God requires Abraham and his offspring to circumcise all males as a sign of the covenant: “This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. . . . So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:10-11, 13b).

64 Origen, Hom. Gen. 3.4. (GCS 6, 43; FC 71, 93).
faith in the flesh: “These indeed are the only things in which the masters and teachers of the synagogue place the glory of the saints.”

As is his common practice, Origen turns to Paul to delineate the spiritual meaning behind God’s commandment to circumcise. He writes:

We, therefore, instructed by the apostle Paul, say that just as many other things were made in the figure and image of future truth, so also that circumcision of flesh was bearing the form of spiritual circumcision about which it was both worthy and fitting that “the God of majesty” give precepts to mortals. Hear, therefore, how Paul, “a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth,” teaches the Church of Christ about the mystery of circumcision. “Behold,” he says, “the mutilation”—speaking about the Jews who are mutilated in the flesh—“for we,” he says, “are the circumcision, who serve God in spirit and have no confidence in the flesh.”

In this passage, Origen employs Paul’s statement in Philippians 3:2-3 to argue against the Jewish practice of fleshly circumcision (which he, following Paul, describes as “mutilation”) and for “spiritual” circumcision, which befits those “who serve God in spirit.” Romans 2:28-29 also serves Origen in a similar regard; he uses

---

65 Origen, Hom. Gen. 3.4. (GCS 6, 43; FC 71, 93). The entire passage reads: *Igitur quandoquidem in hos devenimus locos, requirere volo, si omnipotens Deus, qui coeli ac terrae dominatum tenet, volens testacabat, ut praepatium carnis eius ac futurae ex eo sobolis circumcideretur. Erit enim, inquit, testamentum meum super carnem tuam. Hocine erat quod coeli ac terrae Dominus ei, quem e cunctis mortasunt sola, in quibus magistri et doctores synagogae sanctorum gloriam ponunt.*

66 Origen, Hom. Gen. 3.4. (GCS 6, 43; FC 71, 94): *Nos erg imbuti per Apostoum Paulum dicimus quia, sicut multa alia in figura et imagine futurae vertatis fiebant, ita et circumcisio illa carnalis circumcisionis spiritualis formam gerebat, de qua et dignum erat et decebat Deum maiestatis praecepta mortalibus dare. Audie ergo, quomodo Paulus doctor gentium in fide et vertate de circumcisionis mysterio Christi eclesiam docet. Videte, inquit, concisionem—de Iudaes loquens, qui conciduntur in carne—nos enim sumus ait circumcisio, qui spiritu Deo servimus et non in carne fiduciam habemus.*

67 “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.”

68 “For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal.”
this passage to contend that true circumcision is “inward”: “He is a Jew who is one inwardly with circumcision of the heart in the spirit, not in the letter.”

Reading Phil 3:2-3 together with Rom 2:28-29, Origen thus depicts Jews as literalist interpreters of God’s commandment to Abraham to circumcise himself and his male offspring. Whereas Jews interpret this commandment to be about the flesh, and hence “mutilate” their flesh, Christians understand this commandment to be about the spirit. To support his argument for an allegorical understanding of circumcision, Origen introduces examples from the prophets and the Pentateuch in which circumcision is invoked in reference to other parts of the body, including the heart (Ezek 44:9 and Jer 9:26), ears (Jer 6:10), and lips (Exod 4:13). If one uses allegorical interpretation to understand these passages, he posits, then why not also understand the command to circumcise the foreskin allegorically? Origen claims that if Jews understand the circumcision of the heart, ears, and lips allegorically, then they should understand circumcision of the foreskin allegorically as well.

---

69 Origen, Hom. Gen. 3.4, quoting Paul, Romans 2:29. Compare what he says in his twelfth homily on Jeremiah: “The Jew does not hear the Law in a hidden way. Because of this he is circumcised outwardly, for he does not know that he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision something outward in the flesh. But he who hears of circumcision in a hidden way will be circumcised in secret” (Hom. Jer. 12.13 [SC 238, 44; FC 97, 126]).

70 Origen, Hom. Gen. 3.5 (GCS 6, 45; FC 71, 95-97). See, for example, Origen’s interpretation of Jeremiah 6:10 (“Their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot listen”): “For let your ears be circumcised according to the word of God that they may not receive the voice of the detractor, that they may not hear the words of the slanderer and blasphemer, that they may not be open to false accusations, to a lie, to an irritation. Let them be shut up and closed “lest they hear the judgment of blood” or stand open to lewd songs and sounds of the theater. Let them receive nothing obscene, but let them be turned away from every corrupt scene.”

71 Origen, Hom. Gen. 3.5 (GCS 6, 45): “But if you refer circumcision of lips to allegory and say no less that circumcision of ears is allegorical and figurative, why do you not also inquire after allegory in circumcision of the foreskin?”
Origen then argues that circumcision signifies not a practice of bodily “mutilation” (as Jews understand it) but a practice of bodily chastity. His allegorical understanding of circumcision associates it with ascetic practices that distance the “spiritual” biblical interpreter from the realm of the flesh and prepare him to hear the word of God in its spiritual sense. With this line of argument, he endeavors to appropriate circumcision for exclusive Christian purposes. In the following passage, Origen compares spiritual circumcision to sexual chastity:

But now let us see how also, according to our promise, circumcision of the flesh ought to be received. There is no one who does not know that this member, in which the foreskin is seen to be, serves the natural functions of coitus and procreation. If anyone, therefore, is not troubled in respect to movements of this kind, nor exceeds the bounds set by the laws, nor has known a woman other than his lawful wife, and, in the case of her also, makes

---

72 For Paul’s figuration of circumcision as “mutilation” of the flesh, see Phil 3:2 and Gal 5:12. Commenting on another passage of Origen’s on circumcision and sexual renunciation (from Comm. Rom. 2.9), Elizabeth Clark argues that Origen’s interpretation of circumcision represents an exegetical strategy of “textual implosion.” She writes: “One developed example of ‘textual implosion’ will here suffice to illustrate the principle. In Romans 2:29, Paul speaks of a ‘spiritual circumcision’ that enables Gentile as well as Jewish Christians to be considered God’s chosen people. But what does ‘spiritual circumcision’ mean? Origen’s discussion of this passage illustrates the way in which (seemingly) unrelated texts ‘implode’ onto issues of sexual renunciation. Origen begins by linking ‘spiritual circumcision’ to ‘cutting off the vices of the soul.’ Yet this interpretation, it appears, struck Origen as bland, since he seeks for another. That circumcision was performed on the eighth day gives Origen his interpretive key: the ‘eighth day’ portends the ‘mystery of the future age,’ the age in which there will be ‘no marrying and giving in marriage’ when we will be like ‘angels of God’ (Matt 22:30), ‘castrating’ ourselves ‘for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven’ (Matt 19:12). By adopting such behavior while still walking on this earth, we have our ‘conversation in heaven’ (cf. Phil. 3:20). Thus has the interpretation of ‘spiritual circumcision’ been ‘imploded’ into the topic of sexual renunciation, and the ‘implosion,’ moreover, has received generous assistance from intertextual references.” See Clark, Reading Renunciation, 133-134. See also p. 228 where Clark discusses Origen’s different understanding of circumcision and uncircumcision in his Commentary on First Corinthians 7 (Commentarius in I. Epistolam ad Corinthios, fragmenta). “Documents: Origen on I Corinthians,” ed. Claude Jenkins, Journal of Theological Studies 9 (1908): 231-247, 353-372, 500-514; 10 (1909): 29-51.

73 Philo also offered a “spiritual” and ascetic understanding of circumcision. See Philo, On the Migration of Abraham, 91-92.
use of her in the determined and lawful times for the sake of posterity alone, that man is to be said to be circumcised in the foreskin of his flesh.\textsuperscript{74} Conversely, uncircumcision is aligned with lust and licentiousness: “But that man is uncircumcised in the foreskin of his flesh who falls down in all lasciviousness and everywhere loiters for diverse and illicit embraces, and is carried along unbridled in every whirlpool of lust!”\textsuperscript{75} In this passage, uncircumcision is read as an abandonment of oneself to lust and shameful passions, whereas circumcision is read as a discipline of sexual chastity that prepares one for (and is a result of) the proper understanding of scripture.\textsuperscript{76} “True circumcision of the foreskin of the flesh” is, for Origen, the exclusive domain of the pure and chaste “virgin brides of Christ.”\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74} Hom Gen 3.6 (GCS 6, 46-47): \textit{Nunc vero secundum pollicitationem nostram, qualiter etiam carnis circumcisio suscipi debeat, videamus. Membrum hoc, in quo praeputium videtur esse, officiis naturalibus coitus et gernationis deservire, nemo qui dubitet. Si qui igitur erga huiusmodi motus non importunus existat, nec statutos legibus terminos superet nec aliam feminam quam coniugem legitimam noverit et in ea quoque ips posteritatis tantummodo causa certis et legitimis temporibus agat, iste circumcisus praeputio carnis suae dicendus est.}

\textsuperscript{75} Hom. Gen. 3.6 (GCS 6, 47): \textit{Qui vero in omnem lasciviam proruit et et diversos et illicitos passim pendet amplexus atque in omnem libidinis gurgitem fertur infrenis, iste incircumcisus est praeputio carnis suae.}

\textsuperscript{76} Origen develops this theme by registering the ways in which the circumcision of the lips and heart signify bodily chastity and uncircumcision signifies sexual depravity: “Let the eye also be circumcised lest it lust for things belonging to another, lest it look ‘to lust after a woman.’ For that man is uncircumcised in his eyes whose gaze, lustful and curious, wanders about in respect to the figures of women” (3.6). And: “If there is anyone who burns with obscene desires and shameful passions and, to speak briefly, who ‘commits adultery in his heart,’ this man is ‘uncircumcised in heart.’ But he also is ‘uncircumcised in heart’ who holds heretical views in his mind and arranges blasphemous assertions against knowledge of Christ in his heart” (3.6). In this last passage, note the association of sexual immorality and heresy.

\textsuperscript{77} Hom. Gen. 3.6 (GCS 6, 47): “But the Church of Christ, strengthened by the grace of him who has been crucified for it, abstains not only from illicit and impious beds but also from those allowed and legitimate, and flourishes like the virgin bride of Christ with pure and chaste virgins in whom true circumcision of the foreskin of the flesh has been performed and truly God’s covenant and the eternal covenant is preserved in their flesh.”
Addressing a hypothetical Jew in this same homily on Genesis, Origen insists that the Jew “compare” the Christian “spiritual” account of circumcision to the “Jewish fables and disgusting stories.” Origen states, “See whether in those stories of yours or in these which are preached in the Church of Christ, circumcision is observed according to God’s command. Do not even you yourself perceive and understand that this circumcision of the Church is honorable, holy, worthy of God; that that of yours is indecent, foul, shameful, and displayed as obscene (κακέμφατων) both in condition and appearance!” Here, Origen suggests that circumcision as observed by the Jews constitutes an obscene gesture and signals a debased sexuality. He urges Christians to shun this Jewish practice and instead observe a “spiritual” circumcision that, in its highest form, represents a renunciation of sexual practices and an embrace of virginity.

In his fifth homily on Luke, Origen uses the story of the silence of Zechariah (Luke 1:22) as an occasion to castigate the Jews again for the “mute and dumb” ways in which they interpret scriptural commandments about circumcision. Origen writes:

Consider the Jewish practices. They lack words and reason. The Jews cannot give a reason for their practices. Realize that what happened in the past in Zechariah is a type of what is fulfilled in the Jews even to this day. Their circumcision is like an empty sign. Unless the meaning of circumcision is

---

78 Hom. Gen. 3.6 (GCS 6, 47).

79 Origen, Hom. Gen. 3.6 (GCS 6, 48-49). Confer, si placet, haec nostra cum vestris Iudaicis fabulis et narrationibus foetidis et vide, si in illis vestris an in his, quae in Christi ecclesia praedicantur, circumcisio divinitus observes; si non etiam ipse sentis et intelligis hanc ecclesiae circumcisionem honestam, sanctam, Deo dignam, illam vestram turpem, foedam, deformem, ipso etiam habitu et aspectu κακέμφατον praeferentem. Note that in Rufinus’ Latin translation of this homily the Greek word κακέμφατον remains untranslated. The dictionary entry defines κακέμφατος as “obscenity, or obscene expression” (E. A. Sophocles, Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 617.
provided, it remains an empty sign, a mute deed. Passover and other feasts are empty signs rather than the truth. To this very day the people of Israel are mute and dumb. The people who rejected the Word from their midst could not be anything but mute and dumb.80

In this passage Origen strategically links the (fleshly) practice of circumcision to the (fleshly) practice of literalist interpretation by depicting Jewish circumcision as an “empty sign.” Because Jews interpret circumcision according to the “bare letter,” he claims, the deed is void of meaningful content, and thus it fails to signify any spiritual truth. According to Origen, this futile observance of the Jews is akin to their scriptural interpretation: in the end, it remains “mute and dumb,” producing no meaning and conveying no truth, a waste. In this way, Origen maps what he views as the futility of Jewish interpretation onto the Jewish body.

By depicting the fleshly and material consequences of Jewish literalism, Origen thus theorizes Jewish hermeneutics as a fruitless carnal practice; similarly, by positing a correspondence between Jewish circumcision and Jewish interpretation, Origen theorizes Jewish difference as simultaneously theoretical and embodied. His mapping of Jewish interpretive practice onto the body serves in this instance to naturalize Jewish difference. Moreover, his use of Phil 3:2-3 and Rom 2:28-29, in his third homily on Genesis, indicates the way in which Origen utilizes select Pauline phrases to authorize the distinction he draws between Jewish and Christian interpretations of circumcision. In the next section, I consider Origen’s use of Paul as an authorizing figure not only for subordination of Jewish interpretation and practice but also for the rhetorical defense of Christian interpretive superiority.

**Origen Rewrites Paul**

I submit that Origen is the first Christian writer to present Paul as the authorizing figure for this particular construction of Jewish-Christian difference as a difference of praxis—both interpretive and embodied. Origen repeatedly portrays Paul as his “source” for ideas about Jewish literalism and Jewish lust. In the past, scholars such as Henri de Lubac and Henri Crouzel have examined continuities between Origen and Paul in order to defend Origen’s theology and bring him more in line with (later) Christian orthodoxy.\(^8\)\(^1\) In contrast to scholars such as these, I consider how Origen reworks Pauline ideas in order to depict Paul as the original and legitimating source for his representation of Jewish literalism and Jewish carnality.

As we saw in the passage from his first homily on Exodus with which I began this chapter, Origen frequently presents Paul’s spiritual interpretation as the preferred alternative to Jewish interpretations. Similarly, in his twenty-third homily on Numbers, Origen counsels his congregation on the proper interpretation of the

---

\(^8\)1 Henri de Lubac and Henri Crouzel have argued that Origen portrays Paul as the architect of Christian figural interpretation in general. De Lubac writes that in Paul, Origen “finds two things: the principle of his exegesis and a few examples of its application. The letter kills, but the spirit brings life; the law is spiritual: it contains the shadow of goods to come; all that happens to the Israelites happens to them in figure and was recorded for our instruction: that is the principle” (Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1950, 2007], 78-79). Crouzel makes a similar claim when he writes that “[t]he principle elements of Origen’s theory of exegesis can be found in the Pauline letters” as can Origen’s justification of the “spiritual exegesis of the Old [Testament]” (Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A. S. Worrall [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989], 66-67). He then lists several Pauline passages that are central to Origen’s interpretive theory, including 1 Cor 10:1-11, Gal 4:21-31, and 2 Cor 3:6-18. Whereas de Lubac and Crouzel emphasize continuities between Origen and Paul’s views of scriptural interpretation, I (following Clements, McGuckin, and Gorday) wish to highlight some of the instances in which Origen diverges from Paul’s text and transforms Pauline terms such as “spirit,” “flesh,” and “letter” to explicate the differences between Jewish and Christian identities.
observance of the new moon by stating, “If these things are considered according to the letter, they will seem more superstitious than religious. However, the apostle Paul knew that the law does not speak of these things and did not ordain that rite which the Jews observe.”\[82\] Paul’s biblical interpretation is presented here as the foil to Jewish interpretation. Furthermore, in a homily on the story of Abimelech’s pursuit of Sarah in Genesis 20, Origen writes,

> If anyone wishes to hear and understand these words literally he ought to gather with the Jews rather than with the Christians. But if he wishes to be a Christian and a disciple of Paul, let him hear Paul saying that “the Law is spiritual” and declaring that these words are “allegorical” when the law speaks of Abraham and his wife and sons (Gal 4.22-24).\[83\]

In this passage, Origen cites Paul’s figural interpretation of Hagar and Sarah from Galatians 4 to authorize his own method of allegorical interpretation and to differentiate this method from that of the Jews.

Similarly, in Contra Celsum, Origen deploys Paul’s statement in 2 Cor 3:6—“the letter kills”—to bolster his defense of Christian figural interpretation. Reading together 2 Corinthians 3:6 with passages from Ezekiel 20, Origen writes:

> We maintain that the law has a twofold interpretation, one literal and the other spiritual . . . and it is not so much we as God speaking in one of the prophets [Ezek. 20:25], who described the law that is understood literally as “judgments that are not good” and “statutes that are not good”; and in the same prophet God is represented as saying that the law that is understood spiritually is “judgments that are good” and “statutes that are good” [Ezek. 20:19-24]. The prophet is obviously not making contradictory statements in the same passage. It is consistent with this when Paul also says that “the letter

\[82\] Origen, Homilies on Numbers 23 5.1 (SC 126, 128). Haec si secundum litteram considerentur, non tam religiosa quam supersitiosa uidebuntur; sed sciebat apostolus Paulus quia non de his loquitur lex neque illum ritum, qui Iudaieis obseruari uide tur. See also Origen, Hom. Num. 11.1.10.

\[83\] Origen, Hom. Gen 6.1 (GCS 6, 66; FC 71, 121-122)
In this passage, Origen uses Paul to authorize his subordination of literal interpretation ("the letter that kills") to spiritual interpretation ("the spirit gives life"). Furthermore, utilizing the prophet Ezekiel against the Jews, Origen argues for a consistency between Ezekiel’s view of the law and Paul’s. As we have seen in other passages, Origen frequently equates the death-dealing “letter” with Jewish literalism. I suggest that Origen’s hierarchical structuring of the relation between Christian and Jewish biblical interpretation depends, in part, upon his (mis)representation of Paul as a Christian supersessionist. Origen synchronizes phrases from a variety of Paul’s letters and letters attributed to Paul in an effort to authorize his “displacement” of Jewish interpretive practices and his portrayal of Jews as “fleshly.” In the following passage, from his commentary on Romans, Origen juxtaposes several Pauline (and so-called Pauline) dyadic pairs (from Romans, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews) that he wishes to associate with the Jew/Christian dichotomy. He utilizes this juxtaposition to depict Paul as the original “author” of


87 Ruth Clements (“(Re)Constructing Paul,” 165) maintains that in Origen’s works, oppositions such as Jew/Christian and flesh/spirit come to stand for each other and for other Pauline dyadic pairs, including “outward” and “inward” Jews (Rom 2.28-29) and “letter” and “spirit” (2 Cor 3:6). In Book Four of *On First Principles*, phrases such as “Israel according to the flesh” (1 Cor 10:18) and the “the letter
the rhetorical association of Jewishness with literalism and fleshliness. Origen writes, “In the entire preceding text of the epistle [to the Romans] the Apostle had shown how religion has been transferred from the Jews to the Gentiles, from circumcision to faith, from the letter to the spirit, from shadow to truth, from carnal observance to spiritual observance.” In this passage, Origen associates Jews with the subordinated term of each pair: circumcision, the “letter,” shadow, and “carnal observance,” but he links Gentile (Christian) identity to the privileged term of each pair: faith, spirit, truth, and “spiritual observance.” His strategic collapsing of separate Pauline passages thus transforms Paul’s writing into a hierarchical structure in which Jews are systematically associated with the devalued terms (flesh, shadow) and Gentiles/Christians are, by contrast, consistently linked with terms of more positive valence (spirit, truth).

In his article, “Origen on the Jews,” John McGuckin registers the ways in which Origen draws attention to Paul’s negative statements about Jews and Israel.

---

88 Origen, Comm. Rom. 9.1.1. Cum per omnem textum epistulae in superioribus docuisset apostolus, quomodo a Iudaeis ad gentes, a circumcisiione ad fidem, a littera ad spiritum, ab umbra ad veritatem, ab observatia carnali ad observatiam spiritalem religionis summa translata sit, et haec ita futura prophetice ostendisset vocibus designata. (Fontes Christiani 22).

89 Here I am influenced by the thinking of Ruth Clements, who writes, “Because [Origen] brings together diverse texts which pose differently nuanced oppositions—flesh/spirit, letter/spirit, shadow/heavenly things, above/below, life/death, ‘outward’ / ‘inward’ Jews, circumcision of the flesh/circumcision of the heart, within the law/without the law, slavery/freedom—all these oppositions come to stand for one another. In Origen’s reading, ‘flesh’ must always exist in opposition to ‘spirit,’ so that ‘Israel according to the flesh,’ by whom Paul means the biblical Israelites, must exist in opposition to ‘Israel according to the Spirit,’ a phrase Paul himself never uses.” (Clements, “(Re)Constructing Paul,” 165).
while downplaying Paul’s more positive statements about Israel. In a detailed
analysis of Origen’s Pauline quotations and his censorship of texts concerning the
priority of Israel, McGuckin argues:

There are four such Pauline passages which Origen uses with a high average
level of frequency (some 30 to 40 citations each throughout his *opera*). These
are Romans 2:5, on the refusal of the Jews to repent (26 citations); 2
Corinthians 3:13-15, on how the Jewish understanding of Scripture is
hindered by a veil over their minds (30 citations); Romans 2:2, on how real
circumcision is a matter of the heart not the flesh (32 citations); and
Colossians 2:16-18, on how the observance of festivals is outmoded and
irrelevant (38 citations). Once again all these apologetic concerns fit exactly
the third-century Caesarean context, particularly the last, which also evidences
Origen’s most abundant use. Origen has clearly been ready to alter the tenor
of St. Paul himself, his master theologian, to firm up the apologetic at those
instances the Apostle might be seen to have given too much away because of
his love and respect for Judaism.90

McGuckin then uses this data on Origen’s quotations of Paul to draw a conclusion
about Origen’s relations with Jews of his own time. He notes that “[t]he personal
reshaping by Origen of the Pauline Jewish apologetic suggests someone whose
dialogue with the Jewish tradition in Caesarea had been neither successful nor
particularly happy.”91 Writing in defense of both Christian interpretive methods and
the Christianization of Jewish scripture, Origen thus deploys and transforms Pauline

90 John McGuckin, “Origen on the Jews,” 12-13. Peter Gorday has performed a similar analysis of
Origen’s use of Paul; he concludes that “Origen constructed his understanding of Paul around key
passages: Rom 9:6-24; Rom 8:18-39; 1 Cor 15:20-28, 35-58; Col 1:15-20; Phil 2:5-11 appear most
often in Origen’s works” and that “1 Corinthians and Romans often appear together” (Gorday, “Paulus
Origenianus”, in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, ed. William S. Babcock [Dallas: Southern Methodist
University Press, 1990], 141).

91 McGuckin, “Origen on the Jews,” 13. Note that McGuckin’s conclusion counters those of a variety
of other scholars who view Origen’s relations with Jews to be positive, sympathetic, and reciprocal.
Nicholas de Lange, for example, argues that Origen “is excellently placed to give a sympathetic
outsider’s view of the Jews of his day and of their relations with their non-Jewish neighbors” (de
Lange, *Origen and the Jews*, 1).
language in his endeavor to invalidate the interpretive practices of his Jewish contemporaries. Whatever the historical relation between Origen and his Jewish contemporaries, the effect of his rhetoric is to drive a wedge between Jewish and Christian identity, practice, and hermeneutics.

Paul, the Ascetic Interpreter: The Commentary on Romans

Thus far, we have seen how Origen contends that Jews live and read “according to the flesh” and thus misinterpret scripture and the Jewish law by attending to the “fleshly aspect of the law.” Christians, by contrast, have replaced Jews as the rightful heirs of the law of Moses due to (Christian) spiritual understanding of the law, he argues. We have also noted how Origen reshapes Paul’s language to shore up his association of Jewish identity with literalist interpretation, on the one hand, and Christian identity with spiritual interpretation, on the other. In this section, I analyze passages from The Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, as well as two homilies (on Genesis and Luke), to suggest that Origen understands Paul not only as the paradigmatic biblical exegete but also as an exemplary ascetic. Indeed, for Origen, Paul’s capacity to subject his flesh to the

---


spirit lies at the root of his spiritual interpretive practice. On Origen’s model, spiritual understanding of scripture is linked inextricably to a practice of spiritual discipline. Origen’s encomium to Paul and his spiritual discipline, however, often coincides with his denigration of Jewish exegesis and Jewish sexual praxis.

In Origen’s *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Paul serves as the paradigmatic spiritual interpreter who refuses to be seduced by the literal and the carnal. Drawing on Pauline phrases in 2 Corinthians and Galatians, Origen writes of Paul: “In him who was always carrying around the death of Jesus in his own body, certainly the flesh never lusted against the spirit, but rather the flesh had been subjected to him since it had been put to death in the likeness of Christ’s death.”

For Origen, Paul’s subjugation of the flesh by the spirit, accomplished by “carrying around the death of Jesus in his body,” serves as a model for the subjugation of literal Jewish interpretive practices by spiritual Christian ones. Such a subjugation of flesh by spirit is necessary for Christian biblical interpretation, for, as Origen explains, “it is the flesh that lusts against the spirit; and as long as the flesh pours forth its lusts, it impedes the purity of the spirit and it clouds the sincerity of prayer.”

On this model, Paul’s ability to capture and convey the spiritual meaning of the biblical text derives from his ascetic practice. That is, Paul’s personal subjugation of the flesh enables his hermeneutic subjugation of (fleshly) Jewish interpretive practices. Correspondingly,

---

94 Origen, *Comm. Rom.* Prologue 4. Origen claims that when Paul discusses the war of flesh against spirit (Gal 5:17), he does not refer to his own experience but rather adopts a “persona of a weaker person” *Comm. Rom.* 6.9.11 (FC 41).

Paul’s adherence to spiritual hermeneutics informs his bodily practice because it enables him to interpret problematic biblical passages (such as those dealing with sex and reproduction) allegorically.

Origen suggests that by imitating Paul’s spiritual discipline, Christians of his own day can learn to replicate Paul’s spiritual interpretive practice. Indeed, for Origen, these two projects—the subjugation of fleshly interpretation and the subjugation of one’s flesh—go hand in hand. Such is the case in Origen’s allegorical and ascetic interpretation of “sacrifices” in Leviticus. Origen writes:

Those who put to death their own members from the incentive of lust and rage, and who possess actions in their body that are pleasing to God are offering in a rational manner a sacrifice that is living, holy, and pleasing to God. Moreover, they are fulfilling the law of the sacrifices, which is contained in Leviticus, according to the spiritual understanding.96

In this passage, Origen privileges a spiritual, “rational,” and ascetic interpretation of the Levitical sacrifices over a “literal” one. This spiritual interpretation, moreover, is borne out by a bodily practice: “putting to death” one’s members from the dangerous passions of “lust” and “rage.” Here, Origen closely relates spiritual interpretation to a practice of bodily self-control (σωφρόνησις) such that a spiritual hermeneutics is theorized, in part, as a bodily discipline.97

96 Origen, Comm. Rom. 9.1.3 (FC 192). Hi enim, qui membra sua mortificant ab incentivo libidinis et furoris et actus corporis sui Deo placitos habent, hostiam viventem, sanctam, placentem Deo rationabiliiter offerunt et legem sacrificiorum, quae in Levitico lata est, secundum spiritalem intelligentiam complent.

97 I have been influenced here by the thinking of Karen Jo Torjesen who has argued that Origen envisions a spiritual and pedagogical transformation of the interpreter within the exegetical process. She does not, however, consider this spiritual transformation as a bodily transformation but as a rational, theological, and pedagogical progression. She writes, “The progress of the soul toward perfection, participation in the Logos—in his universal pedagogy—is made possible through exegesis
Often Origen’s exhortation to follow Paul in his spiritual bodily discipline and allegorical interpretive practices is accompanied by a denigration of corresponding Jewish practices. For example, in his thirty-ninth homily on the Gospel of Luke, Origen praises Paul for his capacity for spiritual understanding while, simultaneously, slandering Jews for literalist interpretive practices that promote sexual licentiousness. Origen claims that, due to their affinity for the flesh, Jews often interpret scripture to legitimate indulgence in sex and to promote human reproduction. Origen comments on the story in Luke 20 in which the Sadducees pose a question to Jesus about a woman with seven husbands (to which Jesus responds, “In the resurrection…they shall neither marry nor be given in marriage, but will be like angels in heaven” [Luke 20:35-36]). Origen uses this story as an occasion to castigate Sadducees, that is, Jews, for their biblical interpretive practices, claiming that they interpret statements such as “Blessed are the sons of your womb” (Dt 7:13) and “Your wife is like a fruitful vine” (Ps 128:3) as applicable to the time of the resurrection.98 According to Origen, “Jews understand all of [these scriptural blessings] corporeally.”99 Paul, by contrast, interprets these biblical blessings spiritually and thus serves as a positive example to later Christian exegetes: “Paul,” writes Origen, “interpreted all of these

---

98 See Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 194 for an analysis of this passage.

blessings, which have been placed in the Law, spiritually. He knew that they are not carnal.”

Elsewhere in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Origen further develops this theme of Jewish ‘fleshliness’ and Jewish sexual indulgence by linking it with accusations of Jewish porneia. Commenting on Romans 2:22 (“You who forbid adultery, do you commit adultery?”), Origen creates an analogy between Jewish hermeneutics and Jewish sexual practices. Addressing Jewish exegetes, he writes:

“You who forbid adultery commit adultery” in the synagogue of the people of God by introducing a corrupt and adulterous word of doctrine to it; and you join that doctrine to the letter of the law, which is outward. . . . You therefore who forbid adultery, you commit such a grave adultery that you introduce an adulterous understanding to it.

Here, Origen understands the word “adultery” as referring to Jewish deviance not only in sexual matters but also in textual matters, and he plays on the double meaning. Considered in this way, adultery is imagined not only as something Jews do with their bodies but also as something they do with their sacred texts. For Origen, Jewish understanding is an “adulterous understanding”; it entails literalist readings, false interpretations, and flagrant misuse of texts. In this passage, Origen reworks certain “Pauline building blocks” to construct Jews as sexually and textually corruptive. Jewish exegetes are, on Origen’s model, guilty of “adulterating”

---

100 Origen, Hom. Luc. 39.

101 Origen, Comm. Rom. 2.11.5-6. Qui dicis non moechandum, in congregam populi Dei adulterium committis, sermonem doctrinae pravum et adulterinum ei superducens, et collocas eam cum legis littera, quae foris est. . . . Qui ergo negas moechandum, tam grave adulterium committis, ut adulterinum sensum introducas ad eam.

102 Clements, “(Re)Constructing Paul,” 152.
scripture (being “unfaithful” to the word of God) on the basis of their literalist interpretation and textual interpolation. For Origen, such fraudulent treatment of sacred texts also produces a “lax” morality in regard to sexuality and marriage.

Accusations of Jewish porneia also lie at the heart of Origen’s figural interpretation of the story of Lot and his daughters in his fifth homily on Genesis. Origen contends that this troublesome story necessitates a spiritual interpretation, for “‘the law is spiritual’ and the things which happened to the ancients ‘happened figuratively.’” On Origen’s model, Lot represents “the rational understanding and the manly soul”; he is a “figure of the Law” itself. Lot’s wife, however, who cannot resist the temptation to look back, “represents the flesh,” which “always looks to vices” and “looks backward and seeks after pleasures.” Lot’s daughters represent “Judah” and “Samaria”—“the people divided into two parts made the two daughters of the Law.” Elaborating the links between Judah and Samaria, on the one hand, and Lot’s incestuous daughters, on the other, Origen casts Judeans and Samaritans as carnal interpreters: “Those daughters desiring carnal offspring…depriving their father of sense and making him sleep, that is, covering and obscuring his spiritual

---

103 For more on Origen’s accusations of Jewish textual interpolation, see Ch. 3.

104 Origen, Hom. Gen. 5.2 (GCS 6, 59-60; FC 71, 114). In his allegorical interpretation of this story, Origen argues that the regions in which the “law” [Lot] dwells represent the Jews: “A city is so named from the manner of life of the multitude, because it orders and holds together the lives of many in one place. These, therefore, who live by the Law have a small and petty manner of life as long as they understand the Law literally. For there is nothing great in observing Sabbaths and new moons and circumcision of the flesh and distinctions between foods in a fleshly manner. But if someone should begin to understand spiritually, these same observances, which in the literal sense were small and petty, in a spiritual sense are not small, but great” (Hom. Gen. 5.5; GCS 6, 63; FC 71, 118).
understanding, draw only carnal understanding from him.” Origen thus associates the sexual deviance of Lot’s daughters with the interpretive deviance of Jews and Samaritans, who “obscure” the spiritual and rational interpretation and produce “carnal offspring” in its place. As in *On First Principles* and the *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Origen here develops and embellishes his rhetorical association of Jewishness, carnal interpretive practice, and sexual licentiousness.

In his interpretation of the story of Lot and his daughters, in particular, Origen associates spiritual interpretation of scripture with rationality and masculinity (Lot, “the manly soul”) and “carnal” interpretation with flesh and femininity (Lot’s wife and daughters). Indeed, Origen’s presentation of this story introduces gender into the hierarchical structuring of Christian spiritual interpretation over Jewish literalism. Read as feminine, fleshly, and sexually deviant, Jews, with their literal interpretative practices, stand in stark contrast to the masculine rationality of Christians and their spiritual hermeneutics. On this model, practices of spiritual discipline, bodily self-control, and figural interpretation comprise a stylized performance of masculine σωφροσύνη. In other words, adherence to a spiritual hermeneutic and a

---

105 Origen, *Hom. Gen.* 5.5. (GCS 6, 64). Origen continues: “Thence they conceive; thence they give birth to such sons as their father neither perceives nor recognizes. For that was neither the understanding nor the will of the Law to beget carnally.”

106 Commenting on Origen’s homily on Lot, Ruth Clements writes, “In this sermon, the history of ‘carnal’ Israel is mapped onto the weakness of Lot’s wife and the incestuous activity of his daughters, to show not only that Israel’s interpretations obscure the truth of the Law, but that Israel deliberately sought to follow the path of carnal interpretation in the course of her own history . . . It should be noted that, although the alliance of Israel according to the flesh with ‘literal’ interpretation is essentially the same as that which we saw already in *On First Principles*, the mapping of this alliance onto the incestuous behavior of Lot’s daughters makes the non-spiritual carnality of Israel’s (anti-Logos) interpretive practice more strongly and persuasively explicit than does *Peri Archon*” (Clements, “*Peri Pascha,*” 69).
corresponding discipline of the body constitute, in Origen’s view, a practice of masculinity (in which Paul serves as the exemplary model). Here, Origen utilizes gender “to think with” insofar as he deploys gendered categories to naturalize the distinction between Jewish and Christian identity and between Jewish and Christian hermeneutics.

Gender, Power, and Jewish-Christian Difference

Origen thus appeals to differences in gendered performances, sexual practices, and interpretive methods to describe Jewish-Christian difference. His claim for Christian superiority with regard to Jews, moreover, is imbricated in a corresponding claim for Christian rationality, spirituality, subjection of the flesh, and bodily self-control. What seemed at first to be a defense of the merits of allegorical

107 See Virginia Burrus, “Begotten Not Made”: Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Burrus explores how manhood was reconceived as more closely aligned with spiritual practices during the Trinitarian controversies in the late fourth century. She writes, “The emergent corpus of ‘patristic’ writings, authored predominantly by ascetic bishops deeply involved in the Trinitarian controversies of their day, now stands on the near side of a chronological watershed that it initially helped to create: receding is the venerable figure of the civic leader and familial patriarch; approaching is a man marked as a spiritual father, by virtue of his place in the patrilineal chain of apostolic succession, and also as the leader of a new citizenry, fighting heroically in contest of truth in which (as Gregory of Nyssa puts it) the weapon of choice is the ‘sword of the Word’” (Burrus, “Begotten Not Made,” 4-5). My presentation of Origen’s work suggests that this alignment of practices of spiritual interpretation and “maleness” was already underway in the third century.

interpretation over literal interpretation is exposed here as part of a larger project to create power relations and produce differences in identity, gender, and sexuality.

In the following passage, Karen Jo Torjesen makes a similar argument when she suggests that Origen’s “rhetoric” of spiritual and literal interpretation is implicated in a wider project to produce and stabilize Christian power. She writes:

Christian exegesis used the spiritual sense to flesh out Christian theology and build a Christian exegetical tradition. However, attention to its value for theology should not distract us from the tremendous impact of its exegetical rhetoric in constructing the power relations between Jews and Christians. . . More is going on than creating meaning, interpretation also creates power relations. . . While the rhetoric of a spiritual sense creates a Christian meaning for the Jewish scriptures, the rhetoric of a literal sense establishes the power relations between Jews and Christians and constructs the Jews as ignorant, stubborn, and blind.109

In my analysis, I have argued that Origen’s representation of Jewish literalism constructs Jews not only as “ignorant, stubborn, and blind” but also as sexually depraved, feminized, and misguided attachment to “works of the flesh.” If we imagine Origen as writing within a situation of cultural hybridity and religious mingling, where the lines between Christian and Jew are blurred and contested, then we might understand Origen’s multiple appeals to Jewish-Christian difference as attempts to establish fixed boundaries between Jewish and Christian communities.

109 Karen Jo Torjesen, “The Rhetoric of the Literal Sense,” 640-641. Torjesen here acknowledges the influence of Stephen Mailloux’s Rhetorical Power (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). She writes that “[h]e argues that the practices of interpretation accomplish far more than exegesis, they are also powerful rhetorical strategies to either promote change or stabilize a tradition, exegesis and rhetoric are inseparable. Exegetical homilies and learned commentaries are as much rhetoric as they are exegesis, they debate the issues of their day, they appeal to deeply held communal values and the affirm the authority of the exegete” (635).
His deployment of a “discourse of sexuality” thus functions as a way to fortify these boundaries and depict Jews as sexual and textual corruptors.

I suggest that discourses of sexuality—with their images of permeability, penetration, and adulteration—provide a particularly useful way to theorize cultural interaction in ancient times as well as modern. As theorists of colonialism (Ann Laura Stoler, Robert J. C. Young) have argued, discourses of sexuality often are invoked to sexualize religious and cultural borderlines and to heighten the threat posed by border-crossing. Moreover, as Ann Laura Stoler has argued in her work on colonial cultures, sex is often deployed as a polyvalent symbol for other (not necessarily sexual) asymmetrical power relations. She writes: “Sexuality, then, serves as a loaded metaphor for domination. . . . Sexual asymmetries convey what is ‘really’ going on elsewhere, at another political epicenter. They are tropes to depict other centers of power.” Taking up Stoler’s idea that discourses of sexuality serve as overdetermined modes by which to express differences of power, and applying this idea to Origen’s reading of Jew

Christians. That is, he produces Jewish-Christian difference, in part, by recourse to more entrenched and “naturalized” notions of sexual virtue and vice. The distinction


111 Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power, 44.
of spiritual Christian reading practice is displaced onto a distinction of sexual morality.

*The Seduction of the Literal:* The Commentary on the Song of Songs

In closing, I wish to problematize the absolute distinction I have been drawing between “literal” and “spiritual” interpretation by attending to some of the passages in which Origen appeals to the “bare letter” of scripture. Although Origen consistently prefers “spiritual” interpretations over those “according to the bare letter,” literal, bodily, and historical readings are not to be shunned entirely. Often the literal language of scripture demands no spiritual interpretation whatsoever: “We must assert,” writes Origen, “that in regard to some things the historical fact is true; as that Abraham was buried in the double cave at Hebron . . . and that Jerusalem is the chief city of Judea.” Indeed, he continues, “the passages which are historically true are far more numerous than those which are composed with purely spiritual meanings.”

According to Origen’s theory of interpretation, the “bare letter” of scripture itself is capable of seducing “simple” readers by its beauty; this charm of the literal, however, can mislead the reader. Luckily, Origen argues, scripture contains “certain stumbling blocks . . . and hindrances and impossibilities [that are] inserted in the midst of the

---

112 David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity*. Dawson writes, “I think that it is more accurate to say that because Origen does not operate with simple oppositions or dualisms, he can protect and subvert literalism at the same time. This simultaneity and scope lie at the very heart of his conception of spiritual transformation that enhances rather than undermines identity” (232 n.14).

law . . . in order that we may not be completely drawn away by the sheer attractiveness of the language.”

On Origen’s model, this seduction of the literal constitutes a danger for the interpreter, especially one who lives according to the flesh. No place is this danger more present than in a text like the Song of Songs. In his Prologue to his Commentary on the Song of Songs, Origen writes,

If any man who lives only after the flesh should approach [this text—the Song of Songs], to such a one the reading of this Scripture will be the occasion of no small hazard and danger. For he, not knowing how to hear love’s language in purity and with chaste ears, will twist the whole manner of his hearing of it away from the inner spiritual man and on to the outward and carnal; and he will be turned away from the spirit to the flesh, and will foster carnal desires in himself, and it will seem to be the divine scriptures that are thus urging and egging him on to fleshly lust! For this reason, therefore, I advise and counsel everyone who is not yet rid of the vexations of flesh and blood and has not ceased to feel the passion of his bodily nature, to refrain completely from reading this little book and the things that will be said about it.

In this passage, Origen maintains that proper spiritual interpretation of scripture, especially of an “advanced” and dangerous text such as the Song of Songs, requires a proper behavior and attitude toward the body; practices of sexual chastity and bodily

---

114 Origen, Princ. 4.2.9 (SC 268, 336). ἐνια μὴ πάντη ὑπὸ τῆς λέξεως ἐλκύσεως τὸ ὀγγοῦν ἀκρατοῦ ἑχούσης.
115 Origen, Comm. Cant. Prologue 1.6. Origène: Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques, trans. Luc Brésard and Henri Crouzel, SC 375 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1991), 84: Si vero aliquis accesserit, qui secundum carnem tantummodo vir est, huic tali non parum ex hoc scriptura discriminis periculique nascetur. Audire enim pure et castis auribus amoris nomina nesciens, ab interiore homine ad exteriorem et carnalem virum omnen deflectet auditum, et a spiritu convertetur ad carnem nutritiae in semet ipso concupiscertias carnales, et occasione divinae scripturae commoveri et incitari videbitur ad libidinem carnis. Ob hoc ergo moneo, et consilium do omni qui nondum carnis et sanguinis molestis caret, neque ab affectu naturae materialis abscedit, ut a lectione libelli huius eorumque quae in eum dicentur penitus temperet. See a similar passage a few pages later, in which Origen states: “There have been some who did not understand what was said about love in the sense in which it was written, but took occasion from it to rush into carnal sins and down the steep places of immodesty, either by taking some suggestions and recommendations out of what had been written, as we said above, or else by using what the ancients wrote as a cloak for their own lack of self-control” (Comm. Cant. Prologue 2 [SC 375, 84]).
purity prepare the mind for hearing “love’s language” in a spiritual way. Danger arises when the interpreter has abandoned the spirit for the flesh; for this one, the Song of Songs will serve not as an occasion to advance spiritual understanding but as a provocation to fleshly passion. The “simple” reader of this “little book” will, in Origen’s words, “rush into carnal sins and down the steep places of immodesty, either by taking some suggestions and recommendations out of what had been written . . . or else by using what the ancients wrote as a cloak for their own lack of self-control.”

Although Origen does not specifically associate this dangerous reading with Jewish interpretive practices in this passage, he does argue that spiritual understanding depends upon the proper preparation of the body through chastity. For him, allegorical practice, which stakes the Christian claim to the spiritual meaning of the text, is linked to a restrained and renounced sexuality.

Origen makes this link between chastity and allegory explicit in his discussion of the Song’s use of amor (ερως). First he argues that “divine Scripture” wants to avoid mentioning amor because it becomes “an occasion of falling for its readers”;

116 Comm. Cant. 2.2 (SC 375, 90): … fuerint tamen aliqui qui de his non ita acceperint ut scriptum est, sed occasione eorum quae de amore dicta corruerunt, sive ex his quae scripta erant, ut supra memoravimus, admonitiones quasdam atque incitamenta sumentes, sive incontinentiae suae velamen scripta veterum praefertes.

117 Origen does speak approvingly about the “Hebrews” and their use of the Song of Songs. He writes, “For they say that with the Hebrews also care is taken to allow no one even to hold this book in his hands who has not reached a full and ripe age. And there is another practice too that we have received from them—namely, that all the Scriptures should be delivered to boys by teachers and wise men, while at the same time the four that they call deuteroseis—that is to say, the beginning of Genesis, in which the creation of the world is described; the first chapters of Ezekiel, which tell about the cherubim; the end of that same book, which contains the building of the Temple; and this book of the Song of Songs—should be reserved for study till the last.” (Comm. Cant. 1.7 [SC 375, 84-86]).
instead, scripture usually prefers *caritas* (ςαγγαπη) over *amor*.\(^{118}\) Then Origen notes that although scripture can speak of becoming a “passionate lover (amator) of the beauty” of Wisdom, it never describes Isaac’s love of Rebecca as passionate. If this were the case, “some unseemly passion on the part of the saints of God might have been inferred from the words, especially by those who do not know how to rise up from the letter to the spirit.”\(^{119}\) By yielding to the seduction of the “letter,” the literalist interpreter risks a carnal reading of scripture, and this carnal reading, in turn, propels him into licentious acts.\(^{120}\) The spiritual reader, however, rises above the ignoble letter and indecorous acts; for this one, practices of bodily self-control and practices of spiritual interpretation mutually reinforce each other.

For Origen, the Song of Songs represents one of the most “advanced” texts of scripture and must be read only by the spiritually mature: “[A] man may come to it when his manner of life has been purified, and he has learned to know the difference between things corruptible and things incorruptible.”\(^{121}\) A seductive text such as this is inappropriate for simple, literalist readers, but for the spiritual interpreter, it provides the occasion to “purify” the soul “in all its actions and habits” and to


\(^{119}\) *Comm. Cant.* Prologue 2.23 (SC 375, 108): *Nam si dixisset quia adadamavit vel Isaac Rebeccam vel Iacob Rachel, passio utique aliqua indecora per haec verba erga sanctos Dei homines potuisset intelligi, apud eos praecipue qui nesciunt a littera conscendere ad spiritum.*

\(^{120}\) *Comm. Cant.* Prologue 2.2 (SC 375, 90).

\(^{121}\) *Comm. Cant.* Prologue 3.16 (SC 375, 138).
advance to “the contemplation of the divine with sincere and spiritual love.” Yet, even here, the trace of the literal remains as the site of the initial seduction of the exegete—the beginning point of spiritual transformation through language.

I suggest that Origen’s inscription of the literal as a site of the initial seduction of the reader parallels his inscription of Jewishness within his hermeneutical theory. The trace of the literal signals the “remains” of the Jews in his texts. Jewishness, consistently imagined as flesh and language, overflows the not-quite-bounded space that Origen inscribes for it in his hierarchical structure of Christian/Jew, figural/literal, spirit/flesh.

In her book, *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother*, Jill Robbins analyzes early Christian characterizations of Jews as carnal and literal interpreters, and she argues for the persistent presence of “the Judaic” as “trace” in these early Christian texts. She writes:

> The Jews are related to the Old Testament book physically or carnally: they *carry* it; the Christians are related to it spiritually: they *believe* from it. This

---

122 *Comm. Cant.* Prologue 3.16 (SC 375, 138): *Praemissis namque his quibus purificatur anima per actus et mores, et in rerum discretionem naturalium perducitur, competenter ad dogmatica venitur et ad mystica atque ad divinitatis contemplationem sincer et spirituali amore conscenditur.*

123 Patricia Cox Miller argues for the “seduction of language” with regard to Origen’s first homily on the Song of Songs. She writes that “in both the *Commentary* and the *Homilies* on the Song of Songs Origen develops a picture of the Bridegroom as *Logos*—as language—who woos, entices, and seduces the Bride, a figure for a reader or interpreter of texts. In this case, Origen’s lament about the disappearing Bridegroom, more present than when he is absent, can be read as hermeneutical comment. The word that slips away at the moment when one thinks that one has ‘laid hold of it,’ only to return with promise of renewed meaning, and so on *ad infinitum*, forms a precise picture of the deferral of final meaning characteristic of the interpreter’s abyss” (Patricia Cox Miller, “Poetic Words, Abysmal Words: Reflections on Origen’s Hermeneutics,” in *Origen of Alexandria*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Petersen, 164-178, see esp. 174-175.

polemic against the “dead letter” (i.e. Jewish literalism), indeed the entire figural discourse, depends above all on suppressing the self-understanding of Judaic exegesis. For the self-understanding of Jewish exegesis would give the lie to the figural assertion that the Old Testament discredits its own authority and transfers it to the New. It would disrupt the dyadic and hierarchical oppositions such as carnal and spiritual, literal and figurative, that structure every figural claim. It would make it possible to understand this religion of the book and its relation to the letter of language—otherwise. For if the book the Jews carry is not an Old Testament but a Hebrew Bible, then the figural discourse would collapse. But it cannot, as it were, suppress it enough. It cannot suppress the Judaic without leaving a trace, as when it inscribes it as outside.  

I echo Robbins claim with respect to Origen’s writings. For all his endeavors to circumscribe Jewishness as absolute Other, as “outside,” he cannot “suppress it enough.”

The social and cultural function of Origen’s sexualized representation of Jews thus involves not only a mapping of religious and hermeneutic difference as sexual difference but also a simultaneous “inscription” and “deferral” of this difference. The Other, constructed here as “the Jew,” is preserved in Origen’s hermeneutical writings as the necessary “remainder” of the literal text of scripture—the site of the “seduction” and “sheer attractiveness” of language. As Andrew Jacobs has recently claimed, “Christianity must be constantly reminded of the remainder of Jewishness at its origins even as it persists in pushing an increasingly supersessionist line.”

Origen, I suggest, reads this “remainder of Jewishness” not only as a marker of


carnal, “adulterous” understanding to be superseded by Christian spiritualism but also as a textual provocateur that continues to seduce and attract the Christian reader. In Origen’s interpretive theory, Jewishness thus signals a necessary, if inferior, stage in Christian hermeneutical and spiritual development—one that through its “sheer attractiveness” persistently presents the body and the “bare letter” as forces to be reckoned with by Christian exegetes.
CHAPTER THREE

SEXUAL/TEXTUAL CORRUPTION: EARLY CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATIONS OF “SUSANNA AND THE ELDERS”¹

In the Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome, three scenes from the story of “Susanna and the Elders” line the walls of the cappella greca.² Painted around 250 C.E., these frescoes depict the public accusation of Susanna by the elders (Fig. 1), the intervention of Daniel (Fig. 2), and the prayer of Susanna after her exoneration (Fig. 3). The first fresco (Fig. 1) visually interprets the two elders’ violation of Susanna during her trial. The text known from the ancient Greek versions of “Susanna and the Elders” states:

As she was veiled, the lawless ones ordered her to be uncovered so that they might sate themselves with her beauty. Those who were with her and all who saw her were weeping. Then the two elders stood up before the people and laid their hands on her head. Through her tears she looked up toward Heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord.³

¹ My idea for the title of this chapter comes from the title of a book by Toril Moi: Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (New York: Methuen, 1985).

² The cappella greca is so named because of the presence of two Greek inscriptions in the tomb. See J. Stevenson, The Catacombs: Rediscovered monuments of Early Christianity (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 154, for a description of the inscriptions and chapel. For more on the catacomb of Priscilla, see Leonard Rutgers, Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City (Leuven: Peeters, 2000). Rutgers argues that the cappella greca in the Priscilla catacomb offers “good examples of the concurrent appearance of Old and New Testament scenes. . . There wall paintings can be found that depict the raising of Lazarus from the dead, Daniel in the lions’ den, the sacrifice of Isaac, the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace, Susanna and the elders, Noah, Moses drawing water from the rock, the baptism of Christ, the healing of the lame and the adoration of the Magi” (98).

³ Sus 32-35. Compare the Old Greek version of this scene with that of the Theodotion. The Old Greek states: “And the lawless ones ordered her to be uncovered, in order that they might satisfy their desire with her beauty” [καὶ προσέταξαν οἱ παράνομοι ἀποκαλύψαν αὐτὴν, ἵνα ἐμπληρῶσοι κάλλους ἐπιθυμίας αὐτῆς]. The Theodotion states: “As she was veiled, the lawless ones ordered her to be uncovered so that they might sate themselves with her beauty” [οἱ δὲ παράνομοι ἐκέλευσαν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτήν, ἵνα γὰρ κατακεκλυμμενὴν, ὡς ἐμπληροῦσα τοῦ κάλλους αὐτῆς]. All translations are my own. For translations of Susanna, I have consulted The
Visualizing this incident in the story, the fresco presents two licentious elders flanking Susanna; each lays one hand on her head in a gesture of accusation, and with the other hand he grasps her bare arm. The interplay of sight, touch, and porneia depicted here would not be lost on the early Christian viewer.4

This chapter considers how early Christian authors appropriate this story of Susanna and the Elders in order to define Christians as chaste and their religious opponents, including Jews, as sexually licentious. Third-century writers such as

---

4 Indeed Hippolytus, commenting on this scene in the narrative, contends that by laying their hands upon Susanna’s head, the elders satisfy their lust [ἐπίθυμια] through touch [τῶ ὀψαφοθα]. See Hippolytus, Commentarium in Danielem, 1.26 (Hippolyt Werke: Kommentar zu Daniel, ed. G. Nathanael Bonwetsch and Marcel Richard, 2nd ed. GCS 7 [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000], 56). Commenting on this fresco (fig. 1), Kathryn Smith suggests that the image does more than just illustrate an event in the story: “[T]his image carried other associations as well, and it sent a much more highly-charged message to the Early Christian viewer than it does to the modern one. The ramifications of sight, and particularly touch, and their relation to porneia were integral aspects of contemporary debates around sexuality and salvation” (6). See Kathryn Smith, “Inventing Marital Chastity: the Iconography of Susanna and the Elders in Early Christian Art,” Oxford Art Journal 16 (1993): 3-24. See also J. Stevenson, The Catacombs, 78-81. Nicola Denzey challenges the idea that this fresco cycle represents scenes from Susanna. Instead, she suggests that we read the frescoes, especially fig. 3, as depictions of Mary Magdalene from John 20. Denzey also suggests that these scenes may not represent a biblical figure at all but rather the woman who is buried in the chamber. Considered in this way, fig. 1 may be read as a depiction of a woman’s ordination by the laying on of hands. See Nicola Denzey, The Bone Gatherers: The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 108-115. Although these latter two readings are possible, I suggest that early Christian viewers most likely associated the frescoes with the Susanna story. Indeed, images of Susanna were more common than images of Mary Magdalene in early catacomb paintings. For lists of early Christian images of Susanna in catacomb paintings and sarcophagi, see Hanspeter Schlosser, “Die Daniel-Susanna-Erzählung in Bild und Literatur der christlichen Frühzeit,” in Tortulae: Studien zu Altchristlichen und Byzantinischen Monumenten, Römische Quartalschrift für Christlichen Altertumskunde und für Kirchen geschichte, 30 supplementheft (1965): 243-249; and Henri Leclerc, “Suzanne,” in Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie, ed. Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclerc, vol. 15, cols. 1742-1752 (Paris, 1953).
Hippolytus and Origen locate the narrative force of this story in its description of an attempted sexual violation of a chaste and pious woman, and they utilize this theme to plot differences between the church and its opponents. Casting the church’s “enemies” in the role of sexual predators, Hippolytus and, to a greater extent, Origen present Jews as a sexual threat to virtuous Christians. In this way, both authors employ a narrative of attempted sexual violence to describe the situation of Christians in the third century. I begin my analysis by considering the differences between the two surviving Greek versions of Susanna and noting how the later version (Theodotion) emphasizes the sexual depravity of the elders and the innocence of Susanna. Then I explore how Hippolytus and Origen secure the Susanna story for Christian use through their respective interpretations of the
Theodotion text. Finally, I briefly indicate how other Greek writers of the third and fourth centuries utilize Susanna to support arguments for female chastity.

Fig. 2. Susanna, Daniel, and the Elders. Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome. (Photo reprinted in Kathryn Smith, “Inventing Marital Chastity,” 9).

Fig. 3. Susanna and Daniel. Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome. (Photo reprinted in Kathryn Smith, “Inventing Marital Chastity,” 10).
Susanna and the Elders: Two Versions

The story of Susanna is one of three Greek additions to the book of Daniel along with “The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews” and “Bel and the Dragon.” Since the time of Origen and Julius Africanus, several issues have engaged commentators on Susanna, including original language, genre, purpose, canonicity, date of composition, provenance, and relation to the book of Daniel. In order to

---


understand third-century Christian appropriations of this story, I register here some of the scholarly debates about original language and purpose, paying particular attention to the differences between the two ancient Greek versions of the story, the Old Greek and the Theodotion.\footnote{Most scholars refer to the most ancient version of the story as the Septuagint (LXX) version, but Dan Clanton and Marti Steussy make a convincing case for calling it the Old Greek (OG) version. Clanton writes, “I prefer the term ‘Old Greek’ because the term ‘LXX’ is usually used to designate the Septuagint, i.e., the collection of Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible from Hebrew texts. However, some documents included in the LXX are thought to have been composed originally in Greek, not Hebrew. To avoid any confusion, then, I will refer to this version as the OG” (Clanton, \textit{The Good, the Bold, and the Beautiful}, 32 n.102). Steussy also uses this terminology because “the version which now appears in the LXX is Theodotion’s” (Steussy, \textit{Gardens in Babylon}, 28).}

Susanna represents a Jewish apocryphal reworking of the story of Ahab and Zedekiah, the adulterous false-prophets of Jeremiah 29:21-23. A few decades later, Nehemiah Brüll argued that Susanna is a Pharisaic composition of the first century, B.C.E., designed to counter the Sadducees’ court procedures and theories of justice.

In the early twentieth century, Gedeon Huet and Walter Baumgartner maintained that Susanna originated as a secular folktale that was subsequently “judaized.” Recently, Lawrence Wills, Marti Steussy, and Michael Carroll have affirmed and developed this thesis. For all the debates about the provenance of Susanna, there exists much more information about the history of Susanna after the Greek compositions than


before them. It is to an analysis of the two Greek versions and their appropriation by early Christian writers that I now turn.

The earliest surviving version of Susanna is the Old Greek, which scholars date to the late second century, B.C.E. (from 100-135). The second version, which Origen and later church fathers attributed to Theodotion, is dated to the first half of the first century, C.E., over a century before the time of Theodotion (late second century). Indeed, readings and references to the Theodotion additions to Daniel occur in several first century texts, including books of the New Testament. The Theodotion version of Susanna is longer than the Old Greek; over a third of it contains new material, while a quarter of it repeats the Old Greek verbatim. The Theodotion additions include biographical details in the beginning (vv. 1-5), an emphasis on the role of Daniel (vv. 45-50), and several dramatic embellishments (vv.

12 A point made by Moore: “All in all, the principal weakness of the theory that ‘Susanna’ is a legend or apocryphal story is that we know far more about the story’s development and history after the Greek versions than before them” (Moore, Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah, 86-87). Note, however, that Moore himself accepts the thesis of Baumgartner: “‘Susanna’ was a purely secular tale which only later on was thoroughly judaized and related to the prophet Daniel” (7).

13 Carey Moore, Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah, 17; Marti Steussy, Gardens in Babylon, 31. See Steussy, 28 for a discussion of the limited manuscript tradition of the Old Greek version of Susanna.

14 For a list of these references, see Armin Schmitt, Stammt der sogenannte "Θ"-Text bei Daniel wirklich von Theodotion?, Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens, vol. 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1966), 12-14. Schmitt uses these references to argue that Theodotion could not have been the author of the Greek text of Susanna that Origen attributes to him. See, in particular, Mt 28:3 (Dan-Θ 7:9) and Heb 11:33 (Dan-Θ 6:22).

15 Steussy, Gardens in Babylon, 35. Joseph Ziegler presents the two Greek texts (Old Greek and Theodotion) on the same page to facilitate comparison, see Ziegler, Susanna, Daniel, Bel et Draco, 80-91. Otto Fritzsche argues that the Theodotion text is a later recension of the Old Greek, but August Bludau and Armin Schmitt maintain that the Theodotion text is a separate translation of a now-lost Semitic Vorlage. See Fritzsche, Zusätze zu dem Buche Daniel, 132-145; August Bludau, “Die alexandrinische Übersetzung des Buches Daniel und ihr Verhältnis zum massoretischen Texten,” BSi 2 (1897), 165-172; and Armin Schmitt, Stammt der sogenannte “Θ”-Text bei Daniel wirklich von Theodotion? 11-16.
As Helmut Engel suggests, the Theodotion changes and adds to the Old Greek in order to present the story in a smoother style, emphasize the erotic and psychological elements, individualize and historicize the characters, and offer a new conclusion to the narrative.\textsuperscript{16}

Several of the dramatic additions heighten the contrast between the licentious elders and the chaste Susanna. In the following verses, I highlight a few relevant passages in which the Theodotion version adds to the Old Greek:

Both were overwhelmed with passion for her, but they did not tell each other of their distress, [the Theodotion adds:] for they were ashamed to disclose their lust, that they desired to be with her.  (Sus 10-11)\textsuperscript{17}

[The Theodotion adds the following scene of bathing and voyeurism:] Once, while they were watching for an opportune day, she went in as before with only two maids, and wished to bathe in the garden, for it was a hot day.  No one was there except the two elders, who had hidden themselves and were watching her.  (Sus 15-16)\textsuperscript{18}

When the maids had gone out, the two elders got up and ran to her, [the Theodotion adds:] and they said, “Look, the garden doors are shut, and no one can see us.  We are burning with lust for you; so give your consent and lie with us.  If you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away.”  (Sus 19-21)\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16}Engel divides the changes and additions into these four categories: \textit{Stilistische Glättungen; Eroterisierung und Psychologisierung; Individualisierung und Historisierung; und Neugestaltung des Erzählungsabschlusses}.  (Engel, \textit{Die Susanna-Erzählung}, 181-183).

\textsuperscript{17}Καὶ ἦσαν ἀμφότεροι κατανεγμένοι περὶ αὐτῆς καὶ οὐκ ἀνήγγειλαν ἀλλήλοις τὴν ὀδύνην αὐτῶν, ὅτι ἠχισύνοντο ἀναγγείλαι τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν αὐτῶν ὅτι ἠθέλον συγγενεσθαι αὐτῆς [Theodotion].

\textsuperscript{18}Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ παρατηρεῖν αὐτοῖς ἤμεραν ἐυθῆνεν εἰσῆλθεν ποτὲ καθὼς ἔχθες καὶ τρίτης ἤμερας μετὰ δύο μόνων κορασίων καὶ ἐπεθύμησε λύσασθαι ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ, ὅτι καῦμα ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἦν οὔδες ἐκεί πλὴν οἱ δύο πρεσβύτεροι κεκρυμμένοι καὶ παρατηροῦντες αὐτήν [Theodotion].

\textsuperscript{19}Καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς ἐξήλθοσαν τὰ κοράσια, καὶ ἀνέστησαν οἱ δύο πρεσβύτεροι καὶ ἐπέδραμον αὐτῇ καὶ εἰπὼν ἰδοὺ αἱ θύραι τοῦ παραδείσου κέκλεινται, καὶ οὔδες θεωρεῖ ἡμᾶς, καὶ ἐν
Susanna’s groaning (v. 22), screaming (v. 24), and her prayer for deliverance (vv. 42-43) are also Theodotion additions; together these serve to emphasize her innocence and piety over and against the wicked behavior of the elders.

The Theodotion version thus accentuates and embellishes the eroticized elements of the story by depicting the elders as violent, lustful voyeurs and Susanna as their innocent victim.\(^{20}\) These embellishments render the Theodotion version particularly useful for Christian writers who redeploy the story to deprecate Jewish leadership and construct Jews as sexually depraved. Betsy Halpern-Amaru makes the following observation about the differences between the two Greek versions of Susanna:

Both versions [the Old Greek and the Theodotion] were known in the early Christian period, but sometime in the third century C.E. the Theodotion text totally displaced the Old Greek one. We have little knowledge of the processes involved in that displacement. Yet it is noteworthy that the elevation of heroic and villainous characterization over communal, legal issues and the absence of explicit, positive Jewish associations (i.e., no reference to Susanna as “Jewess” and the synagogue no longer the scene of justice) – are particularly significant when the story becomes intertwined with the development of Christian self-definition.\(^{21}\)

Building on Halpern-Amaru’s observation, I suggest that the appropriation of the Theodotion text by third-century writers such as Hippolytus and Origen supports the production of Jewish-Christian difference insofar as it claims the chaste

---


protagonist as a prototype of the church while imagining “the enemies of the church” (including Jews) in the role of the sexually licentious elders. Christian authors employ the Theodotion text, with its emphasis on the villainous elders and its avoidance of “positive Jewish associations,” in the service not only of Christian self-definition but also of anti-Jewish ideology. By the second century, C.E., the Susanna narrative is “Christianized,” for Christian writers recontextualize the story as one that pertains not to Jewish diasporic history but to Christian history.  

Susanna as Church: Hippolytus’ Commentary on Daniel

Whereas the mid-third-century frescoes in the Catacomb of Priscilla constitute the earliest surviving visual interpretation of Susanna and the Elders, Hippolytus offers the earliest extant commentary on the story.  

---

22 Although the story of Susanna has a long and substantial afterlife in Christian imagery and text, no Jewish writer refers to this story until the eleventh century. Israel Lévi writes, “Or, chose curieuse, elle n’a laissé aucune trace dans la littérature juive avant le XI siècle. Rien de plus naturel, dirait-on, les apocryphes ayant été exclus du canon biblique” (“L’Histoire de Suzanne et les deux Vieillards,” 158).

23 Hippolytus of Rome was a writer, theologian, and presbyter in the late second and early third centuries. Other facts about his life, including dates and birthplace, are subject to debate (most commentators think that Hippolytus lived from 170-236). Beginning with Pierre Nautin, a lively debate has developed about the identity of Hippolytus (die Hippolyt Frage). Indeed, Jerome wrote of him: “Hippolytus [was] the bishop of a certain church. I have not, in fact, been able to learn the name of the city” (Vir. ill. 61). For the debate on Hippolytus, his location, and his corpus, see, Pierre Nautin, Hippolyte et Josipe: contribution à l’histoire de la littérature chrétienne du troisième siècle (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1947); Josef Frickel, Das Dunkel um Hippolyt von Rom: Die Schriften Elenchos und Contra Noetum, Grazer Theologische Studien, 13 (Graz: Institut für Ökumenische Theologie und Patrologie an der Universität Graz, 1980); and most recently, J. A. Cerrato, Hippolytus between East and West: The Commentaries and the Provenance of the Corpus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For more on Hippolytus in general, see Allen Brent, Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop, Suppl. To VC 31 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995); Marcel Richard, “Hippolyte de Rome,” DS 7 (1969): cols. 531-569; Christian von Bunsen, Hippolytus and His Age, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1854); Johann von Dollinger, Hippolytus und Kallistus, oder die römische Kirche in der erste Hälfte des 3. Jahrhunderts (Regensburg: Joseph Manz, 1853); Adolf von Harnack, Geschichte
century, Hippolytus writes a four-volume commentary on the book of Daniel and devotes the entire first volume to an interpretation of “Susanna and the Elders.” The allegorical method that he employs stakes a Christian claim to the story by fashioning Susanna as a prefiguration of the church. Correspondingly, the licentious elders represent, for Hippolytus, those who prey upon the church and seek to oppress her. With this allegorical reading, Hippolytus capitalizes on the narrative force of the story by redeploying it to portray the church as innocent sufferer and the church’s opponents as licentious predators.

Hippolytus introduces his allegorical method early in his commentary when he argues that “this history [of Susanna] will happen later, although it is written first in the book. For it is a custom of the writers to set down in the scriptures many things that come about later.”24 By thus imploding the temporality of the story, he

---

24 Comm. Dan. 1.5 (GCS 12). See also Comm. Dan. 1.17 (GCS 38-40) for another passage in which Hippolytus argues that the story of Susanna has meaning insofar as it signals events in Christian history: “These things were prefigured long ago through the blessed Susanna for our sakes, in order that now we who have faith in God might not regard that which now happens in the church as strange, but believe that these things were long ago prefigured through the patriarchs, just as the apostle says, ‘These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come’” (1 Cor 10:11).
appropriates the biblical past for the Christian present and argues that what is narrated in Jewish history realizes its existence in Christian history.\(^{25}\)

In the following passage, Hippolytus presents an allegorical interpretation of Susanna by identifying the ways in which characters, objects, and the setting of the story prefigure the history of the church:

For what the elders did then to Susanna is similarly accomplished now by the leaders who are presently in Babylon. For Susanna is a figure of the church, and Joachim her husband, of Christ. And the garden is the calling of the saints, who are like fruitful trees planted in the church. Babylon is the world. And the two elders are presented as a type of the two peoples who plot against the church—one of the circumcision and one of the Gentiles. For the words “appointed” leaders and “judges” of the people mean that in this age they exercise power and rule, these unjust judges of the just.\(^{26}\)

Extending the allegorical reading, Hippolytus contends that Susanna’s bath signifies baptism\(^{27}\); this, too, solidifies her prefiguration of the church, for “the Church, like

\(^{25}\) Hippolytus explains the purpose behind this temporal inversion and implosion: “This was done by the oikonomia of the spirit, in order that the devil might not understand the things spoken in parables by the prophets and might not ensnare and destroy man a second time” (Comm. Dan. 1.5 [GCS 12]). For more on exegetical and rhetorical strategies that church fathers employed in ascetic interpretation, see Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 104-152. Clark registers “textual implosion” as one of these strategies (132-134).

\(^{26}\) Comm. Dan. 1.15 (GCS 36). Α γάρ ἐκεί παρά τῶν πρεσβυτέρων περὶ τὴν Σούσανναν γεγένηται, τούτα καὶ νῦν ὡμοίως ύπὸ τῶν ἀρχόντων τῶν ἐν τῇ νῦν Βαβύλων ἐπιτελεῖται. Η γάρ Σούσανα προετυπώτο εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ἰωακείῳ δὲ ὁ ἀνήρ αὐτῆς εἰς τὸν Χριστόν. ὁ δὲ παράδεισος ἦν ἡ κλήσις τῶν ἁγίων, ὡς δεύτεραν καρποφόρων ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ περιπετευμένων. Βαβύλων δὲ ἐστιν ὁ κόσμος. Οἱ δὲ δύο πρεσβυτεροὶ εἰς τούτους δείκνυται τῶν δύο λαῶν τῶν ἐπιβουλευόντων τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, εἰς μὲν ὁ ἐκ περιπομῆς καὶ εἰς ὁ εἴκοσι. Τὸ γάρ λέγειν ἀπεδειχθήσαν ἀρχόντες τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ κρίται σημαίνει ὅτι εἰς τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἐξουσιάζουσι καὶ ἀρχουσι, κρίνοντες ἀδίκως τοὺς δικαίους.

\(^{27}\) Comm. Dan. 1.17 (GCS 38-40).
Susanna, is washed and presented as a pure young bride to God.”

This alignment of Susanna and the church is invoked again when Hippolytus calls on Christian women to imitate the story’s heroine on account of her “faith,” “discretion” [εὐλαβείς], and “self-control of the body” [σωφρόν περὶ τὸ σώμα].

Just as Hippolytus’ allegorical understanding of Susanna defines Christian identity in terms of faithfulness, piety, feminine chastity, and suffering, his interpretation of the elders attempts to circumscribe the identity of his religious opponents. Here, Jewish and Gentile “persecutors of the church” are compared to the scheming and voyeuristic villains of the story. Hippolytus uses Sus 10-12 to make his point:

But the verse—“eagerly they watched each day” Susanna walking in the garden—this means that until now the Gentiles and the Jews of the circumcision closely watch and meddle in the affairs of the church, wishing to bring false witness against us. . . For how did these oppressors of and conspirers against the church become capable of justly judging, raising their eyes to heaven with a pure heart, enslaved as they are by the leaders “of this age”? “And they were both overwhelmed by passion for her, but they did not tell each other of their distress, for they were ashamed to disclose their lustful desire to seduce her” (Sus 10-11). These words are easy to understand: Always these two peoples, enflamed by Satan at work in them, desire to harass and stir up oppressions against the church, striving to corrupt [διαφθειροσκιν] her.

28 Comm. Dan. 1.17 (GCS 38-40). Ἡ ἐκκλησία ὡς Σουσάννα ἀπολουομένη καθαρά νῦμφῃ θεῷ παρίσταται. See also Comm. Dan. 1.23 (GCS 52), where Susanna “prefigures the mysteries of the church.”

29 Comm. Dan. 1.23 (GCS 52).

30 Comm. Dan. 1.16 (GCS 36-38). Ἀλλὰ τὸ παρετήρουν φιλοτίμως καθ’ ἴμεραν περιπτούντες ἐν παραδείσῳ τὴν Σουσάνναν, τούτο σημαίνει ότι ἐως νῦν παρατηροῦνται καὶ περιεργάζονται τὰ ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ πραττόμενα οἱ τε ἐξ ἐννόων καὶ οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς Ιουδαῖοι, βουλόμενοι ψευδεῖς μαρτυρίας καταφέρειν καθ’ ἴμεραν, . . . οἱ γὰρ ἐπίβουλοι καὶ φθορεῖς τῆς ἐκκλησίας γενόμενοι πρὸς δύνανται δίκαια κρίνειν ἡ καθαρὰ καρδία ἀναβλέπειν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, τοῦ ἀρχων τούτου δεδουλωμένου· καὶ ἐπεὶ αὐτὸν κατανεμομένοι περὶ αὐτῆς καὶ οὐκ ἀπηγγείλαν ἀλλήλοις τὴν ὀδύνην αὐτῶν ότι ἱσχύνοντο ἀπαγγείλαι τὴν ἐπίθυμιαν αὐτῶν ὁτι
In this passage, Hippolytus’ analogy between the lustful elders, on the one hand, and Jewish and Gentile oppressors of the church, on the other, frames the relationship between the church and its opponents as one of unjust domination infused with sexual threat. The church is imagined here as an object of sexual violence, while her enemies are portrayed as instigators of this violence.

Hippolytus develops this imagery of sexual domination by employing verbs such as διαφθείρω and μισίνω—terms that signal not only patterns of unjust domination but also practices of sexual exploitation.31 In the following passage, Hippolytus deploys this vocabulary to enhance his depiction of his opponents as sexually threatening to the integrity of the church. With reference to the elders’ illicit proposition of Susanna in Sus 19-21, he writes:

When the blessed Susanna heard these words she was troubled in her heart and she shielded her body because she did not wish to be defiled [μιανθήναι] by the lawless elders…You might find this fulfilled now in the church. For when the two peoples agree to corrupt [διαφθείραι] the souls of the saints, they watch closely “for a fitting day” and enter into the house of God. While all there are praying and praising God, they seize them and drag some of them about and prevail over them, saying, “Come, submit [συγκατάθεσθε] to us and pay homage to our Gods. And if not, we will bear witness against you.” And when they are not willing, they bring them to the courts and accuse them of acting in opposition to Caesar’s decrees, and they condemn them to death.32


32 Comm. Dan. 1.21 (GCS 48-50). Τούτων οὖν τῶν ἤμιτῶν ἀκούσας ἡ μακαρία Σουσάννα κατενύχη τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ εἴραξε τὸ σῶμα μὴ βουλομένη μιανθήναι ὑπὸ ἀνόμων πρεσβυτέρων. ἐστὶ δὲ καὶ καταλαβέσθαι ἄλλως τὸ συμβᾶν ἐπὶ τῇ Σουσάννῃ. Τότε γὰρ νῦν καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ οὕροις πλησμονεῖ. Τότε γὰρ ἀν οἱ δύο λαοὶ συμφωνήσουσι διαφθείραι τὸς τῶν ἁγίων ψυχῶν, παρατηροῦνται ἤμεραν εὐθετον καὶ ἐπεισελθόντες εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ,
Here, Hippolytus compares Susanna’s fate to that of the Christian martyr.\textsuperscript{33} Like her, the martyr is subjected to voyeurism, meddling, seizure, domination, unjust litigation, false testimony, and a death sentence. The Christian martyr, like Susanna, is faced with an impossible choice: either she submits [συγκατάθεσθε] to her oppressors, or she faces death. Moreover, like the wicked elders, the Jewish and Gentile “persecutors of the church” propagate violence by corrupting and bearing false witness against the church.

With this allegorical interpretation of Susanna, Hippolytus inventively configures Jewish and Gentile persecution of Christians as a type of sexual exploitation. Such a presentation not only accentuates the construction of religious Others as licentious predators but also contributes to the developing discourse of Christian asceticism by depicting the church as a vulnerable victim for whom sophrostyle serves as a necessary shield against external defilement.\textsuperscript{34} Writing in the early third century—a time when Christians wielded little social or political power within the empire—Hippolytus capitalizes on this narrative of attempted violence, condemnation, and redemption to fashion the church’s enemies (Jewish and Gentile)

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{33} For more on this comparison, see \textit{Comm. Dan.} 1.25, where Susanna’s trial is compared to that of a martyr.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Comm. Dan.} 1.21 (GCS 48-50). For other references to chastity in Hippolytus’ commentary on Susanna see 1.20, 22.}
as powerful persecutors [δύοπτες] of the innocent. In order to explore what is at stake in such a construal of the church’s relationship to her “enemies,” I turn to an analysis of the interactions of gender, sexuality, and power in Hippolytus’ allegorical interpretation.

Mapping Gender, Mapping Power

In her examination of constructions of masculinity in the Second Sophistic, Maud Gleason argues that gender is “a primary source of the metaphorical language with which power relationships are articulated, in our own time as in antiquity.”

According to Gleason, ancient rhetoricians deploy categories of “male” and “female” to connote authority and activity (male) and powerlessness and passivity (female). Drawing on this rhetorical tradition of gendered imagery, Hippolytus employs feminine metaphors for the church in order to define Christian identity in terms of

---

chastity, vulnerability, and victimization. In this way, he invokes gender to position Christians as paradigmatic (and feminized) sufferers. 

Moreover, Hippolytus deploys sex to construct a particular relation of power between his Jewish and Gentile opponents and Christians. As we have seen above, he draws on language of voyeurism, seduction, defilement and attempted sexual violation to represent the violent and unjust use of power by his religious opponents. I suggest that with this sexualized representation of power relations, Hippolytus contributes to a developing Christian discourse of alterity that constructs religious, ethnic, and cultural Others as sexual predators who prey upon the innocent.

Kimberly Stratton makes a similar observation with regard to early Christian portrayals of male “magicians.” Examining passages such as Irenaeus’ portrayal of Marcus and Hippolytus’ portrayal of Simon Magus, Stratton describes a “widespread pattern of representation emerging in early Christian literature according to which men practice magic and women function as victims of male supernatural

36 Amy-Jill Levine suggests that the story of Susanna lends itself to interpretations in which gender is deployed to describe other sorts of cultural interaction. She argues that “women’s bodies, like the community itself, become the surface upon which are inscribed the struggles between the adorned and the stripped, the safe and the endangered, the inviolate and the penetrated” (“Hemmed in on Every Side,” 309).


38 Irenaeus, Adversus haereses, 13.1.

39 Hippolytus, Refutatio omnium haeresium, 6.19.4.
assault.” She notes that the representation of the male magician’s enticement of his female victim often follows a pattern of sexual seduction. Drawing on the work of Daniel Boyarin and Virginia Burrus, Stratton then situates this Christian representation of male magicians and female victims within the context of Roman imperial power. She writes:

I propose that Christian depictions of female victims and male magicians reflect an ego identification on the part of these male writers with vulnerable but chaste female bodies over against the invasive violence of Rome. . . . The victimized women thereby serve as a trope for early Christian writers to locate themselves and their communities in opposition to Rome’s power and violence, imagined in terms of the sexualized masculinity and aggression of the “magician.” Competing forms of Christianity—so-called “heresies”—are likewise demonized through identification with the violent danger of the male “other.” Through these rhetorically-crafted representations, competing forms of Christianity are collapsed into the same ideological opposition that Rome similarly occupies: between aggressive threatening masculinity and the vulnerable body of the “virgin” church.

In this passage, Stratton maintains that male Christian writers imagine their position vis-à-vis Roman authority as similar to that of a vulnerable woman illicitly seduced by a male aggressor. Seduction narratives and cross-gendered imagery thus serve as modes by which these early Christian authors represent relations of power in the pre-Constantinian period.

---


Whereas the narratives that Stratton examines portray intra-Christian heretics as licentious “magicians,” Hippolytus’ commentary on Susanna imagines Jewish and Gentile opponents of the church as licentious. Following Stratton’s analysis, I suggest that in his allegorical reading of Susanna Hippolytus aligns non-Christian Jews and Gentiles with Roman imperial power, thereby consigning them to the position of leonine aggressors. Moreover, by securing Susanna as a figure for the church, Hippolytus associates Christian identity with feminine vulnerability and thus strategically locates Christians as victims of imperial violence. For Hippolytus, and for Origen after him, scenes of seduction and exploitation—vividly depicted in the story of Susanna—prove to be a particularly apt way in which to narrate the relationship between the imperiled church and the wider, non-Christian empire.

Unlike Hippolytus, who identifies his opponents as “Gentiles” and “Jews of the circumcision,” Origen singles out Jews as his primary objects of sexualized representation.

Sexualized Representation in Origen’s Letter to Africanus

In his Letter to Africanus, and in some of his other works as well, Origen models Jewishness after the lustful elders in the Susanna story. Like Hippolytus,

---

43 See discussion and translation of Comm. Dan. 1.21 (GCS 48-50) above.


Origen claims Susanna for Christian use by comparing her predicament to that of the Christian exegete—“hemmed in on every side” (Sus 22). He employs the Susanna narrative to produce difference not only between Jewish and Christian sexual behavior but also between Jewish and Christian exegetical practices.

Origen differentiates between Jewish and Christian modes of reading scripture by suggesting that Jewish interpretation adheres more closely to the world of bodies and desires. For Origen, not only do Christians have a different understanding of biblical texts than do Jews; they also have a different relationship to the body and

---

sexuality. Exegetical strategy is here inextricably linked to attitudes towards the body. To borrow a phrase from Daniel Boyarin, “hermeneutics becomes anthropology.”46 I suggest that one effect of Origen’s linkage of hermeneutics and anthropology is the creation of an image of the Jewish interpreter as “fleshly” and sexualized—an image neatly illustrated by the gawking elders in the story of Susanna. More generally, I argue that Origen’s reading of Susanna provides an occasion for analyzing the overlapping construction of gender and Jewish-Christian difference in late antiquity.

Origen writes his Letter to Africanus while on a trip to Nicomedia in 249, a little before the Decian persecution.47 Caesarea Maritima has been his residence for almost twenty years.48 He writes in response to a letter from Julius Africanus that contests his inclusion of the story of Susanna in the book of Daniel, and thus ensues the debate over the canonicity of the story: Africanus claims that because Susanna is found only in Greek versions of the bible, it is most likely a Greek “forgery.”49 He appeals to the fact that the Jews have not retained the story in their scriptures to


47 Pierre Nautin, Origène: Sa vie et son ouvre, 182.


49 For more recent debates about the original language of Susanna, see F. Zimmerman, ‘The Story of Susanna and Its Original Language’ and C. A. Moore, Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah, 81-84, as well as the discussion above.
support his claim. For evidence that the Susanna story represents a Greek forgery, Africanus points to a play on words that exists only in Greek: there are two puns relating types of trees to forms of punishment—πρινος and πρίζειν; σχίνος and σχίζειν\textsuperscript{50}—such wordplay, for Africanus, would not “work” in Hebrew. Moreover, Africanus argues that the style of the Susanna story differs from that of the book of Daniel. These factors, argues Africanus, should demonstrate that Susanna is a “more modern” addition to Daniel and should not be considered an authentic part of scripture.

Origen defends the canonicity of Susanna in several ways, exhibiting much exegetical finesse in the process. He registers numerous occasions in which the Greek version of the bible contains words or phrases that are not found in Hebrew versions and other occasions in which the Hebrew version contains phrases not present in the Greek. Indeed, his compilation of the Hexapla has armed him with several examples of the discrepancies between Greek and Hebrew versions. Regarding the wordplay, Origen reports that he has consulted “not a few Jews about it,” yet he remains undecided. Because the Hebrew words for the trees named in Greek are unknown, he claims that we cannot conclude whether or not the puns would have translated.\textsuperscript{51} Origen also allows that whoever translated Susanna into Greek might have transposed the pun so that it would retain the wordplay if not the

\textsuperscript{50}Translation: the evergreen oak/ to saw or cut in pieces and the mastich tree/ to cleave.

literal translation.\textsuperscript{52} Furthermore, he dismisses Julius’ last objection, that the style is different. “This I cannot see,” writes Origen.\textsuperscript{53}

I call attention here to a particular point that Origen makes in favor of an original Hebrew version of the story. In the middle section of his letter, Origen defends the canonicity of Susanna by contending that Jewish leaders of his own day, like the wicked elders before them, have engaged in illicit activity by hiding the story of Susanna and the Elders from the people.\textsuperscript{54} After registering the differences between Greek and Hebrew versions, and after exploring the implications of the wordplay, Origen argues that some Jewish sages do know the Susanna story, but have excluded it on account of its shameful content. He knows of one sage who recalls a tradition about the elders in the story, and he describes this man as “a Hebrew fond of learning, said among themselves to be the son of a wise man, and educated to succeed his father.”\textsuperscript{55} This Jewish sage identifies the licentious elders of the Susanna story with the wicked elders of Jeremiah 29, Zedekiah and Ahab, who are accused of both false prophecy and committing adultery with their neighbors’ wives.\textsuperscript{56} Interweaving

\textsuperscript{52} Ep. Afr. 18 (SC 302, 558).

\textsuperscript{53} Ep. Afr. 22 (SC 302, 572).

\textsuperscript{54} Indeed there is no record of Jewish commentary on the story of Susanna until the eleventh century. See I. Lévi, ‘L’histoire de Suzanne et Les Deux Vieillards,” 159.

\textsuperscript{55} Ep. Afr. 11 (SC 302, 538).

\textsuperscript{56} Ep. Afr. 11 (SC 302, 538). Jeremiah 29:22 reads: ‘And on account of them this curse shall be used by all the exiles from Judah in Babylon: “The Lord make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire,” because they have perpetrated outrage in Israel and have committed adultery with their neighbors’ wives, and have spoken in my name lying words that I did not command them’ (NRSV). Although there is no mention of Susanna in rabbinic literature, there is a legend about Zedekiah and Ahab recorded in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 93a). See N. Brüll, ‘Das
the elders of the story of Susanna with those of Jeremiah 29, Origen depicts “these men, who bore the title Elder but who performed their service wickedly.”\(^{57}\) One who “condemned the innocent, and let the guilty go free,”\(^{58}\) and the other whom “beauty seduced,” “lust led his heart astray.”\(^{59}\)

From a different Hebrew sage, Origen learns another tradition about these elders. He writes:

I know another Hebrew who related the following traditions about these Elders: When the people were in captivity and hoping to be liberated from slavery under their enemies by the coming of the Messiah, these elders pretended to know revelations about the Messiah. Each for his own part, whenever he met a woman whom he wished to seduce, told her in secret that he had been given the ability by God to beget the Messiah. Then the woman, deceived by the hope of begetting the Messiah, gave herself freely to her deceiver. And thus the elders Ahab and Zedekiah committed adultery with the wives of their fellow citizens. Therefore, Daniel rightly called one an “old relic of wicked days”\(^{60}\) and of the other he said, “Thus you did to the daughters of Israel, and out of fear they consorted with you; but a daughter of Judah would not tolerate your wickedness.”\(^{61}\) Perhaps deceit and fear had a power over these women to make them offer their bodies to those who called themselves elders.\(^{62}\)

---


\(^{60}\) Sus 52.

\(^{61}\) Sus 57; See Shaye Cohen, “Ioudais: ‘Judaean’ and ‘Jew,’” 213, for the contrast between “Israel” and “Judah.”

\(^{62}\) *Ep. Afr.* 12 (SC 302, 540-2). Καὶ ἕτερον δὲ οἶδα Ἑβραῖον περὶ τῶν πρεσβύτερων τούτων τοιαύτας παραδόσεις φέροντα, ὅτι τοῖς ἐν τῇ αἰχμαλωσίᾳ ἔλπιζοι διὰ τῆς Χριστοῦ ἐπιδημίας ἐλευθερωθῆσασθαι ἀπὸ τῆς ὑπὸ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς δουλείας προσποιοῦμενοι οἱ πρεσβύτεροι οὕτως εἴδοτες τὰ περὶ Χριστοῦ σαφηνεῖσθαι· καὶ ἐκατέρων οὕτως ἄνω μέρος ἦ περιετυχανε γυναίκι καὶ ἦν διαφθείρει ἐμύλετο, ἐν ἀπορρήτῳ δὴ ἐφαύξεν ὡς ἀρα δέδοται αυτῶ ἀπὸ Θεοῦ σπειρὰ τὸν Χριστὸν· εἰτ’ ἀπατωμένη τῇ ἐλπίδι τοῦ γεννησαι τὸν
Origen here performs an intertextual reading of Susanna, Jeremiah 29, and rabbinic legends about Zedekiah and Ahab that shapes and expands our understanding of these wicked elders. They have become multi-layered characters, with an even seedier past than the story of Susanna suggests.

The next layer that Origen adds to these traditions about the wicked elders is, to me, the most fascinating. He aligns the lustful elders in the story of Susanna with his Jewish contemporaries—with the elders of his own day—and charges the latter with concealing this sacred, albeit embarrassing, story from their people. How does Origen accomplish this more complex reading? First, he accuses his Jewish contemporaries of hiding “from the knowledge of the people as many of the passages which contained any accusation against the elders, rulers, and judges, as they could.” Instead of being included in scripture, these stories were passed down as apocryphal legends, and, hence, they ceased to carry the authoritative status of a biblical text. Second, Origen accuses Jewish interpreters of his own day of expurgating scriptural passages in order to portray their predecessors in a more favorable light. For example, he claims that Jewish elders have hidden the story of the martyrdom of Isaiah, relegating it to apocryphal status, because it accuses Jews of

---

Χριστὸν ἕγειρεν ἐπεδίδυμον ἐαυτὴν τῷ ἀπατώντι· καὶ σύντως ἐμοίχωοντο τὰς γυναῖκας τῶν πολιτῶν οἱ πρεσβυτέροι Ἀχιαὶ καὶ Σεδεκίας. Διό καλῶς υπὸ τοῦ Δανιήλ ὁ μὲν ἔρηται πεπαλαιώμενος ἡμερῶν κακῶν ὅ ἐκ ηκουσε τὸ. Ὅτως ἐποίητε ταῖς θυγατρασίν Ἰσραήλ, κακεῖναι φοβοῦμεναι ἀμιλῶν ὡς ἀλλ᾽ οὐ θυγατρὶ Ἰουδα ὑπὲμενε τὴν ἀνομίαν ὑμῶν. Τάχα γὰρ ἀπάτη καὶ φόβος δυνάμενα ἐν ταῖς γυναιξὶν ἐποίηει αὕτας παρέχειν ἐαυτῶν τὰ σώματα τῶν ἱερομένων τούτων πρεσβυτέρων.

killing a prophet.⁶⁴ According to Origen, the Jews also corrupted this story of martyrdom by adding illegitimate words and phrases: “purposefully reckless,” they “interpolat[ed] phrases and words that were ill-fitting in order to discredit the whole.”⁶⁵

Third, and finally, Origen collapses the difference between the sexually corruptive elders in the Susanna story and the textually corruptive elders of his own day. He writes:

Therefore I know of no other explanation but that those who bear the titles of sages, leaders, and elders of the people excised all the texts that might discredit them among the people. Therefore it is no wonder if this story about the licentious elders plotting against Susanna is true, but was concealed and removed from the scriptures by those whose purpose is not far removed from that of the elders.⁶⁶

Here, Origen suggests that the Jewish elders of his own time are no different from the elders who wickedly solicited Susanna. He claims that the deceptive interpretive practices of his Jewish contemporaries attest to the authenticity and historicity of Susanna. These deceptive interpretive practices include interpolating, editing, expurgating, and hiding the text. Origen thus links the duplicitous and corruptive

---


textual practices of Jewish exegetes with the illicit, predatory sexuality of the elders in the story. He concludes:

I think I have demonstrated that it is not absurd to say that the story [of Susanna and the Elders] took place, and that the elders of that time dared to commit against Susanna that act of licentious cruelty, and that it was written down by the providence of the Spirit, but it was excised, as the Spirit said, by ‘the rulers of Sodom.’

It is curious that in these passages Origen offers two paradoxical images of Jewish sages. On the one hand, he presents his Jewish informants as erudite and trustworthy, conveyors of important information and traditions that Origen puts to good use in his argument for an original Hebrew version of “Susanna and the Elders.” On the other hand, he claims that Jewish sages are deceptive, hiding from the people any scriptural accounts that might discredit their authority. Andrew Jacobs helpfully suggests that Origen’s repeated references to his Jewish informants not only shore up his claims to understand Jewish texts and Jewish biblical interpretation but also establish legitimacy for his own Christian interpretations of Jewish texts. Jacobs writes:

Throughout his many exegetical projects Origen refers to “local” Palestinian Jewish life and society, continually promoting his own firsthand knowledge of Jewish language and interpretation. The knowledge of local Jews even helped Origen produce a more “authentic” biblical text on which to base his often

---

67 Origen, Ep. Afr. 15 (SC 302, 550). Καὶ ὅπως ἐστιν τὸ πνεύμα τοῦ προφήτου ἀπεκαθήθη ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ τὴν τοῦ κόσμου ἀπεκαθήθη ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ οὕτω τοῖς ἰδίοις καὶ τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς, ὥς ἦς ἐστιν ἐν τῷ πνεύματι, ὑπὸ τῶν γενόμενων Σωσάμων. Origen is quoting Isaiah 1:10. Isaiah 1 includes an indictment of Israel for religious infidelity; it is thus a fitting passage for Origen to cite in his condemnation of Jewish exegetes: ‘Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? Says the Lord’ (Isa 1:10-11a). Note that elsewhere Origen does not understand ‘Sodom’ as signifying a site of sexual sins; rather, for him, Sodom is destroyed on account of its lack of hospitality. See Origen, Hom. Gen. 5.1 in L. Doutreleau (ed.), Origène: Homélies sur la Gènese, SC 7 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1976).
astonishing biblical exegesis. At the same time that Origen complained that Jewish understanding of the Bible was too “fleshly”—that is, too focused on the literal, nonspiritual interpretation of the text—he relied on their philological and geographical expertise in his own interpretive efforts to produce a thoroughly spiritualized interpretation of the Old and New Testaments.68

By accusing Jewish sages of expurgating, hiding, interpolating, and misinterpreting biblical texts, Origen attempts to establish primacy for his Christian mode of interpretation. In this way, he simultaneously legitimizes his own interpretation through references to Jewish knowledge and delegitimizes Jewish interpretation by comparing the sages’ illicit textual practices to the lascivious behavior of the elders of the past.

To summarize, I highlight the work that the licentious elders of the Susanna story do for Origen in his Letter to Africanus. The elders provide him with an opportunity both to utilize information he has gleaned from “learned Hebrews” and to construct a sexualized image of Jewish masculinity that he can deprecate. By an intertextual reading of the elders of the Susanna story that alludes to the wicked elders Zedekiah and Ahab in the book of Jeremiah, Origen depicts Jewish elders of the past as aggressively lustful, duplicitous, and exploitive of women. These wicked elders of the past, in turn, provide him with an opportunity to chastise Jewish leaders and exegetes of his own day and implicate them in the crimes of the past—the very

---

68 Andrew Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 62. Nicholas De Lange describes how the idea that Origen’s references to “Hebrew” informants function as a rhetorical device goes back to Jerome: “According to Jerome, Origen, Clement, Eusebius and others, when they want to lend authority to what they say, are in the habit of saying ‘referebat mihi Hebraeu’ ‘audiui ab Hebra’ or ‘Hebraorum illa sententia est.’ This might be taken to mean that, in Jerome’s opinion, the phrase was simply a rhetorical device, but the context of his [Origen’s] argument, a defense of Jewish scholarship, militates against such an interpretation.” See De Lange, *Origen and the Jews*, 27.
crimes they wished to conceal from the masses. By collapsing the difference between past and present elders, Origen expertly blurs the lines between sexual and textual corruption.

Constructing the Christian Interpreter: Origen’s First Homily on Leviticus

In his first Homily on Leviticus, delivered in the early 240s, Origen again turns to the Susanna story to distinguish between proper and improper readings of scripture. In this homily, Origen configures the text as a body, all the while drawing upon Incarnational themes in which the Word of God becomes “clothed in the flesh of Mary.” As the “veil of the flesh” covered the human body of Christ, so too, he writes, the “veil of the letter” clothes the Word of God: “[T]he letter is seen as flesh but the spiritual sense hiding within it is perceived as divinity.”

With this introduction to allegorical exegesis in his homily on Leviticus, Origen proceeds to offer a reading of the Levitical laws, attending to their literal and

---

69 For more on how Origen imagines sacred text as a body, see Patricia Cox Miller, “‘Pleasure of the Text, Text of Pleasure’: Eros and Language in Origen’s Commentary on the Song of Songs,” JAAR 54 (1986): 241-253.


71 Hom. Lev. 1.1 (SC 286, 66). Paul’s use of veil imagery in 2 Cor 3:12-18 operates as another intertext for Origen in this regard. Paul writes, “Since, then, we have such a hope we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:12-18).
spiritual interpretations. Here is his vision of the Christian exegete who penetrates to the deeper, hidden meaning of the text: “I myself think that the priest who removes the hide ‘of the calf’ offered as ‘a whole burnt offering’ and pulls away the skin with which its members are covered is the one who removes the veil of the letter from the word of God and uncovers its interior parts which are members of spiritual intelligence.” The Christian exegete, or priest in this case, does more than unveil a hidden meaning; he flays the beast. Sacred text is imagined here as a sacrificial calf whose skin is drawn back to reveal the arteries and veins of a “spiritual intelligence.” For Origen, this represents the proper way to handle the text of Leviticus, whose literal meaning masks a deeper, spiritual one.

To describe the improper, Jewish way of reading the Levitical laws, Origen turns to the story of Susanna and the Elders. Here, his complaint is lodged against Jewish interpreters who insist upon the literal sense of scripture:

For they do this who force us to be subject to the historical sense and to keep to the letter of the law. But it is time for us to use the words of the holy Susanna against these shameless elders, which indeed those who repudiate the story of Susanna excise from the list of divine books. But we both accept it and aptly use it against them when it says, “Everywhere there is distress for me.” For if I shall consent to you to follow the letter of the law, “it will mean death for me”; but if I will not consent, “I will not escape from your hands.

---

72 Hom. Lev. 1.4 (SC 286, 78-80). Ego puto quod ille sacerdos detrahit corium vituli oblati in holocaustum et deduct pellem, qua membra eius conteguntur, qui de verbo Dei abstrahit velamen litterae et interna eius, quae sunt spiritualis intelligentiae membra.

73 Henri Crouzel writes, “The accusation of literalism due to ignorance of the spiritual meaning is quite frequently levelled by Origen against the Jews.” Crouzel, Origène, 64. Gustave Bardy writes, “Il approuve quelquefois ces explications [des juifs]; le plus souvent il les condamne, surtout celles qui viennent des juifs, parce qu’elles n’élèvent pas au-dessus du sens littéral.” See Bardy, “Les traditions Juives dans l’oeuvre d’Origène,” 215.
But it is better for me to fall into your hands without resistance than to sin in the sight of the Lord.”

Many things are happening in this passage in which Origen cites from the story of Susanna, and it is worth looking “under the veil” to discover how our cast of characters—Susanna and the elders—functions in this context.

The passage that Origen quotes is from Susanna 22-23. It is the part of the story in which the elders have just surprised the innocent bather and told her that she could either submit to their wishes, or they would testify against her and accuse her of adultery with another young man. Finding herself in a perilous bind, Susanna groans and says, “I am hemmed in on every side. For if I do this, it will mean death for me; if I do not, I cannot escape your hands. I choose not to do it; I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord.”

Origen likens this perilous bind of Susanna to that of the Christian exegete. Like Susanna, the spiritual Christian exegete is offered only two negative choices: either he submits to the Jews and follows the literal sense of the law, or he follows the spirit of the law and is persecuted by Jews on account of it. Origen suggests that Christians, like Susanna, should make the latter choice. He writes, “Therefore, let us

---

74 Hom. Lev. 1.1 (SC 286, 68). Hoc enim agunt, qui deservire nos historiae et servare legis litteram cogunt. Sed tempus est nos adversum improbos presbyteros uti sanctae Susannae vocibus, quas illi quidem repudiantes historiam Susannae de catalogo divinorum voluminum desecarunt, nos autem et suscipimus et opportune contra ipsos proferimus dicentes: Angustiae mihi undique. Si enim consensero vobis, ut legis litteram sequar, mors mihi erit; si autem non consensero, non effugiam manus vestra. Sed melius est me nullo gestu incidere in manus vestras quam peccare in conspectu Domini.

75 Sus 19-21.

76 Sus 22-23.
fall, if it is necessary, into your (the Jews’) detractions so long as the Church, which has already turned to Christ the Lord, may know the truth of the Word which is completely covered under the veil of the letter.”

Here, Origen imagines the Christian exegete as a woman—and a Jewish woman, at that—who is afflicted by the Jews, represented by the licentious elders of the story.

In his *Letter to Africanus* and first *Homily on Leviticus*, Origen asserts that the story of Susanna fittingly illustrates the predicament of the Christian exegete. Like Susanna, the Christian exegete is chaste, faithful, and imperiled, the lamb to the Jewish lion. By positioning Christian identity and Christian exegesis as akin to a vulnerable, persecuted, yet chaste woman, Origen participates in the “common discourse” of “powerlessness and suffering” that characterized much Christian writing of the time. As in Christian martyr acts, Origen’s text redeployes the discourse of suffering to define Christian subjectivity and produce Jewish-Christian difference. For Christians, vulnerability is transformed into triumph. This discourse of suffering and vulnerability intersected in various ways with the reconfiguration of

---

77 *Hom. Lev.* 1.1 (SC 286, 70).

78 For an analysis of lion and lamb imagery in early Christian texts, see Andrew Jacobs, “The Lion and the Lamb: Reconsidering Jewish-Christian Relations in Antiquity.”


gender in the third and fourth centuries, and it is to an examination of these junctures of gender and religious self-definition that I now turn.

*Mapping Gender; Mapping Difference*

Recently, Daniel Boyarin and Virginia Burrus have traced the “reimagination of manhood” in the later Roman empire by examining texts ranging from second-century martyr acts to late-fourth-century trinitarian treatises.81 Building on the work of Maud Gleason, they have shown how definitions and performances of masculinity shifted as “ideal male identity” became “secured in part via cross-gender identification with female virgins.”82 I suggest that we plot Origen’s interpretation of Susanna on this shifting landscape by indicating how he identifies the plight of the Christian exegete with that of the Jewish heroine. In particular, I suggest that his reading of the Susanna story illuminates the ways in which the mapping of gender intersected with the mapping of Jewish-Christian difference in the third century.

The terrain of gender definition shifted between the second and fourth centuries, so that by the late fourth century, in Burrus’ words, idealized “masculinity incorporated characteristics or stances traditionally marked as ‘feminine,’”83 whereas, in the second-century, the female martyr is measured, in part, by her ability to


82 Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 69.

perform as a man. In the second century, a courageous and virile masculinity signifies spiritual strength in female martyrs (Thecla and Perpetua are examples). Yet, by the fourth century, a shift in the mapping of gender has occurred, and “a much more complex structure of gender” develops in which idealized manhood is produced in part by feminized performances of passivity, virginity, and retreat. As Burrus indicates, “Empire had reshaped the city into a stage for agonistic performances of a multifaceted manhood distinguished by its power to turn vulnerability—frequently figured as a capacity for feminization—to advantage.”

I suggest that we can plot Origen’s feminization of Christians as well as his hyper-masculinization of Jews on this trajectory of gender reconfiguration. In his *Letter to Africanus* and first *Homily on Leviticus*, Origen imagines the Christian exegete not as a female virgin, but as a chaste Jewish matron, who is threatened on all sides by the detractions of those who possess more power than she does. In Origen’s texts, this comparison of the Christian exegete to Susanna is imbricated with his definition of Christian exegesis: Allegorical practice, which stakes the Christian claim to the spiritual meaning of the text, is linked to a restrained and renounced sexuality.

---

84 See, for example, the accounts of the martyrdoms of Thecla, Perpetua and Felicitas.


86 Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 75.

The literal and duplicitous exegesis of the Jews, by contrast, is associated with hyper-masculinity and excessive lust, represented here by the elders in the story. Here, Origen’s idealized Christian man adopts the posture of the chaste female while the role of the virile and domineering man is consigned to Jews.

Origen thus produces Jewish-Christian difference by recourse to the more entrenched and “naturalized” difference between male and female, and in so doing he constructs the relationship of Jews to Christians as one fraught with overtones of sexual domination and violence. Like Hippolytus before him, his reading of the Susanna story redeployed ancient notions of a “violent and invasive” male sexuality in order to portray Christians as victims of Jewish power. Considered in this way, Origen’s sexualized representation of Jewish-Christian relations pits Christians, the “paradigmatic sufferers,” against Jews, their aggressive and leonine oppressors. In his complex reading of the Susanna story, Origen offers a discourse of alterity that utilizes accusations of carnality and illicit sexuality to define religious Others.

---

88 Maud Gleason makes a similar point with regard to the Second Sophistic, noting that “sex and gender categories could be used to sort human differences into readily comprehensible hierarchies and oppositions” (Making Men, xiii).


Susanna as a Model of Chastity: Clement, Methodius, Asterius, John Chrysostom

Susanna frequently appears as a model of chastity and self-mastery \([\sigma\omega\phi\rho\sigma\sigma\upsilon\eta]\) in the work of other Greek fathers of the second, third, and fourth centuries. Like Origen and Hippolytus, many early Christian writers utilize the story of Susanna and the elders to align Christian identity with the preservation of bodily integrity and purity in the face of exterior threat. Origen and Hippolytus are distinctive, however, in their allegorical interpretations of the wicked elders.\(^91\) After Origen, few writers focus on identifying the elders with present-day opponents of the church. Rather, writers such as Methodius of Olympus, Asterius of Amasea, and John Chrysostom uphold Susanna as an example of chastity to be imitated by women in particular.\(^92\)

Clement of Alexandria is one of the first Christian writers to identify Susanna as a model of sophrosyne. In the fourth book of his \textit{Stromata}, he lists women from ages past who demonstrated a capability for perfection, and he includes Susanna among these. For Clement, Susanna’s “extraordinary dignity” \([\sigma\epsilon\mu\nu\omicron\omicron\tau\omicron\omicron\sigma\varsigma\]\ \[\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho\beta\omicron\omicron\lambda\eta\]\ establishes her as an “unwavering martyr of chastity” \[\mu\alpha\rho\tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\ \alpha\gamma\nu\epsilon\iota\varsigma\] \[\acute{o}\rho\rho\epsilon\pi\omicron\acute{\nu}\varsigma\].\(^93\) In his \textit{Symposium}, an ode to Christian virginity written in the early fourth century, Methodius urges ascetic Christian women to imitate Susanna’s

\(^91\) See also Irenaeus, \textit{Adversus haereses}, 4.26, who associates the wicked elders with heretics.

\(^92\) See Betsy Halpern-Amaru, “The Journey of Susanna among the Church Fathers,” and Kathryn Smith, “Inventing Marital Chastity.” Smith argues that among Latin writers, especially Ambrose and Augustine, Susanna is presented as a model of chastity within marriage.

rejection of sexual advances. He has Thekla, the "chief of virgins," offer the following hymn to Susanna:

Thekla: Seeing the fair figure of Susanna, the two judges, maddened with desire, said, O lady, we have come longing to lie secretly with you, beloved; but she, trembling, cried:

Chorus: I keep myself pure for you, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet you.

Thekla: It is better for me to die than to give myself to you, O men who are mad for women, and to suffer eternal justice by the fiery vengeance of God. Save me now, O Christ, from these things. In this passage, Methodius associates Susanna’s (marital) chastity with the Christian virgin’s “purity” and fidelity to her “Bridegroom.” As Daniel saves Susanna from death by exposing the elders’ false accusation against her, Christ “saves” the female Christian virgin who maintains her “purity” by interceding on her behalf.

Writing around the year 400, Asterius delivers a sermon on Susanna in which he associates her sophrosyne with that of Joseph. Like Joseph, who refused the sexual advances of Potiphar’s wife, Susanna rejects the elders’ illicit proposition.

---

94 Elizabeth Clark, Reading Renunciation, 269-270; G. N. Bonwetsch, Die Theologie des Methodius von Olympus (Berlin, 1903).


Asterius encourages his auditors to emulate Joseph and Susanna, for both are “tutors of chastity” [παιδαγωγοὺς σωφροσύνης]. Like Methodius before him, Asterius encourages women, in particular, to imitate Susanna: “Women, emulate Susanna; in this way you will guard (your) chastity with courage, as she did hers.”

Finally, John Chrysostom’s sermon on Susanna presents her as a model of chastity, a suffering victim, and a courageous victor over her enemies. He vividly depicts Susanna as a lamb between two wolves, with no one to call upon but God. For Chrysostom, her struggle against these “wolves” establishes not only her sophrosyne but also the elders’ licentiousness [ἀκολογία]. Her fight, argues Chrysostom, is more glorious than that of Joseph: “Susanna endured a violent battle, more severe than that of Joseph. He, a man, contended with one woman; but Susanna, a woman, had to contend with two men.” In contrast to Origen and Hippolytus, Chrysostom fails to elaborate on the identity of the two “wolves,” but

97 Hom. 6.4. (Homilies I-XIV, 61).
98 Hom. 6.7. (Homilies I-XIV, 63). Αἱ γυναῖκες, ζηλώσαστε τὴν Σωσάνναν· οὕτως φυλάξατε τοῖς ανθρώποις τὴν σωφροσύνην ὡς ἑκεῖνη τῷ εαυτῷ.
100 “On Susanna” (PG 56, 591). The entire passage reads: οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ὑπὲρ λύκων ἁμάδα κατέχουν, τῷ σίστρῳ τῆς ἀκολογίας σπαραξᾶς βουλόμενοι· καὶ ἡ μόνη Σουσάννα ἀνα μέσου τῶν δύο λεόντων, καὶ οὐδεὶς ὁ βοηθός, οὐ παιδισκή, οὐ δούλος, οὐ συγγενής, οὐ φίλος, οὐ γείτων, ἐπεὶ ἡ μόνη σαββαθενεθεὶς ἡ Θεός ὁ καλοὶς μὲν δυνάμενος, συγχειρῶν δὲ γίνεσθαι τὴν πάλην ἑαυτῆς γυναικὸς γνώμαις ἐλέγξῃ, καὶ τῆς μὲν Σουσάννης τὴν σωφροσύνην, τῶν δὲ πρεσβυτέρων τὴν ἀκολογίαν δημοσιεύσῃ, ὅμοιος δὲ ταῖς γυναιξὶ παιδευτήρων μέγιστος τὴν Σουσάννης ἐναρέτου ἀθλητὴν ἐπίδειξῃ. Μεγάλη ἡ μάχη, σφοδρός ἢγων τῇ Σουσάννῃ ἀπεκέκλητο, μειζῶν τοῦ ἱωνίας. Εἰκείος μὲν γὰρ ἀνὴρ ὁ μὲν Ῥεχαίτης ἐμάχετο γυναικὸς· αὕτη δὲ γυνὴ ὑπάρχῃ ὑπάρχῃ δύο ἀνδρῶν ἐπάλλασται. For an English translation and discussion of this passage, see Bruce Metzger, An Introduction to the Apocrypha (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 112.
like his predecessors, he configures the Jewish heroine of the story as a suffering “lamb.” In his deft rhetorical presentation, Chrysostom transforms this suffering “lamb” into a Christian victor, a glorious champion of courage, fidelity, and chastity.

The portrayal of Susanna as a lamb between two wolves appears not only in text but also in visual form (fig. 4). In the acrosolium of Celerina in the Roman catacomb of Praetextatus, a fresco dated to the early fourth century offers a figurative interpretation of Susanna and the Elders. She is depicted as a lamb standing between two wolves, and the identification is certain because “SVSANNA” is inscribed over the head of the lamb and “SENIORIS” over the back of one of the wolves. In the visual and textual imagination of these fourth-century Christians, the story of Susanna and its attendant themes of chastity, piety, violence, and deliverance function as a way to theorize Christian identity. She represents the “paradigmatic sufferer” who nevertheless triumphs over her enemies by holding fast to the virtues of purity, chastity, and piety. The Susanna narrative thus fittingly applies to the formation of Christian identity both before and after the imperial sanction of the church. In the second and third centuries, writers invoke Susanna to describe the struggle of the church against her more powerful adversaries. In the later fourth century, writers utilize Susanna to encourage Christians to renounce sexual relations or practice marital chastity. For these later authors, Susanna’s sophrosune, even in the face of death, enables her transformation into a triumphant victor over her licentious adversaries.
In their allegorical interpretations of the story of Susanna, Hippolytus and Origen construct Jews as a sexual threat to virtuous Christians. Their interpretations of Susanna express the concurrent proximity and distance between “Christianity” and “Judaism,” and each author attempts to draw a border between Christian and Jewish behavior by depicting the former as chaste and pure and the latter as lascivious and violent. Origen, in particular, employs the story of Susanna as an occasion to produce difference between Jewish and Christian modes of reading scripture. He utilizes the rhetoric of sexual stereotyping not only to distinguish the Christian from his or her religious Others but also to forge a link between proper Christian sexual behavior (sophrosyne) and proper Christian hermeneutical practice. As the Susanna story enters the service of the imperial church, the focus shifts away from sexualized representations of the wicked elders and towards the co-optation of Susanna as exemplar of chastity. Church fathers of the fourth century and beyond reiterate the link between Christians and the chaste Jewish matron in order to regulate sexual
morality within Christian communities. Such diverse interpretations of Susanna and
the Elders thus illuminate the variety of ways in which sexualized representation
functions in the production of anti-Jewish ideology and early Christian self-definition.
CHAPTER FOUR

“A SYNAGOGUE OF MALAKOI AND PORNAI”: JOHN CHRYSOSTOM’S SERMONS AGAINST THE JEWS

“[T]he borders between Christianity and Judaism are as constructed and imposed, as artificial and political as any of the borders on earth . . . Rather than a natural-sounding ‘parting of the ways,’ such as we usually hear about with respect to these two ‘religions,’ I will suggest an imposed partitioning of what was once a territory without border lines.”

-Daniel Boyarin, Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity

“It is against the Jews that I wish to draw up my battle line.”

-John Chrysostom, Fourth Sermon against the Jews

In his first sermon against the Jews,1 delivered in Antioch in the autumn of 386, John Chrysostom tells a story of a Christian woman, “elegant and free, modest

---

1 There is a debate about whether these sermons should be titled Against the Jews or Against the Judaizing Christians. In the Preface to his 1979 English translation of the sermons, Paul Harkins writes, “Traditionally, these homilies have been called Kata Ioudaioin, which in Latin becomes Adversus Iudaeos, i.e., Against the Jews. This title misrepresents the contents of the Discourses, which clearly show that Chrysostom’s primary targets were members of his own congregation who continued to observe the Jewish feasts and fasts” (Paul Harkins, trans. Saint John Chrysostom: Discourses against Judaizing Christians, FC 68 [Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1979], x). Harkins thus prefers the title Against the Judaizing Christians because it signals the irenic concerns of Chrysostom and his congregation. Marcel Simon held a similar view; see his Verus Israel: A Study in the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425), trans. H. McKeating (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 145. Original French version: Verus Israel: Étude sur les relations entre Chrétiens et Juifs dans l’Empire Roman (135-425), Bibliothèques des Écoles Françaises d’Athènes et de Rome (Paris: Éditions de Boccard, 1948). “Judaizer” and “Judaizing,” however, are loaded terms that “interpret social phenomena by theological categories,” as Judith Lieu has aptly argued (Judith Lieu, “’The Parting of the Ways’: Theological Construct or Historical Reality?” JSNT 56 [1994]:101-119, see esp. 118). Furthermore, Chrysostom has plenty of negative things to say about Jews, their sacred spaces, and their ritual practices in these sermons. For these reasons, I adopt the simpler English translation, Against the Jews. For more on problems encountered when using terms such as “Judaizer” and “Jewish Christian,” see Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “Jewish Christians, Judaizers, and Anti-Judaism,” in A People’s History of Christianity: Late Ancient Christianity, ed. Virginia Burrus (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 234-254. For more on the use of the title Against the Jews, see Andrew Jacobs, “A Jew’s Jew: Paul and the Early Christian Problem of Jewish Origins,” JR 86 (2006): 258-286, who writes, “Although it is often pointed out that John is actually preaching against Judaizers—i.e., gentile Christians who insist on affiliating with Jewish rituals or sacred spaces—there is doubtless enough invective against non-Christian Jews to let the more abbreviated title stand in for the sake of convenience” (270 n. 49).
and faithful,” who is forced by a “defiling and unfeeling man” to enter a synagogue and swear an oath. The woman resists her attacker; she pleads with Chrysostom to help her. Heroically, the newly-ordained priest comes to her rescue: “I was fired with indignation,” Chrysostom states, “I became angry, I rose up, I refused to let her be dragged into that transgression, I snatched her from the hands of her abductor! I asked him if he was a Christian.” This licentious abductor claims to be a Christian, but he is also, in Chrysostom’s eyes, a Jew, for he believes that an oath sworn in the synagogue is more powerful than one sworn in the church. It is precisely this sort of dangerous religious “hybrid”—this “half Christian”’—that Chrysostom rails against in his sermons, and the sexualized depiction of the heretical Christian-Jew as a male

2 John Chrysostom, Adversus Judaeos 1.3.4 (PG 48, 817; FC 68, 11-12). The entire passage reads:

Let me tell you this, not from conjecture but from my own experience. Three days ago (believe me, I am not lying) I saw a woman who was elegant and free, modest and faithful, being forced by a defiling and unfeeling man, reputed to be a Christian (for I would not call a person who would dare to do such a thing a pure Christian)—he was forcing her to enter into the [shrine] of the Hebrews and to swear there an oath about some matters under dispute with him. But the woman, coming up, asked for help, and she required me to prevent this lawless violence (for it was forbidden to her, who had shared in the divine mysteries, to enter that place). I was fired with jealousy, I became angry, and I rose up; I refused to let her be dragged into that transgression, I snatched her from the hands of her abductor. I asked him if he was a Christian, and he said he was. Then I set upon him vigorously, charging him with lack of feeling and the worst stupidity; I told him he was no better off than a mule if he, who professed to worship Christ, would drag someone off to the dens of the Jews who had crucified him.

3 This term is Chrysostom’s own: “And what excuse do you have, you who are only half a Christian?” and poian ἑξείς συγγνώμην, Χριστιανὸς ἐν ἡμισείᾳ; (Adv. Jud. 1.4.7 (PG 48, 849; FC 68, 16).
predator who preys upon pure Christian women was, I conjecture, not lost on Chrysostom’s audience.⁴

In a manner akin to that of Hippolytus and Origen, Chrysostom frequently depicts Jews and “Judaizers” as “wolves” in pursuit of Christian “sheep,” and he asserts that he himself is the shepherd who protects the sheep from their Jewish predators.⁵ Leaving aside an analysis of John Chrysostom’s self-presentation as a “good shepherd” and stalwart protector of Christian women, I focus here on the gendered and sexualized portrayal of his religious opponents—both Jews and so-called “Judaizers”—in his sermons Adversus Iudaeos.⁶ Delivered in the late fourth century, Chrysostom’s usage of the metaphor of wolves and sheep is common in his sermons. For example, in his fourth sermon Adversus Iudaeos, he writes:

“Today the Jews, who are more dangerous than any wolves, are bent on surrounding my sheep; so I must spar with them and fight with them so that no sheep of mine may fall victim to those wolves.”⁷ Chrysostom also utilizes the imagery of wolves and sheep to describe the “Judaizing disease” in the beginning of his third sermon when he writes: “The untimely obstinacy of those who wish to keep the first paschal fast forces me to devote my entire instruction to their cure. For the good shepherd does more than drive away the wolves; he also is most diligent in caring for his sheep who are sick. What does he gain if the flocks escape the jaws of the wild beasts but are then devoured by disease?”⁸

⁴ I thank Dayna Kalleres for initially suggesting to me the sexualized underpinnings of this passage. Charlotte Fonrobert’s excellent and extensive analysis of this passage also views Chrysostom’s narrative as strongly insinuating the threat of sexual violence. She writes, “Read with a dose of hermeneutical suspicion, the story does not necessarily reflect an actual historical incident, as many scholars simply assume. It is just as possible that Chrysostom constructed the incident as an example serving his rhetorical purposes. The description of the scene in terms that suggest an impending rape happily averted by the bishop who happens to have witnessed it seems to suggest as much. Even if the incident is a rhetorical invention, we can safely assume that Chrysostom expected his cautionary anecdote to be an effective means of persuasion” (Fonrobert, “Jewish Christians, Judaizers, and Anti-Judaism,” 238).

⁵ Ad. Jud. 4.1.2 (PG 48, 871; FC 68, 72); “Today the Jews, who are more dangerous than any wolves, are bent on surrounding my sheep; so I must spar with them and fight with them so that no sheep of mine may fall victim to those wolves.” Chrysostom also utilizes the imagery of wolves and sheep to describe the “Judaizing disease” in the beginning of his third sermon when he writes: “The untimely obstinacy of those who wish to keep the first paschal fast forces me to devote my entire instruction to their cure. For the good shepherd does more than drive away the wolves; he also is most diligent in caring for his sheep who are sick. What does he gain if the flocks escape the jaws of the wild beasts but are then devoured by disease?” (Adv. Jud. 3.1.1 [PG 48, 862; FC 68, 47-48]). See also Ad. Jud. 8.3.10 (PG 48, 932; FC 68, 217), where he writes, “The Jews are more savage than any highwaymen; they do greater harm to those who have fallen among them. They did not strip off their victim’s clothes nor inflict wounds on his body as did those robbers on the road to Jericho. The Jews have mortally hurt their victim’s soul, inflicted on it ten thousand wounds, and left it lying in the pit of ungodliness.”

century (when the church in Antioch is more imperial than imperiled), Chrysostom makes use of a narrative of violent “abduction” and aggression to map differences between Christian and Jewish identities. His portrait of a Judaizer as a man who lures Christian women into the synagogue is one example of how Chrysostom denigrates his opponents by constructing them as sexual aggressors.

Chrysostom’s sermons contain other sexual stereotypes of Jews—including insidious images of Jewish men as “soft” (malakoi), lustful, and bestial, Jewish women as prostitutes (pornai), and the synagogue as a brothel (porneion). Yet in the story of the “abduction” of a Christian woman who is dragged to the synagogue, it is

7 John Chrysostom, Adv. Jud. 1.2.7; 1.3.1; 1.6.8; 2.3.4; 4.7.3; and 6.7.6.
the Christian-Jew who suffers Chrysostom’s verbal attack. I suggest that, like Hippolytus and Origen before him, Chrysostom utilizes this narrative of male violence against a woman to define a boundary between orthodoxy and heresy, between a “pure” Christianity and an adulterated one that is tainted with the stain of Jewish practices. Facing a situation in which some of his Christian congregants were visiting synagogues and joining in Jewish worship and celebrations—a veritable “territory without border lines” —Chrysostom invokes a narrative of attempted exploitation of a woman to “draw up” his battle line and drive a wedge between “Christianity” and “Judaism.”

In this chapter I explore the sexual stereotyping of Jews and “Judaizers” in Chrysostom’s sermons against the Jews. I argue that Chrysostom’s caricature of Jews as sexual deviants and his depiction of “Judaizers” as sexual aggressors function as devices by which he can sexualize religious and cultural borderlines and heighten the threat posed by border-crossing. Moreover, I suggest that with his accusations of sexual excess, sexual violence, and general immorality of Jews and “Judaizers,” Chrysostom endeavors not only to delegitimate the authority of his religious opponents but also to shore up his own authority and the links between Christian orthodoxy and sexual virtue.

8 In his fourth sermon against the Jews, Chrysostom states: “It is against them [the Jews] that I wish to draw up my battle line.” (Adv. Jud. 4.4.2 [PG 48, 876; FC 68, 81]). ...ἐπειδή ἐκαὶ πρὸς ἐκείνους ἀποτείνασθαι βούλομαι. See also Adv. Jud. 4.3.4 (PG 48, 875; FC 68, 77) for another use of battle imagery: “But before I draw up my battle line against the Jews...” [Μᾶλλον δὲ πρὶν ἥ πρὸς Ἰουδαῖος ἀποτείνασθαι. . .]
In the past, some scholars examined Chrysostom’s sermons *Adversus Iudaeos* in an effort to identify the “reality” behind the impassioned rhetoric of the sermons. For example, in his 1948 book, *Verus Israel*, Marcel Simon, who labeled Chrysostom the “master of anti-Jewish invective,”9 sought to uncover the “local situation” that inspired such ire in the Antiochene priest. He claimed that Chrysostom’s sermons present evidence for “Jewish vitality” and “proselytism” that threatened the Christian community in Antioch.10 In their 1978 study, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, Wayne Meeks and Robert Wilken maintained a similar argument to that of Simon by claiming that Chrysostom’s sermons *Adversus Iudaeos* provided evidence not only of the “strength and vitality within the Jewish communities” but also of “large numbers of Judaizing Christians.”11 Five years later, in *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, Wilken contextualized the “threat” of Jews and Judaism to Chrysostom and the Antiochene church by exploring the impact of the emperor Julian’s campaign to rebuild the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.12

---


12 See especially Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, chapter 5, “The Temple in Jerusalem and Christian Apologetics.” Wilken also helpfully examines Chrysostom’s sermons in light of Greek and
More recently, Isabella Sandwell has explored the ways in which Chrysostom’s sermons against the Jews function in relation to the formation of religious identity—as well as the formation of the category “religion” in general—in fourth-century Antioch. Drawing on the work of Daniel Boyarin and Judith Lieu, Sandwell argues that Chrysostom’s invective against the Jews contributes to his (not always successful) efforts to construct boundaries among Antioch’s religious communities. Furthermore, Sandwell utilizes Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* to theorize the role that religious practice and behavior play in Chrysostom’s efforts to construct orthodox Christian identity.

Building on the work of these scholars, I explore how Chrysostom’s rhetoric functions in the construction of reality and the formation of identity in late fourth-century Antioch. In particular, I focus on how Chrysostom uses the stereotype as a

---

Roman rhetorical traditions, arguing that “the techniques of the *psogos* are apparent in the use of half-truths, innuendo, guilt by association, abusive and incendiary language, malicious comparisons, and in all, excess and exaggeration” (Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, 116). For more on the rhetorical practices and invective speech of Libanius, Chrysostom’s teacher, see Raffaella Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

13 Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, 82-84. She writes, “Attempts at boundary construction are often found in situations where individuals continue to interact across those boundaries. . . Chrysostom’s audiences may have been acting in very different ways to those outlined in his preaching. While calling themselves Christian they may not have defined this as strictly as Chrysostom did and may not have seen it as exclusive of the same behaviors as he did” (9).


15 Andrew Jacobs observation is informative: “One of the benefits of colonial discourse analysis. . . is its refusal to separate rhetoric from reality in the way that is presumed by both sides of this debate on ‘Jewish-Christian relations.’ To separate ‘Christian rhetoric’ from ‘Jewish reality’ is to imagine that the Christians who enjoyed prestige and authority in the era after Constantine inhabited a different world than the Jews who were directly subject to that authority. My understanding of Christian culture as *imperial* during this period should signal that the language of Christians was not incidental or
targeted device to construct Jewishness as the negation of Christianness.\textsuperscript{16} In Chrysostom’s hands, stereotypes of Jews as licentious and immoral function as a means by which to cordon off “pure” Christians from their heretical (i.e., more Jewish) counterparts. In his analysis of how stereotypes operate in modern colonial contexts, Homi Bhabha argues that “the stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself.”\textsuperscript{17} In this chapter, I take Chrysostom’s stereotypes of Jews as the central object of analysis, and I explore how he “anxiously and assertively” repeats these stereotypes in his effort to construct Jewish and Christian identity as antithetical and exclusive.\textsuperscript{18} In the conclusion of the chapter, I use Bhabha’s work on the stereotype in colonial discourse to theorize the ways in which Chrysostom’s frantic attempts to “fix” Jewish identity function to expose (and, perhaps, to create

\textsuperscript{16} Despite his repeated attempts to disavow Jewishness and portray it as antithetical to Christianess, Chrysostom’s construction of Jewish identity and behavior as the negation of Christian identity and behavior is never complete or absolute, for it is continually troubled by the proximity of Jews, the overlap of identities, and the porosity of borders.

\textsuperscript{17} Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), 100.

\textsuperscript{18} In an illustrative passage from his fourth sermon, Chrysostom demands of his audience: “The difference between the Jews and us is not a small one, is it? Is the dispute between us over ordinary, everyday matters, so that you think the two religions are one and the same? Why are you mixing what cannot be mixed? They crucified Christ, whom you adore as God. Do you see how great the difference is?” (Adv. Jud. 4.3.6 [PG 48, 875; FC 68, 78-79]).
conditions for) the complexity, richness, and fluidity of religious identity in late ancient Antioch.

**Chrysostom’s Accusations against the Jews**

Chrysostom’s sermons *Adversus Iudaeos* include several caricatures of Jews and Jewish practices as immoral, base, and demonically inspired. Like Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, and other Christian heresiologists before him, Chrysostom accuses Jews of bearing responsibility for the murder of Christ, and he connects this murder to past Jewish aggression against the prophets. Addressing the Jews, he writes:

>You did slay Christ, you did lift violent hands against the Master, you did spill his precious blood. This is why you have no chance for atonement, excuse, or defense. In the old days your reckless deeds were aimed against his servants, against Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Even if there was ungodliness in your acts then, your boldness had not yet dared the crowning crime. But now you have put all the sins of your fathers into the shade. Your mad rage against Christ, the Messiah, left no way for anyone to surpass your sin.19

Chrysostom frequently justifies the suffering of Jews in his own day as divine punishment for Jewish aggression against Christ. He insists that the Jews’ “present disgrace” is linked inextricably to their treatment of Christ when he writes: “Your mad rage against Christ . . . is why the penalty you now pay is greater than that paid

---

19 John Chrysostom, *Adv. Jud.* 6.2.10 (PG 48, 907; FC 68, 154). Ἐπειδή τὸν Χριστὸν ἀπεκτέινατε, ἐπειδὴ κατὰ τοῦ Δεσπότου τὸς χεῖρας ἔξετέινατε, ἐπειδὴ τὸ σῶμα τὸ τίμιον ἔεξείνατε, διὰ τούτο ὡκ ἐστίν ὑμῖν διόρθωσις, οὐδὲ συγγνώμη λοιπὸν, οὐδὲ ἀπολογία. Τὸτε μὲν γὰρ ἐὰς δούλους ἦν τα τολμᾶμενα, ἔις Μωυσεὰ καὶ Ἡσαΐαν καὶ Ἰερεμίαν· τοτε ἐκαὶ ἀσέβεια τῆς ἐγένετο, ἀλλὰ οὕτω τὸ κεφάλαιον τῶν κακῶν ἦν τολμηθέν. Νυνὶ δὲ παντα ἀπεκκύπτετα τα πάλαι, οὐδὲν δὲ τρόπῳ παρανομίας ὑπερβολῆν κατέληπτε διὰ τῆς ἔις Χριστὸν μανίας· διὸ καὶ μειζόνως κολαζευθεὶς νῦν. See also *Adv. Jud.* 1.2.1; 1.5.1; 5.1.7 (PG 48, 845, 850, and 884; FC 68, 5, 18, and 100). For more on the accusation of Jews as “Christ-killers” from biblical times to the present, see Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
by your fathers.” Furthermore, like Justin Martyr, Chrysostom depicts the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. as divine punishment for the murder of Christ. He claims that after Jesus died on the cross, “he then destroyed your city; it was then that he dispersed your people; it was then that he scattered your nation over the face of the earth.” With these descriptions of divine punishment of Jews, Chrysostom constructs his Jewish contemporaries as subjects of justified violence.

In a further effort to vilify and dehumanize Jews, Chrysostom depicts not only their synagogues but also their souls as “dwelling places . . . of demons.”

20 Adv. Jud. 6.2.10 (PG 48, 907; FC 68, 154).

21 Justin Martyr argues that the purpose of Jewish circumcision “was that you and only you might suffer the afflictions that are now justly yours; that only your land be desolate, and your cities ruined by fire; that the fruits of your land be eaten by strangers before your very eyes; that not one of you be permitted to enter your city of Jerusalem” (Dial. 16). Jennifer Knust explores Justin Martyr’s claim that acts of violence toward the Jews are divinely ordained. She argues, “[I]dentifying acts of violence against Jews as divine punishment but acts of violence against Jesus and the Christians as sacrifice or divine fulfillment, he develops a theory of violence that excludes Jews from sympathy while emphasizing the unjust, and temporary, afflictions of those who follow Christ” (Jennifer Wright Knust, “Roasting the Lamb: Sacrifice and Sacred Text in Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho,” forthcoming). See also Knust, “Enslaved to Demons: Sex, Violence and the Apologies of Justin Martyr,” in Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, eds. Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses. Biblical Interpretation Series 84 (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 431-456.

22 Adv. Jud. 5.1.7 (PG 48, 884; FC 68, 100). Τότε γὰρ ἔστι τὸ θαυμαστὸν, ὡς ἤφθασεν ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ τὰς οἰκονομίας τῆς Ἰουδαίας, ὑπὸ θανάτου καθαίρεται, τὸτὲ τοῖς πολλοῖς καθαίρεται, τὸτὲ τῶν δήμων διεσκοπίσει, τότε τὸ ἔθνος παντοχοῦ διέσπειρε.

23 Meeks and Wilken make a similar point when they write, “Chrysostom thus draws the conclusion which is implicit in the anti-Jewish polemic of the Christian apologists from Pseudo-Barnabas and Justin—if not indeed from the Acts of the Apostles—on: the Jews’ rejection of Jesus as Messiah meant the end of their role in the history of salvation, and the destruction of their city and temple was God’s public pronouncement of their rejection, fulfilling Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24:2. Consequently there seems hardly any limit to his invective” (Jews and Christians in Antioch, 31).

24 Adv. Jud. 1.3.1 and 1.4.2. (PG 48, 847, 848-849; FC 68, 11, 15): “Indeed the synagogue is less deserving of honor than any inn. It is not merely a lodging place for robbers and cheats but also for demons. This is true not only of the synagogues but also of the souls of the Jews” [μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ πανδοξεῖον παντὸς ἀτιμότερον τὸ τῆς συναγωγῆς χαρίν εστίν. Οὐ γὰρ ληστῶν ὑδὲ κατήλεσεν ἄπλος, ἀλλὰ δαιμόνων ἐστὶν καταγωγίων, μᾶλλον δὲ οὐχ οἱ συναγωγαί μονον, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ αἱ συναγωγαί] (1.4.2). Dayna Kalleres argues that in “Adversus
Comparing the synagogue to other Greek places of worship (such as the shrine of Matrona and the temple of Apollo), Chrysostom argues that Jews are a more dangerous influence on Christians than are pagans.\textsuperscript{25} Describing the synagogue, Chrysostom writes, “Here the slayers of Christ gather together, here the cross is driven out, here God is blasphemed, here the Father is ignored, here the Son is outraged, here the grace of the Spirit is rejected. Does not greater harm come from this place since the Jews themselves are demons?”\textsuperscript{26} To avoid encountering the devil in the synagogue, Chrysostom recommends that upon entering a synagogue, Christians should “make the sign of the cross on your forehead” so that “the evil power that dwells in the synagogue immediately takes to flight.”\textsuperscript{27} Of the Judaizers, Chrysostom demands, “How do you Judaizers have the boldness, after dancing with demons, to come back to the assembly of the apostles?”\textsuperscript{28} To associate with Jews, share in their ritual practices, and enter their sacred spaces is, in Chrysostom’s view,

\textit{Iudaeos}, Chrysostom identifies the synagogue as the principle locus of the daemonic in Antioch; in particular, it was a place which his congregants frequently visited to forge oaths” (Dayna Kalleres, “Exorcising the Devil,” 5).

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Adv. Jud.} 1.6.4 (PG 48, 852; FC 68, 23): “The godlessness of the Jews and the Greeks is on par. But the Jews practice a deceit which is more dangerous. In their synagogue stands an invisible altar of deceit on which they sacrifice not sheep and calves but the souls of men” [\textit{\'Ωστε τά μὲν τής ἁσβείας ἵσα αὐτοῖς καὶ Ἑλληνικά, τα δὲ τής ἀπάθεας χαλεπότερον ὑπὸ τούτων δράται. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ παρ’ αὐτοῖς ἐστι ἐκεῖνον ἁρατόν, εἰς ὃν οὐκ ἱδ᾿ ἐπῄεσαν καὶ μόσχους, ἀλλὰ ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων καταθύμασιν.]

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Adv. Jud.} 1.6.3 (PG 48, 852; FC 68, 23). \"Οσοι Χριστιανοὶ συνέχονται, ὃσοι Πατὴρ ἐγνοεῖται, ὃσοι βλασφημεῖται Θεὸς, ὃσοι Πνεῦματος αἰθετεῖται χαρίς, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ αὐτῶν ὄντων δαιμονῶν, οὐ μείζων ενεπεύθην ἡ Βλάβη;\" \textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Adv. Jud.} 8.8.7 (PG 48, 940; FC 68, 237). Chrysostom continues: “If you fail to sign your forehead, you have immediately thrown away your weapon at the doors. Then the devil will lay hold of you, naked and unarmed as you are, and he will overwhelm you with ten thousand terrible wounds.”

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Adv. Jud.} 2.3.5 (PG 48, 861; FC 68, 44).
to come into contact with the sphere of the demonic. Such contact, moreover, jeopardizes the “purity” of the body of the Church.29

Along with his characterization of Jews as demonic, Chrysostom also depicts Jews as sorcerers and dealers in witchcraft. Not only do people in his community “flock” to the synagogues to make oaths,30 he claims, but they also seek out the synagogue for healings.31 He uses his pulpit as an occasion to castigate these “Judaizers” who encourage Christians to visit the synagogue for magical “cures,” and he endeavors to expose Jewish healings as “tricks,” “incantations,” “charms,” and “spells.”32 Strong Christians, he states, must not only shun Jews and avoid Jewish places of worship but also rescue their weaker brothers and sisters from these demonic practices of the Jews.33

29 At the close of his seventh sermon, Chrysostom states, “We have an eager and vigilant concern for our brothers who have deserted over to the Jewish side. When the Jews find this out, it will be they, rather than we, who thrust out those of our number who frequent the synagogue. I should say, there will be no one hereafter who will dare flee to them, and the body of the Church will be unsullied and pure” (Adv. Jud. 7.6.10 [PG 48, 928; FC 68, 204]).

30 Adv. Jud. 1.3.4-5 (PG 48, 847-848; FC 68, 11-12).

31 Adv. Jud. 8.6.6 (PG 48, 936; FC 68, 227): “What excuse will we have if for our fevers and hurts we run to the synagogues, if we summon into our own house these sorcerers, these dealers in witchcraft?”

32 Adv. Jud. 8.5.6 (PG 48, 935; FC 68, 222): Describing a dangerous “Judaizer,” Chrysostom writes, “Suppose he uses the cures which the Jews effect as his excuse, suppose he says: ‘They promise to make me well, and so I go to them.’ Then you must reveal the tricks they use, their incantations, their amulets, their charms and spells. This is the only way in which they have a reputation for healing; they do not effect genuine cures.”

33 Adv. Jud. 1.6.7 (PG 48, 852; FC 68, 24) and 1.8.6-7 (PG 48, 856; FC 68, 33-34). See also Adv. Jud. 1.8.3-4 (PG 48, 856; FC 68, 32-33) and 5.1.5-6 (PG 48, 883; FC 68, 99) where Chrysostom recommends resorting to physical violence if necessary: “What I have said to your loving assembly both here and in my previous discourse is enough to silence and gag the shameless arguments of the Jews and to prove that they are transgressing the Law. It was not my sole purpose to stitch shut the mouths of the Jews.” In her dissertation, Dayna Kalleres considers how “Chrysostom’s inclusion of the daemonic in his character defamation resulted in a mandate detailing a strategized, verbal interaction instigated by the stronger members of the congregation to rescue or cleanse the Judaizers.
Like images of demonic and magical practices, images of disease and pollution color Chrysostom’s sermons and enable him to exaggerate the threat of Jews and “Judaizers” to the Christian community in Antioch. In the beginning of his first sermon against the Jews, Chrysostom states that he is interrupting his series of sermons against the Anomoeans in order to confront another “illness”:

Another very serious illness calls for any cure my words can bring, an illness which has become implanted in the body of the Church. We must first root this ailment out and then take thought for matters outside. . . . What is this disease? The festivals of the pitiful and miserable Jews are soon to march upon us one after the other and in quick succession.

A few moments later Chrysostom informs his congregation that although “the greater portion of the city [of Antioch] is Christian, …some are still sick with the Judaizing disease.” By depicting those who promote Jewish practices as diseased and polluting agents within the Christian community, Chrysostom theorizes the “border line” between Christianity and Judaism as a line between health and sickness. The disparity between these two “religions” is portrayed, here, as a stark difference between health and disease, between life and death. In Chrysostom’s deft presentation, the threat of Jewishness could not be direr.

within the community and silence the Jews in the larger environment” (Dayna Kalleres, “Exorcising the Devil,” 110).


35 Adv. Jud. 1.1.4-5 (PG 48, 844; FC 68, 3). “Ετερον νόσημα χαλεπώτατον τὴν ἰμετέραν γλώσσαν πρὸς ἱερότητας καλεῖ, νόσημα εν τῷ σώματι τῆς Ἑκκλησίας πεφυτευμένον. Δεὶ δὲ πρότερον τούτῳ ἀναστάσαντας, τὸτε φροντίσαι τῶν ἐξωθην’ πρότερον τοὺς οἰκείους θεραπέυσαι, καὶ τοὺς τῶν ἄλλων ἔπιμελήσασθαι. Τι δὲ εστὶ τὸ νόσημα; Εὐρταῖ τῶν ἁθλίων καὶ ταλαιπώρων Ἰουδαίων μέλλουσι προσελαύς εἰν συνεχείς καὶ ἐπάλληλοι.

Chrysostom further embellishes his invective against Jews by accusing them of drunkenness and gluttony. He introduces this theme in his first sermon by quoting Stephen in Acts 7, who accuses Jews of being a “stiff-necked people” (Acts 7:51). Chrysostom then inquires about the “stiffness” and “hardness” of the Jews: “What is the source of this hardness?” he asks, “It comes from gluttony and drunkenness. Who says so? Moses himself. ‘Israel ate and was filled and the darling grew fat and frisky’” (Dt 32.15). A few moments later, Chrysostom utilizes this accusation of excess with regard to food and drink to delegitimate Jewish fasting. He argues, “Now when they [the Jews] fast, they go in for excesses and the ultimate licentiousness, dancing with bare feet in the market place. The pretext is that they are fasting, but they act like men who are drunk.”

Chrysostom returns to the theme of Jewish drunkenness again in his final sermon against the Jews, delivered in September of 387. Here he claims that Jews are drunk but not on wine. He supports this claim by registering other instances in which a man may be considered a “drunkard”: for example, if he “nurtures some other passion in his soul,” if he “is in love with a woman who is not his wife,” if he “spends

---


38 *Adv. Jud.* 1.2.4 (PG 48, 846; FC 68, 7). See also Isaiah 48:4: “Because I know that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew…” (NRSV).

39 *Adv. Jud.* 1.2.5 (PG 48, 846; FC 68, 8). Note how Chrysostom uses turns the figure of Moses against the Jews. This is one of several places in his work where biblical heroes and prophets are transformed to serve anti-Jewish ends.

40 *Adv. Jud.* 1.2.7 (PG 48, 846; FC 68, 9). See also *Adv. Jud.* 4.1.5 (PG 48, 873; FC 68, 73): “Do not tell me that the Jews are fasting; prove to me that it is God’s will that they fast. If it is not God’s will, then their fasting is more unlawful than any drunkenness.”

194
his time with prostitutes,” or if he “is filled with the strong wine of his undisciplined passion.”

This type of drunkard, argues Chrysostom is “[l]ike a deranged man or one who is out of his wits, he imagines he sees everywhere the woman he yearns to ravish.”

Drunkenness is theorized, here, as *porneia*, and Jews, because of their indulgence of licentious desires, are guilty of crimes of both drunkenness and *porneia*. Given these broader definitions of “drunkenness,” Chrysostom claims that “the Jews are drunk but do not know they are drunk.”

In these passages, in particular, it is important to note the close proximity of charges of drunkenness and charges of *porneia*.

In her work on ancient Roman moral discourse, Catharine Edwards argues convincingly that accusations of drunkenness and gluttony are part of a wider rhetorical project in which ancient moralists denounced opponents by characterizing them as pursuers of base pleasures. Accusations of drunkenness, gluttony, and sexual immorality “were implicated in defining what it meant to be a member of the Roman Elite, in excluding outsiders and controlling insiders.”

She continues by arguing that Roman moralists “frequently associate sensual pleasure with ‘lower’ beings, such as the poor, slaves and animals. Brothels, taverns, gambling dens, baths—the public haunts of venal pleasure—are regularly presented as especially

---


195
attractive to low persons.” Furthermore, as Edwards claims, excess in food and drink signal a lack of bodily self-control and a tendency to choose vice over virtue.\footnote{Edwards, \textit{Politics of Immorality}, 190.} Often when we encounter accusations of drunkenness and gluttony in ancient moral discourse, charges of sexual immorality are not far behind.\footnote{Edwards writes: “Sensual pleasure was seen as dangerous, at least in part because its power, its appeal, was universal. Susceptibility to such pleasure was associated with women, slaves and the poor—those who had to be controlled by others if they were not to fritter away their lives in self-indulgence. A display of self-control enabled the wealthy and powerful to justify their position by pointing to their moral superiority and natural distinction” \cite{Politics of Immorality, 195}.} Such is the case in regard to Chrysostom’s accusations against the Jews. By associating drunkenness with practices of \textit{porneia} (adultery, prostitution, and promiscuity) and, then, by associating Jewishness with drunkenness, Chrysostom constructs Jews as particularly vulnerable to the lure of base pleasures, and, thus, as morally reprehensible. His depiction of Jews as morally debased in regard to sexuality and bodily self-control continues throughout the entire series of his sermons against the Jews, but it is particularly evident in his first sermon.

\textit{Caricatures and Sexual Stereotypes in Chrysostom’s First Sermon Adversus Iudaeos}

Before exploring the variety of ways in which sexual stereotypes and charges of \textit{porneia} function in Chrysostom’s invective against the Jews, I wish to summarize recent scholarship on Chrysostom’s sermons \textit{Adversus Iudaeos} that pertains to the

\footnote{Indeed, Edwards critiques David Halperin and Michel Foucault for too-easily separating discourses about sex from other discourses about luxury and excess. She writes, “Despite the concern of these studies with attitudes rather than real behavior in the ancient world, they have offered relatively little exploration of the relationship between discussions of sexual immorality and those concerning other vices, areas which are intimately connected in ancient literature” \cite{Politics of Immorality, 9}.}
dating and order of the sermons. In the 2001 issue of the Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum, Wendy Pradels, Rudolf Brändle, and Martin Heimgartner published a German translation of a “rediscovered” text of John Chrysostom’s second sermon (Discourse 2) of Adversus Iudaeos.48 This discovery led the authors to propose a new order and dating of Chrysostom’s sermons Adversus Iudaeos—an order and dating that differs from the one followed by Bernard de Montfaucon and J.-P. Migne in Patrologia Graeca. This proposal, along with a fresh translation of the entire series of sermons, will be published by these authors in a forthcoming volume of Sources chrétiennes.49

To summarize the importance of Pradels, Brändle, and Heimgartner’s findings for my project, I highlight their suggestion that Chrysostom delivered his first sermon a full year before he continued the series.50 The authors comment on the unique nature of this first sermon when they write:

When one reads through the discourses in the order we have proposed, one is struck by the different tone in Discourse 1 as compared to the rest of the

48 Wendy Pradels, Rudolf Brändle, and Martin Heimgartner, “Das bisher vermisste Textstück in Johannes Chrysostomus, Adversus Iudaeos, Oratio 2” ZAC 5 (2001): 22-49. Their proposal includes the removal of Discourse 3 from the series, as it “is contained in only a handful of manuscripts, always in isolation, and was never published as part of the series until it was inserted by Bernard de Montfaucon” (Wendy Pradels, Rudolf Brändle, and Martin Heimgartner, “The Sequence and Dating of the Series of John Chrysostom’s Eight Discourses Adversus Iudaeos,” ZAC 6 [2002]: 90-116, see esp. p. 91). The new order is as follows, with proposed dates of each discourse in parentheses: Discourse 1 (August or September 386), Discourse 4 (29 August 387), Discourse 2 (5 September 387), Discourse 5 (9 September 387), Discourse 6 (10 September 387), Discourse 7 (12 September 387), and Discourse 8 (19 September 387) (“The Sequence and Dating of the Series,” 106). Given the authors’ argument that Discourse 3 does not belong among the original set of sermons Adversus Iudaeos, I have refrained from using Discourse 3 as part of the current study.

49 “Das bisher vermisste Textstück,” 23.

50 “The Sequence and Dating of the Series,” 92: The authors write, “Discourse 1 was preached as an isolated sermon in the fall of 386, and . . . Discourse 2 was delivered the following year as part of a series of six discourses (Discourse 4, 2, 5-8).”
series. Though all of the sermons are polemical in nature, Discourse 1 is more constantly excessive than the others in its language, and moreover, it never progresses beyond polemics into the realm of complex theological considerations. In the remaining discourses the tone is often didactic rather than polemical, and the line of reasoning throughout the series reflects considerable preparation on the part of the preacher as well as a preference for theological argumentation. The reader is given the impression that the first sermon took up a very controversial subject, one about which the orator had already received sharp criticism on the part of certain individuals in his congregation, and that his rather superficial, polemical treatment of the issue must have reaped even more criticism and debate. Thus he decided to treat the matter more thoroughly and carefully the following year.  

According to these authors, Chrysostom’s first sermon Adversus Iudaeos was highly polemical and “excessive” in its language. These observations correspond with my finding that, of the series, the first sermon contains the most frequent and derogatory invective, including the most frequent sexualized invective. I now turn to a close analysis of invective against the Jews in the first sermon; in particular, I am interested in exploring the interaction of sexualized slander with other negative stereotypes of Jews.

After introducing the immediate problem that this sermon addresses (the “disease” of the “pitiful and miserable Jews” and the approach of their festivals and fasts), Chrysostom invokes Paul’s image of the olive tree in Romans 11:17-24.

51 “The Sequence and Dating of the Series,” 110.

52 Adv. Jud. 1.1.4-5 (PG 48, 844; FC 68, 3).

53 In Romans 11:17-24, Paul states, “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. You will say, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And even those of Israel, if
Whereas Paul utilizes the image of the olive tree to argue for Gentile humility in regard to Jews and the eventual salvation of Jews (“…how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree”), Chrysostom reverses Paul’s logic by suggesting that the “Jewish” branches have been severed permanently and the “Christian” branches have replaced them. Chrysostom’s misrepresentation of Paul as a proponent of complete Christian supersessionism reads as follows:

The morning sun of justice arose for them [Jews], but they thrust aside its rays and still sit in darkness. We [Christians], who were nurtured by darkness, drew the light to ourselves and were freed from the gloom of their error. They were the branches of that holy root, but those branches were broken. We had no share in the root, but we reaped the fruit of godliness.

In this passage, Chrysostom’s transposal of Paul’s message shows how the fourth-century priest expertly re-constructs Paul’s text to bolster his anti-Jewish claims.

---

54 There is some debate among Pauline scholars as to Paul’s view of the eventual salvation of Israel. See, for example, John Gager, Reinventing Paul (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Lloyd Gaston, Paul and the Torah (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987); and E. P. Sanders, Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1983).

55 Adv. Jud. 1.2.1 (PG 48, 845; FC 68, 5). Ἄνετειλεν ἐκείνοις πρώτος ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἡλίος· κακεῖνοι μὲν ἀπέστατο τὴν ἀκτίνα, καὶ εἰς σκότῳ καθήμενοι· ἡμεῖς δὲ οἱ σκότω συντραφεῖτε, πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς ἐπεστασάμεθα τὸ φῶς, καὶ τοῦ ζοφοῦ τῆς πλάνης ἀπηλλάθημεν. Ἐκεῖνοι τῆς ρίζης τῆς ἁγίας ἦσαν κλάδοι, ἀλλὰ ἐξεκλάθησαν· ἡμεῖς οὖ̃ μετείχομεν τῆς ρίζης, καὶ καρπὸν εὐσεβείας ἠνέγκαμεν.

Chrysostom (contra Paul) equates Christians with Gentiles, distancing Christians entirely from their Jewish “root.” In the remainder of the sermon, Chrysostom will argue that the Christian replacement of Jews as recipients of God’s promises is justified, in part, by the continued immoral practices (including porneia) of Jews.

After his interpretation of the olive tree in Romans 11, Chrysostom turns to the gospel of Matthew for another image with which he can caricature and disparage Jews. Matthew 15:21-28 tells the story of a Canaanite woman who asks Jesus to help her and her daughter, who is “tormented by a demon.” Jesus refuses the woman’s request by stating that he has come to help only “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” She persists in her request, and Jesus responds, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” In this passage, “dogs” represent Gentiles, whereas Jews are “children.” As he did with Romans 11:17-24, Chrysostom strategically reverses the terms of this Matthean story to suit his own purposes. He states:

Although those Jews had been called to the adoption of sons, they fell to kinship with dogs; we who were dogs received the strength, through God’s grace, to put aside the irrational nature, which was ours, and to rise to the honor of sons. How do I prove this? Christ said: “It is not fair to take the children’s bread and to cast it to the dogs.” Christ was speaking to the Canaanite woman when he called the Jews children and the Gentiles dogs. But see how thereafter the order was changed about: They became dogs, and we became the children.

---

57 The verses pertaining to Chrysostom’s point read: “[Jesus] answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ He answered, ‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs’” (Matt 15:24-26).

58 Adv. Jud. 1.2.1-2 (PG 48, 845; FC 68, 5-6). Κόκεινοι μὲν ἐς ὑποθεσίαν καλοῦμενοι, πρὸς τὴν τῶν κυνῶν συγγενεῖαι ἐξεπεσον· ἡμεῖς δὲ κύνες ὡτες ἵσχυσαμεν διὰ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ χάριν ἀποθέσαι τὴν προτεράν ἀλογίαν, καὶ πρὸς τὴν τῶν ὑιῶν ἀναβήναι τιμήν. Ποθὲν τούτο δήλον; Οὐκ ἔστι καλὸν, φησὶ, λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων, καὶ βαλεῖν τοῖς κυναρίοις· πρὸς
Chrysostom then combines the image of the dog from Matthew 15 with that of Philippians 3:2-3 (“Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh”), claiming that Paul also understood Jews as “dogs”:

“‘Beware of the dogs,’ Paul said of them [the Jews], ‘Beware of the evil workers, beware of the mutilation. For we are the circumcision.’ Do you see how those who at first were children became dogs? Do you wish to learn how we, who at first were dogs, became children?” As with the story of the olive tree, Chrysostom utilizes the texts of Matthew 15:24-26 and Philippians 3:2-3 to argue that Christians have fully replaced Jews as both the “children of God” and the proper recipients of the “bread.” Jews, by contrast, have replaced Gentiles as “dogs.” With this image of the Jewish dog, Chrysostom introduces a theme that he will interweave throughout the remainder of his sermons Adversus Iudaeos, namely, the sustained caricature of Jews as animals.

59 Adv. Jud. 1.2.2 (PG 48, 845; FC 68, 6). Βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας, Παύλος φησι περὶ αὐτῶν, Βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, Βλέπετε τὴν καταστομὴν ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἐσμέν ἡ περιτομὴ. Εἴδες πῶς κύνες ἐγένοντο οἱ πρῶτοι οὖντες τέκνα; Βουλεῖ μαθεῖν πῶς οἱ πρῶτοι οὖντες κύνες ἡμεῖς ἐγενόμεθα τέκνα; For an analysis of this passage and a history of the image of the “Jewish dog” in early Christianity and the middle ages, see Kenneth Stow, Jewish Dogs: An Image and Its Interpreters: Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 4-9.

60 For another example of Chrysostom’s argument for complete Christian supersession of God’s promises to Israel, see Hom. Rom. 16 (PG 60).

61 Indeed, Chrysostom’s choice of animals is telling: He consistently compares Jews to animals known for licentious, promiscuous, and brute behavior: dog, heifer, hyena, and stallion. Kenneth Stow notes that the dog, in particular, is known as excessively sexual in ancient times. Stow points to a rabbinic teaching “which explains that almost alone of the creatures on Noah’s Ark, the dog dared copulate, promiscuously at that, while waiting out the flood.” He continues, “It was just such a portrait of
To lend authority to his depiction of Jews as brute animals, Chrysostom turns to the language of the prophets. Using the language of Hosea 4, he compares the obstinacy of the Jews to that of a “stubborn heifer.”

Similarly, drawing on the language of Jeremiah 31, he depicts Jews as “untamed calves.” In the midst of an argument in which he accuses Jews of murdering their own children, Chrysostom compares Jews to the “amorous stallion” of Jeremiah 5. He writes:

Wild beasts often lay down their lives and scorn their own safety to protect their young. No necessity forced the Jews when they murdered their own children with their own hands to pay honor to the avenging demons, the foes of our life... Because of their licentiousness, did they not show a lust beyond that of irrational animals? Hear what the prophet says of their excesses. “They are become as amorous stallions. Every one neighed after his neighbors wife” (Jer 5:8), but he expressed the madness which came from their licentiousness with the greatest clarity by speaking of it as the neighing of brute beasts.

promiscuity that John Chrysostom was recalling, when, commenting on Matthew, he said that the Christians, who have become true children, have shed their ‘irrational [pagan, carnal, and, in context, doglike] nature.’ And for Chrysostom, as we have seen, the dogs were now the Jews and their synagogues, kennels” (Stow, Jewish Dogs, 8-9).

62 Adv. Jud. 1.2.5 (PG 48, 846; FC 68, 8). Hos 4:16: “Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn; can the Lord now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture?” (NRSV).

63 Adv. Jud. 1.2.5 (PG 48, 846; FC 68, 8). Jer 31:18: “Indeed I heard Ephraim pleading: ‘You disciplined me, and I took the discipline; I was like a calf untrained. Bring me back, let me come back, for you are the Lord my God’” (NRSV). Note that Chrysostom connects the prophetic images of brute beasts to his accusations of Jews as glutons and drunkards. The passage, in its entirety, reads: “But what is the source of this hardness? It comes from gluttony and drunkenness. Who says so? Moses himself. ‘Israel ate and was filled and the darling grew fat and frisky’ (Dt 32:15). When brute animals feed from a full manger, they grow plump and become more obstinate and hard to hold in check; they endure neither the yoke, the reins, nor the hand of the charioteer. Just so the Jewish people were driven by drunkenness and plumpness to the ultimate evil; they kicked about, they failed to accept the yoke of Christ, nor did they pull the plow of his teaching. Another prophet hinted at this when he said, ‘Israel is as obstinate as a stubborn heifer’ (Hos 4:16). And still another called the Jews ‘an untamed calf’ (Jer 31:18)” (Adv. Jud. 1.2.5 [PG 48, 846; FC 68, 8]).

64 Adv. Jud. 1.6.8 (PG 48, 852-853; FC 68, 25). Ἐὰν δὲ τῆς ἁμορρος διάφορης πολλάκις, καὶ τῆς οἰκείας καταφρονεῖ σωτηρίας, ὡς ὑπερασπίζως τῶν εκγόνων· οὕτω δὲ οὐδεμίας ανάγκης οὐσὶς τούτων ἐξ αὐτῶν φύσαι ταῖς οἰκείαις κατεφαξάν χερεῖν, ἰνα τοὺς ἐξήθους τῆς ἡμετέρας ξασθής, τοὺς ἀλέστορος θεραπεύωσι δαιμόνιας. Τί αν τὶς αὐτῶν ἐκπλήγη πρῶτον, τὴν ἁσβείαν ἢ τὴν ὀμοτῆτο, καὶ τὴν ἀπανθρωπίαν; ὅτι τοὺς οὐοὺς
In this passage, Chrysostom strategically combines sexualized images (stallions lusting after their neighbors’ wives) with stereotypes of Jews as promiscuous animals and murderers of their own children. In addition, he attempts to legitimate these accusations against the Jews by quoting phrases from the prophets.65

Chrysostom’s most explicit use of sexual slander to vilify Jews occurs soon after his depiction of Jews as “stubborn heifers” and “untamed calves” and immediately after his portrayal of Jewish fasts as exercises in “excess” and “licentiousness.”66 In the context of these accusations, Chrysostom adds the following caricature of Jews as sexually deviant. He states: “But these Jews are gathering choruses of ‘soft’ men and a great trash heap of prostituting women; they drag into the synagogue the whole theater, actors and all. For there is no difference between the theater and the synagogue.”67

65 In several places, Chrysostom emphasizes that his accusations against the Jews are in accordance with biblical texts—texts Jews themselves hold to be authoritative: “If the words I speak are the words of the prophet, then accept his decision” (Adv. Jud. 1.2.7 [PG 48, 847; FC 68, 10]); and “It was not Paul who said this but the voice of the prophet speaking loud and clear” (Adv. Jud. 1.2.4 [PG 48, 846; FC 68, 7]). For more on how early Christians drew upon the Hebrew prophets to sexually slander opponents, see Jennifer Knust, Abandoned to Lust, 54-56.

66 Adv. Jud. 1.2.5-7 (PG 48, 846; FC 68, 8-9).

67 Adv. Jud. 1.2.7 (PG 48, 846-847; FC 68, 9). Ούτοι δὲ χορός μιλακῶν συναγωγόντες, καὶ πολὺς πεπονεμένων γυναικῶν συρφετοῦ, τὸ θέατρον ἀπαντὰ καὶ τοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς σκηνῆς εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν ἐπισύρουσιν θεάτρου γεν καὶ συναγωγῆς οὐδὲν τὸ μέσον. Καὶ οἶδα μὲν ὅτι τινὲς τόλμασιν καταγινώσκουσιν τοῦ λόγου, ὅτι εἶπον, Θεάτρου καὶ συναγωγῆς οὐδὲν τὸ μέσον. For a repetition of these accusations, see Adv. Jud. 2.3.4 (PG 48, 860-861; FC 68, 44): “You let them be dragged off into licentious ways. For, as a rule, it is the prostitutes, the ‘soft men’, and the whole chorus from the theater who rush to that festival [of the Trumpets]” [ἀλλὰ περιοράτε τοῖς τῆς
Many accusations of sexual immorality combine in this brief passage, and it is worth pausing to consider each.

First, Chrysostom caricatures Jewish men as “soft” and “feminine” (malakoi). Dale Martin explains that in ancient texts the term malakos “can refer to many things: the softness of expensive clothes, the richness and delicacy of gourmet food, the gentleness of light winds and breezes. When used as a term of moral condemnation, the word still refers to something perceived as ‘soft’: laziness, degeneracy, decadence, lack of courage, or, to sum up all these vices in one ancient category, the feminine.”

In Chrysostom’s case, such “gendered invective” functions as a strategy to denigrate Jews and Judaizers by challenging their ability to perform as males. By associating Jewish men with the realm of the “feminine,” via the label malakoi, Chrysostom aligns Jewishness and gender deviancy and thus challenges Jewish status.

68 Dale Martin, “Arsenokoitês and Malakos: Meanings and Consequences,” in Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 44. See also John J. Winkler, The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece (New York: Routledge, 1990), 50-52, who provides this anecdote from Xenophon’s Memorabilia: “‘Tell me, Charmides, if a man is capable of winning a crown at contests and thus being honored in his own person and making his fatherland more renowned in Greece but does not wish to compete, what kind of person do you think this man would be?’ ‘Obviously a soft (malakos) and cowardly one’” (Mem. 3.7.1, quoted in Winkler, 50). Winkler helpfully notes that “one axis along which masculinity could be measured was hardness/softness” (50).

69 The term “gendered invective” is borrowed from Maud Gleason’s Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). She argues that “Libanius did not use gendered invective. John Chrysostom did” (166). In an earlier description of the rhetorical contests of the sophists Polemo and Favorinus, Gleason explains how gendered invective operated: “Ever conscious of the dignity of his own appearance, [Polemo] regarded effeminate physical characteristics with extreme distaste. The rivalry of these two star performers became a notorious dispute about gender correctness for two reasons: first, in a culture where accusations of gender deviance were a traditional component of invective, Favorinus’ effeminate appearance invited comment; and second, their contest for supremacy, on behalf of themselves and the cities they represented, was a struggle for power, and gender, as we now are well aware, readily becomes a language for signifying relationships of power” (27).
and power in general. As Maud Gleason suggests, gender “readily becomes a language for signifying relationships of power.”\textsuperscript{70} Chrysostom thus articulates Christian dominance over Jews, in part, by challenging Jewish masculinity.\textsuperscript{71}

Second, Chrysostom identifies Jewish women as prostitutes (\textit{peporneumenon gunaikon}). If the charge of “softness” and effeminacy presented a challenge to the late ancient Antiochene male and his performance of masculinity, charges of “prostitution” presented congruent challenges to Antiochene women. Accusations of female prostitution functioned not only as slander to the chastity and gender performance of the community’s women but also as an affront to men and their ability to enforce “proper” sexual hierarchies. As Blake Leyerle argues, “What is especially reprehensible in prostitution, then, is the perversion of the ‘natural’ sexual hierarchy in which men are to lead and women to follow.”\textsuperscript{72} By caricaturing Jewish men as \textit{malakoi} and Jewish women as \textit{pornai}, Chrysostom suggests that Jews fail in

\textsuperscript{70} Maud Gleason, \textit{Making Men}, 27; see full quote in footnote above.

\textsuperscript{71} Catharine Edwards’ analysis of Roman accusations of \textit{mollitia} is helpful in this context. Edwards argues that “accusations of \textit{mollitia} were not so much responses to ‘effeminate’ sexual behavior as attempts to humiliate. The terms referring to \textit{mollitia} and related notions have a much broader frame of reference than the specifically sexual” (\textit{Politics of Immorality}, 68). She continues by demonstrating how “penetration” functioned as a vivid metaphor for power relations: “Accusations of certain forms of sexual misbehavior made by Romans can be read as claims to dominance by the accuser over the accused. To be penetrable was to be weak. To be penetrated was to be aligned with the female, the ‘other’. It was not the only respect in which a man could be like a woman but in many cases it was made to stand for other aspects of effeminacy. Penetrability could be invoked at such a level of abstraction that men were often accused of being effeminate while having an excessive interest in penetrating women” (\textit{The Politics of Immorality}, 75). Jennifer Knust’s analysis of sexual slander in ancient rhetoric is also informative. She argues, “In the ancient context, sexual behavior was an important component of the production and maintenance of status. The freeborn, citizen male was thought to be—told he should be, claimed he was—in control of his passions. He avoids excess. He is the active partner in sexual acts. To fail in these areas is to fail as both a man and as a citizen. Charges of sexual vice, therefore, could serve to discount an individual’s claim to status, just as praise of an individual’s sexual virtue could justify his privilege” (\textit{Abandoned to Lust}, 28).

\textsuperscript{72} Blake Leyerle, \textit{Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives}, 46.
their proper gender performances. With sexualized and gendered invective such as this, Chrysostom aims not only to humiliate Jews and “Judaizers” in regard to gender and sexuality but also to call into question their status, social standing, and authority in religious and cultural domains.

Finally, Chrysostom depicts the synagogue as a theater (indeed he argues for the complete identification of synagogue and theater) and compares Jews to actors. To grasp how devastating an insult this was in the context of Chrysostom’s late fourth-century congregation, we must understand his attitude to the theater in general.

In her book, *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives: John Chrysostom’s Attack on Spiritual Marriage*, Blake Leyerle examines Chrysostom’s negative attitude toward the theater and describes how he associates acting with porneia. Drawing on some of Chrysostom’s other sermons, Leyerle argues:

> Sexual immorality seemed indeed the theater’s special study, from which, according to Chrysostom, one could choose a whole curriculum: “planning for unnatural lust, the study of adultery, practical training for fornication, schooling for wantonness, fostering of filthiness” (*Hom. In Acta Apost. 42.4*). He wonders how any Christian dared to turn the same eyes that gazed on “the bed on the stage on which the filthy deeds of adultery were enacted” to the “holy table” of the altar (*De Dav. et Saule* 3). For this reason he forbade attendance at the theater.73

Leyerle helpfully sets Chrysostom’s depiction of the theater as a site of porneia in context, arguing that his portrayal of the theater must be viewed “within the broader

---

73 Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives*, 43.
and arguably more interesting context of his concern over misused power and overturned hierarchies.”

In his thirty-seventh homily on Matthew, Chrysostom portrays the theater as a place where

there are adulteries and stolen marriages. There are female prostitutes, male ‘companions,’ and pleasure boys: in short, everything that is illegal, monstrous, and full of shame. . . . Tell me, for instance, from where do those who plot against marriages come? Is it not from this theater? From where do those who undermine bedrooms come? Is it not from that stage? Is it not from there that husbands become burdensome to their wives? Is it not from there that wives become easily despised by their husbands? Is it not from there that most people are adulterers?

In this passage, Chrysostom represents the theater as disruptive of social hierarchies and “natural” order, and it troubles the gendered hierarchy within marriage, in particular. With this negative portrayal of the theater, Chrysostom resembles Roman moralists more than Greek ones, who tended to hold the theater and actors in higher regard. Catharine Edwards describes how Roman moralists, in particular,

“characterized the theater as a storehouse of obscenity, a place where lust, laughter and political subversion were incited in almost equal measures. Actors were viewed as base persons, of ambiguous and venal sexuality, whose words could not be trusted.” Chrysostom’s depiction of the synagogue as a theater thus functions as

---

74 Leyerle, Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives, 44.
75 Hom. in Matt. 37.6 (PG 57.426-27). Quoted in Leyerle, Theatrical Shows, 67-68.
76 Edwards, Politics of Immorality, 99. Edwards also suggests that for Roman moralists, “[a]cting was incompatible with honestas, honor, and dignitas, ‘social standing’, the qualities which were supposed to mark out those of senatorial and equestrian status above all” (99).
sexualized invective that bolsters his claims that Jews are sexually licentious and lustful. 77

In supporting his rhetorical invective against the Jews, Chrysostom again draws on the language of the prophets in an attempt to legitimate, first, his charges of Jewish sexual immorality and, second, his description of the synagogue as a theater and brothel. Claiming that he “speaks” not in his own words but in “the words of the prophet,” 78 he utilizes a passage from Jeremiah to support his claim that the synagogue is “no better than” a theater or brothel. He writes:

Many, I know, respect the Jews and think that their present politeia is a venerable one. This is why I hasten to uproot and tear out this deadly opinion. I said that the synagogue is no better than the theater and I bring forward a prophet as my witness. Surely the Jews are not more deserving of belief than their prophets. What, therefore, did the prophet say? “You had a harlot’s brow; you became shameless before all” (Jer 3:3). Where a harlot has set herself up, that place is a brothel. 79

Chrysostom continues this line of attack by depicting the synagogue as a “lodging place” of hyenas. This charge is especially vilifying since many ancients understood hyenas as sexually indecent due to their supposed ability to change between male and female. 80 He writes, “But the synagogue is not only a brothel and a theater; it is also a

---

77 For more on Chrysostom’s views of the theater, see his Hom. Matt. 68 (PG 58, 631-640).

78 Adv. Jud. 1.2.7 (PG 48, 847; FC 68, 10).

79 Adv. Jud. 1.3.1 (PG 48, 847; FC 68, 10). Οἶδα ὅτι πολλοὶ αἰδοῦνται Ἰουδαίοις, καὶ σεμνὴν νομίζουσιν ἐννοεῖ τὴν ἐκείνων πολιτείαν υπὲρ διὸ τὴν ὀλεθρίαν ὑπόληψιν πρόφητοι ἀνασάσαι ἐπείγομαι. Ἐποίη τῇ θεάτρῳ ἡ συναγωγὴ οὐδὲν ἀμένον διάκειται, καὶ ἀπὸ προφήτου παράγα τὴν μαρτυρίαν ὅσι εἰσίν Ιουδαίοι τῶν προφητῶν ἀξιοπιστοτέροι. Τί σοι ὁ προφήτης φησίν; Ὄψις πόρης ἐγένετο σοι ἀπηναισχυνθησα ὑπέρ πάντας. Ἐνθα δὲ πόρυν εἴπηκεν, πορεῖον ἐστίν ὁ τόπος.

80 The Epistle of Barnabas also understands the hyena as a sexually deviant animal (see my discussion of this in Chapter One). The writer of Barnabas explains the commandment as follows: “Nor shall
den of robbers and a lodging place for wild beasts. Jeremiah said, ‘Your house has become for me the den of a hyena’ (cf. Jer 7:11, Jer 12:9). He does not simply say ‘of a wild beast,’ but ‘of a filthy wild beast.’

At this point in his sermon, after maligning Jews as brute animals and sexual deviants, Chrysostom begins to focus his ire on so-called “Judaizers” or “half-Christians”—those who, according to Chrysostom, not only worship with Christians but also visit the synagogue and participate in Jewish fasts and festivals. It is at this moment in the sermon that he relates the story (discussed above) of the “modest” Christian woman who is violently pursued by a “brutal” Judaizing man. He then admonishes Christians who fast with the Jews by invoking the rhetoric of shame. He writes:

Do you fast with the Jews? Then take off your shoes with the Jews, and walk barefoot in the agora, and share with them in their indecency and laughter.

---

you eat the hyena.’ ‘You must not,’ he says, ‘be an adulterer or a pervert nor be like such people.’ For what reason? Because this animal changes its nature every year, at one time it is male, the next time female” (Ep. Barn. 10:7). For more on ancient understandings of the hyena, see Mary Pendergraft, “‘Thou Shalt not Eat the Hyena’ A Note on ‘Barnabas’ Epistle 10.7” VC 46 (1992) 75-79 and Stephen E. Glickman, “The Spotted Hyena from Aristotle to the Lion King: Reputation is Everything” Social Research 62 (1995): 501-557. See also the comments on the hyena in the Physiologus, a Greek text of unknown authorship dated between the second and fourth centuries: “The law says ‘You shall not eat the hyena and whatever resembles it’ [cf. Dt. 14:8]. Physiologus says about the hyena that it is a hermaphrodite: at times it becomes male and at times female. The beast is unclean because of changing its nature. That is why Jeremiah says, ‘Is my heritage a hyena’s den?’ [cf. Jer. 12:9]. Likewise every ‘double-minded man is unstable in all his ways’ [cf. James 1:8], he is also like the hyena. And now there are many that enter this church [ ἱσχυσίη] in the form of men, and when they come out of the assembly [συναγωγή], they have the habits of women. So Physiologus spoke well about the hyena” (Physiologus 27, trans. Gohar Muradyan, Physiologus: The Greek and Armenian Versions with a Study of Translation Technique [Leuven: Peeters, 2005], 131-132, 158-159).

81 Adv. Jud. 1.3.1 (PG 48, 847; FC 68, 10-11). Μᾶλλον δὲ ὁ χῶρος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μὲν ἄστιν ἢ συναγωγῆ, ἀλλὰ καὶ σπῆλαιοι ληστῶν, καὶ καταγώγων θηρίων. Σπῆλαιοι γὰρ, φησιν, ὑμεῖς ἐγγενεῖται μοι ὁ οἶκος μου· οὐδὲ ἀπιστὸς θηρίου, ἀλλὰ θηρίου σκαθάρτου. Paul Harkins notes that “Chrysostom’s citation is not accurate. It may be a conflation of Jer 7:11 (LXX), which reads: ‘Is my house a den of thieves. . .?’ and Jer 12:9 (LXX), which reads: ‘Is not my inheritance to me a hyena’s cave?’” (FC 68, 11n.40).
But you would not choose to do this because you are ashamed and apt to blush. Are you ashamed to share with them in outward appearance but unashamed to share in their impiety? What excuse will you have, you who are only half a Christian?  

In this passage, Chrysostom depicts Jewish behavior as indecent and shameful. In his view, Jews lack bodily self-control and social dignity: they walk barefoot in public, they laugh, they “dance with demons.” For a Christian to join Jews in this disgraceful performance is to compromise not only her piety but also her honor and shame. By embracing the hybrid status of half-Christian/half-Jew, she relinquishes her claims to faithfulness, modesty, and sexual purity.

Taken together, these accusations of sexual licentiousness, shameful indecency, effeminacy, prostitution, and bestiality serve to heighten the rhetorical force of Chrysostom’s argument that Jewish practice and behavior is inferior to Christian practice and behavior—indeed, that Jews, by their very nature, are inferior to Christians. By creating stereotypes of Jews as agents of porneia and pollution, he raises the stakes of “mixing” what he views as two mutually exclusive religious formations. He contends that by joining Jews in their worship and celebrations, a

---

82 Adv. Jud. 1.4.7 (PG 48, 849; FC 68, 16). Ἡ στειευῖς μετὰ Ἰουδαίων; οὐκ οὖν ἀπόθου καὶ τὰ ὑποδήματα μετὰ Ἰουδαίων, καὶ γυμνοὶ βαδίζε τοῖς ποσίν ἐπὶ τῆς ἀγορᾶς, καὶ κοινώνει τῆς ἀσχημοσύνης αὐτοῖς καὶ τοῦ γέλωτος. Ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀν ἐλαῖο; αἰσχύνη γὰρ καὶ ἐρυθρίας. Εἶτα ἀχμάτος μεν αὐτοῖς κοινωνίᾳ αἰσχύνη, ἀσβείας δὲ κοινωνίας, οὐκ αἰσχύνη; καὶ ποίαν ἐξεσ συγγνώμην, Χριστιανὸς ἐώς ἐξ ἡμισίας;

83 Adv. Jud. 2.3.5 (PG 48, 861; FC 68, 44).

84 I am reminded here of Blake Leyerle’s suggestion in her book on Chrysostom: “In such a society, the accusation of sexual shamelessness is both metaphor and punishment for social misbehavior” (Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives, 152).

85 On the problem of “mixing” Jewish and Christian practices, see Adv. Jud. 4.3.6 (FC 68, 78), quoted above (7 n. 18). On the mutual exclusivity of Judaism and Christianity, see Adv. Jud. 1.6.5 (PG 48, 16).
Christian man compromises his masculinity and thereby his power and status in the community. Likewise, a Christian woman compromises her bodily integrity, chastity, and shame. By claiming that Jewish men are *malakoi*, Jewish women are *pornai*, and the synagogue is a *porneion*, Chrysostom endeavors to naturalize Jewish-Christian difference by appealing to popular moral attitudes toward gender and sexuality. In his subsequent sermons against the Jews, delivered in the following year, he returns to and develops many of these stereotypes.

*Sexual Stereotypes in the Remaining Sermons Adversus Iudaeos*

If we recall the narrative of attempted (religious) exploitation of a Christian woman with which I began this chapter, then we may note how Chrysostom constructs women, in particular, as vulnerable to the designs of predatory “Judaizers.” He continues this portrayal of women as acutely susceptible to Judaizing heresies throughout the remaining sermons against the Jews. For example, in his second sermon, Chrysostom urges husbands to control their wives by preventing them from

---

852; FC 68, 23-24): “If the ceremonies of the Jews move you to admiration, what do you have in common with us? If the Jewish ceremonies are venerable and great, ours are lies. But if ours are true, as they are true, theirs are filled with deceit.”


87 Note that Marcel Simon takes such descriptions as evidence that women were especially susceptible to Judaizing and, thus, the main proponents of Judaizing activities. He writes, “Autant que nous puissions nous rendre compte, c’est parmi les femmes d’une part, dans les milieux populaires et peu cultivés d’autre part, que le mal s’est surtout. Du moins Chrysostome met-il les defections sur le compte de la frivolité feminine et de l’ignorance” (“La polémique anti-juive de S. Jean Chrysostome,” 405).
“running off” to join the Jews in their fasts and festivals. Drawing on the language of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14, Chrysostom states:

This is why he made you to be head of the wife. This is why Paul gave the order: “If wives wish to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home” (1 Cor 14:35), so that you, like a teacher, a guardian, a patron, might urge her to godliness. Yet when the hour set for the services summons you to the church, you fail to rouse your wives from their sluggish indifference. But now that the devil summons your wives to the feast of Trumpets and they turn a ready ear to his call, you do not restrain them. You let them entangle themselves in accusations of ungodliness, you let them be dragged off into licentious ways. For, as a rule, it is the prostitutes, the “soft” men, and the whole chorus from the theater who rush to that festival.88

In this passage, Chrysostom depicts women as particularly prone not only to Judaizing aggression (the call of the devil) but also to licentiousness in general. He encourages husbands to imitate Paul (and, likewise, himself) in guarding, teaching, and admonishing women so as to prevent them from going astray. Here, sexualized invective lurks under the surface of Chrysostom’s warnings to husbands: strong Christian men, he suggests, maintain control over their wives and keep them from falling into licentious ways. Jews and Judaizers, by contrast, illicitly “prey” upon women and encourage them to participate in shameless, indecent acts, such as the festivals and fasts of the Jews.

After urging Christian husbands to guard their wives from Judaizing aggressors, he adds one further warning: “Why do I speak of the *porneia* that goes on

---

88 *Adv. Jud*. 2.3.4 (PG 48, 860-861; FC 68, 44). Διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο κεφαλὴν σε τῆς γυναικὸς ἐποίησε, διὰ τούτο καὶ ὁ Παύλος ἐκέλευσεν. Εἴ τι μαθεῖν θέλουσιν αἱ γυναῖκες, ἐν σῶμα τοῦ Ιέων ἀνδρᾶς ἐπερωτᾶν, ἵνα ὡσπερ διδάσκαλος καὶ κηδεμόνας καὶ προστάτης, ἐφι εὐαξίαν αὐτήν εὐσέβης. Ὡμείς δὲ, ὅταν μὲν καιρὸς συνάξεως πρὸς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καλῆ, ῥαθυμοῦσας οὐ διεγείρετε τοῦ δὲ διαβόλου πρὸς τὰς σαλπίγγας αὐτῶς καλύπτως, ἡτοίμως ἐπακουόμενας οὐ κατέχετε, ἀλλὰ περιορίσατε τοῖς τῆς ἁπαξίας ἐγκλήμασιν ἁλικομένας, καὶ πρὸς ἀκολούθαν ἐξελκομένας. Καὶ γὰρ πορναὶ καὶ μαλακοὶ καὶ πάς ὁ τῆς ὀρχήστρας χορὸς ἐκεῖ συντρέχειν εἰσόθαι.
there [at the Jewish festivals]? Are you not afraid that your wife may not come back from there after a demon has possessed her soul? Did you not hear in my previous discourse the argument which clearly proved to us that demons dwell in the very souls of the Jews and in the places in which they gather?**89 By adding the threat of demon-possession, Chrysostom accentuates the danger of female contact with Jews, and he links Jewish *porneia* to the sphere of the demonic.

Because of the heightened danger and defilement of Jews, their sacred spaces, and their ritual practices, Chrysostom cautions Christian men to keep their wives at home. In his fourth sermon, he warns:

> If you have a female servant or if you have a wife, detain them at home with great forcefulness. If you refuse to let them go to the theater, you must refuse all the more to let them go to the synagogue. To go to the synagogue is a greater crime than going to the theater. What goes on in the theater is, to be sure, sinful; what goes on in the synagogue is godlessness.**90

As in his first sermon against the Jews, in this passage Chrysostom compares the synagogue to a theater in order to shore up his claims that the synagogue is a *locus* of

---

**89*Adv. Jud.* 2.3.5 (PG 48, 861; FC 68, 44). Καὶ τί λέγω πορνείας τὰς γυνομένας; οὐ δέδοικας μὴ δαίμονα λαβοῦσα ἐκείθεν ἐπανέλθῃ ἡ γυνή; οὐκ ἢκουσας ἐν τῇ προτέρᾳ διαλέξει σαφῶς ἀποδείξατος ἡμῖν τοῦ λόγου, ὅτι καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτάς τῶν Ιουδαίων καὶ τοὺς τόπους, ἐν οἷς συλλέγονται, δαίμονες κατοικοῦσιν; Note that the “previous discourse” to which he refers is his first sermon (*Adv. Jud.* 1.4.2), which he may have repeated before starting the series of sermons in the autumn of 387. See Pradels, Brändle, and Heimgartner, “The Sequence and Dating of the Series,” 108-109.

**90*Adv. Jud.* 4.7.3 (PG 48, 881; FC 68, 92). Καὶ οἶκεται ἡ ἐκής, καὶ γυναῖκα, κάτεχε ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκίας μετὰ πολλῆς τῆς φοβοῦσθης. Εἰ γὰρ ἐἰς θέατρον οὐκ ἐπιτεθεῖς ἀπελθεῖν, πολλῶς μᾶλλον ἐπὶ συναγωγῆς τοῦτο ἱρὴ ποιεῖν· μεῖζον γὰρ ἡ παρανομία εἰκῆν ἑκεῖ ἁμαρτία τὸ γινόμενον, ἐνταῦθα δὲ ασέβεια.
sexual promiscuity and shamelessness. It is, in his view, no place for a chaste and modest Christian woman to enter.91

Chrysostom depicts Jewish places of worship as sites of porneia twice more in his sixth and seventh homilies. In his sixth sermon he describes the former Jerusalem temple as a “brothel, a stronghold of sin, a lodging-place for demons, a fortress of the devil, the ruin of the soul, the precipice and pit of all perdition.”92 Similarly, in his seventh sermon, he describes the “licentiousness” of the festival of sukkot in the following terms: “Their trumpets were a greater outrage than those heard in the theaters; their fasts were more disgraceful than any drunken revel. So, too, the tents which at this moment are pitched among them are no better than the inns where harlots and flute girls ply their trades.”93

Moreover, as he does in his first sermon, in his sixth sermon Chrysostom turns to prophetic writings in an attempt to authorize his claims about Jewish porneia. For example, he refers to the allegory of the two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, in Ezekiel


92 Adv. Jud. 6.7.6 (PG 48, 915; FC 68, 174).

23 in order to associate Jews of his own day with biblical prostitutes.\textsuperscript{94} He addresses his Jewish contemporaries, saying:

It is not only now that your people are living sinful lives. Did you, in the beginning, live your lives in justice and good deeds? Is it not true that from the beginning and long before today you lived with countless transgressions of the Law? Did not the prophet Ezekiel accuse you ten thousand times when he brought in the two harlots, Oholah and Oholibah, and said, “You built a brothel in Egypt; you were mad after barbarians, and you worshipped strange gods” (Ezek 23:5-9).\textsuperscript{95}

In this passage, Chrysostom utilizes the passage from Ezekiel to argue that Jews are not only licentious in present times but also in former times. By accentuating the continuity of Jewish porneia over time, Chrysostom endeavors to “naturalize” Jewish behavior as indelibly and inescapably sinful.

Another example of this association of present Jewish sins and past (biblical) sins occurs in Chrysostom’s fourth sermon, when he interprets the story of Sodom and Gomorrah by arguing for the resemblance of Jews to the sinful inhabitants of these cities. Quoting Isaiah 1:10 (“Hear the word of the . . . Lord, you rulers of Sodom, give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah”), Chrysostom argues that the prophet spoke “not to those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah, but to

\textsuperscript{94} Note that this is another instance in the writings of the prophets in which female prostitution signifies the apostasy of Israel. Such passages are particularly useful for church fathers who endeavor to provide “proof texts” for their configuration of Jews as carnal and licentious.

\textsuperscript{95} Adv. Jud. 6.2.5 (PG 48, 906; FC 151-152). Μὴ γὰρ ὃν ἐν ὀμαρτίαις μόνον ζῆτε, παρὰ δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ κατορθώμασιν; οὐκ άνωθέν καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς μιρίας συναναστράφητε παρανομίαις; οὐ μιρία κατηγόρησαν ὑμῶν ἱερείῳ ὁ προφήτης, ὅτε τὰς δύο πόρνας εἰσῆγαγε, τὴν Ὄλα, καὶ τὴν Ὄλιβα, λέγων, ὅτι Πορνεῖον ὡκοδομήσατε ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ, καὶ ἐπεμαίνεσθε τοῖς βαρβάροις, καὶ τοὺς ἀλλότριους ἔθεραπευτε ἦσος;
the Jews . . . because, by imitating their evil lives, the Jews had developed a kinship with those who dwelt in those cities.”

Following this linkage of Jewish sins to the sexual sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, Chrysostom deploys prophetic images to reiterate and reify the relation between Jews and lustful animals. He claims that “the prophet” (without specifying which prophet) “thus called the Jews dogs and sex-crazed stallions—not because they suddenly changed natures with those beasts but because they were pursuing the lustful habits of those animals.” Combining the image of the “dog” (Isaiah 56:10) with that of the “lustful stallion” (Jeremiah 5:8), Chrysostom attempts to legitimize his identification of Jews with licentious beasts by, first, referring to carefully selected (and decontextualized) biblical images of animals and, second, associating such animals with Jews of the biblical past and late-ancient present. In these passages, Chrysostom intertwines accusations of sexual immorality with images of Jews as animals in order to paint Jews as sub-human pursuers of base pleasures.

Marcel Simon helpfully describes Chrysostom’s exegetical technique in these passages when he writes:

The methods by which Chrysostom denigrates the Jews are apparent enough. When he is not simply relating gross and gratuitous slanders, he is taking

---

96 Adv. Jud. 4.6.2 (PG 48, 879; FC 68, 88). Καὶ τούτῳ αὐτὸν τὸν προφήτην παράγω μάρτυρα, λέγουσα ὅτε ὁ κυρίου, ἀρχοντες Σωδόμων προσέχετε νόμων θεοκυριων, λαὸς Γομόρρας οὐ πρὸς Σωδομίτας καὶ τοὺς ἐν Γομόρροις οἰκούντας διάλογον διαλεγομένος, ἀλλὰ πρὸς Ιουδαίοις. Καλεί δὲ αὐτῶν σῶμα, ἐπεὶ δὴ τῆς κακίας μιμησαι τῆν πρὸς εἰκόνιος ἐπεσπάσαυτο συγγένειαν.

97 Adv. Jud. 4.6.3 (PG 48, 879; FC 68, 88-89). Οὕτω γὰρ καὶ κύνας καλεῖ, καὶ ἵππους θηλυκανεῖς, οὐκ ἐπεὶ δὴ πρὸς τὴν φύσιν εἰκόνα μετέπεσαν, ἀλλὰ ἐπεὶ δὴ τὴν τῶν ζώων τούτων λαγυνεῖαν ἱδίωκον. Νοτει that he mixes his prophetic metaphors here. The image of the dog is from Isaiah 56:10 and the image of the lustful horse from Jeremiah 5:8.
prophetic condemnations, isolating them completely from the context in which they are recorded and the circumstances in which they were uttered and from which they derive their meaning, and applying them to the present. . . This one-sided exegesis . . . turns the Jew into an eternal figure, a type; and it is a monstrous, villainous figure, calculated to inspire in all who look at it a proper horror.98

In this passage, Simon demonstrates how Chrysostom’s anti-Jewish appropriation of choice prophetic passages contributes to his formulation of “the Jew” as an “eternal figure.” According to Chrysostom’s caricature, the Jew’s licentiousness and immorality are natural, self-evident, uncontestable, total, and consistent over time.99

Moreover, Chrysostom himself claims that he has “made the prophets [his] warriors against the Jews and routed them.”100 In the next section, I explore how Chrysostom’s construction of the Jew as brute animal not only serves to enhance his rhetoric of violence but also functions as a foil for his formulation of Christian (ascetic) identity.

98 Marcel Simon, Verus Israel, 219-220.

99 Considered in this way, Chrysostom’s discourses against the Jews function in a parallel fashion to modern European discourses about “Orientals.” In Orientalism, Edward Said writes, “The figures of speech associated with the Orient . . . are all declarative and self-evident; the tense they employ is the timeless eternal; they convey an impression of repetition and strength; they are always symmetrical to, and yet diametrically inferior to, a european equivalent, which is sometimes specified, sometimes not. For all these functions it is frequently enough to use the simple copula is . . . . Philosophically, then, the kind of language, thought, and vision that I have been calling orientalism very generally is a form of radical realism; anyone employing orientalism, which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, name, point to, fix, what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality” (Said, Orientalism [New York: Vintage Books, 1978], 72). For an analysis of this passage, see Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 101-102.

100 Adv. Jud. 8.1.6 (PG 48, 928; FC 68, 207).
Jewish Bodies, Christian Bodies

In an insidious turn in his first sermon, Chrysostom utilizes prophetic images of animals to depict Jews as subjects of justified violence. In the following passage he associates Jews with slaughtered animals by drawing on Hosea’s image of the “stubborn heifer” and Jeremiah’s image of the “untamed calf.” Chrysostom states:

Although such beasts are unfit for work, they are fit for slaughter. And this is what happened to the Jews: while they were making themselves unfit for work, they grew fit for slaughter. This is why Christ said: “But as for these my enemies, who did not want me to be king over them, bring them here and slaughter them” (Luke 19:27).  

In this passage, Chrysostom introduces the term sphazo—to slaughter or butcher—and draws on passages from Hosea, Jeremiah, and the Gospel of Luke to embellish his characterization of Jews as animals deserving of death. Using biblical language as “proof,” he thus imagines the Jewish body as a sacrificial animal body, “unfit for work,” but “fit for slaughter.”

According to Chrysostom, Jewish proclivities for gluttony and lasciviousness contribute to their bestial condition and their continual subjection to suffering and violence. He claims that “living for their bellies, they [the Jews] gape for the things of this world, their condition is no better than that of pigs or goats because of their licentious [aselgeias] ways and excessive gluttony. They know but one thing: to be punched in the belly and to be drunk, to be cut up for the sake of dancing and to be

---

101 Adv. Jud. 1.2.6 (PG 48, 846; FC 68, 8). Τά δὲ τοιαύτα ἄλογα, πρὸς ἐργασίαν οὐκ ὄντα ἐπιτίθεια, πρὸς σφαγὴν ἐπιτίθεια γίνεται. "Ὅπερ οὖν καὶ οὕτως πέπονθασί, καὶ πρὸς ἐργασίαν ἀχρήστους ἑαυτοὺς καταστήσαντες, πρὸς σφαγὴν ἐπιτίθειοι γεγόνασι. Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἔλεγεν· Τοὺς ἑκάθρους μου, τοὺς μὴ θελήσαντος με βασιλεύσαι ἐπὶ αὐτῶν, ἀγάγετε ὥδε, καὶ καταφάξατε αὐτοὺς."
wounded for the sake of charioteering." In this passage, Chrysostom constructs Jewish identity as debased and animalistic. Jews, in his representation, are preoccupied with the sphere of the carnal, and thus they should be treated as carne. In a dramatic reversal of his use of animal imagery to describe Jews, Chrysostom portrays himself as a ravenous beast, thirsty for confrontation with Jews. At the start of his sixth sermon, he exclaims:

Wild beasts are less savage and fierce as long as they live in the forests and have had no experience fighting men. But when the hunters capture them, they drag them into the cities, lock them in cages, goad them on to do battle with beast-fighting gladiators. Then the beasts spring upon their prey, taste human flesh and drink human blood. After that, they would find it no easy task to keep away from such a feast but they avidly rush to this bloody banquet. This has been my experience, too. Once I took up my fight against the Jews and rushed to meet their shameless assaults... I somehow acquired a stronger yearning to do battle against them.

---

102 Adv. Jud. 1.4.1 (PG 48, 848; FC 68, 14). 'Εκεῖνοι δὲ τούτων μὲν οὐδὲν συν ὅπως ἴσαι, τῇ γαστρὶ ζώντες, πρὸς τὰ παρούσα κεχνώτες, ὑστο καὶ τράγων οὐδὲν ἁμεινον διακείμενοι, κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἀσελείας λόγον καὶ τὴν τῆς ἀδηλφαίας ὑπερβολὴν ἐν δὲ ἐπιστανται μόνον, γαστρίζεσθαι καὶ μεθείνειν, ὑπὲρ ὀρχήστων κατακοπτεσθαι, ὑπὲρ ἰδιόχων τραματίζεσθαι.

103 For more on Chrysostom’s comparison of carnal and spiritual bodies, see Hom. Rom. 13.8, where he writes, “For as they that have the wings of the spirit make the body spiritual, so they who turn away, and are the slaves of the belly and of pleasure, make the soul flesh. . . And this mode of speaking is a trope in many parts of the Old Testament also, where flesh signifies the gross and earthly life, which is entangled in unnatural pleasures.” (PG 60, 517):

104 Adv. Jud. 6.1.1-2 (PG 48, 903; FC 68, 147-148). Τὰ θηρία ἔως μὲν ἄν τὸς ὕλας νεμηταί, καὶ τῆς πρὸς ἀνθρώπους μάρμαρος ἀμελέτητα ὡς τυγχάνῃ, ἡμερώτερα πώς ἐστὶ καὶ πραότερα: ἐπειδὰν δὲ αὐτὰ λαβόντες ὕστο κυνηγέται εἰς τὰς πόλεις ἄγασσω, καὶ κατακλίσαντες πρὸς τὸν τῶν θηριομάχων διεγείρασιν πόλειον, εἴτε ἐπιθήσαντα σάρκας ἀποχύμηται καὶ αἰμα ἀνθρώπων την, οὐκ αὖ ραδίως ταύτης ἄμεσαι λοιπὸν τῆς θοινής, ἀλλὰ μετὰ πολλὴς ἐπὶ ταύτην τρέχει τὴν τράπεζαν τῆς ἐπιθυμίας. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ τῆς πρὸς λουθαίους ἁμάμαθα μάρμαρος, καὶ ἐπιθήσαντας αὐτῶν ταῖς ἀνακλησμοῖς αντιρήεσαι . . . ἐπιθυμίαν πλείονα πώς ἐσχήκαμεν τῶν πρὸς ἐκεῖνος πόλεμον. Note that gladiatorial games were in decline in the fourth century, C.E. due to imperial prohibitions and decreasing funds for games. Chrysostom may be forging a link between the spectacle of Christian martyrdom and that of the gladiatorial games. For more on the history of gladiators, see Kathleen Coleman, Bonds of Danger: Communal Life in the Gladiatorial Barracks of Ancient Rome (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 2005).
Similarly, in his second sermon, he compares his pursuit of Jews and Judaizers to the hunt when he writes, “Like a pack of hunting dogs let us circle about and surround our quarry; let us drive them together from every side and bring them into subjection to the laws of the Church.”105 In these passages, Antiochene Christians are encouraged to follow their priest’s lead and join the “hunt” to rout out Judaizing heretics within the church and subject them to Christian discipline (“the laws of the Church”). Chrysostom’s recommendation to use force, if necessary, is justified in part by his characterization of Jews as “animals fit for slaughter.”106

If Chrysostom imagines the paradigmatic Jewish body as glutted, drunk, carnal, and fit for suffering, then how does he imagine the perfect Christian body? How does his representation of Jewish bodies in Adversus Iudaeos compare to his depiction of idealized Christian bodies in other sermons? When Chrysostom describes the spiritual Christian body, he accentuates its absolute distance from the realm of the carnal. Such is the case in his thirteenth homily on Romans, where he states, “The one who lives rightly is not even in the body... for the spiritual man was not even in the flesh from then on, having become from that moment an angel, and ascended into heaven, and from then on lightly carrying the body about.”107 Whereas the Jewish body, on Chrysostom’s model, is weighted to the earth, burdened with


106 For his recommendation of the use of force when dealing with Jews and Judaizers, see Adv. Jud. 1.8.3-4 (PG 48, 856; FC 68, 32-33) and 5.1.5-6 (PG 48, 883; FC 68, 99).

107 Hom. Rom. 13.7 (PG 60, 517-518): ... καὶ δείκνυς ὃτι οὐδὲ ἐν σώματι ἔσται ὁ ὀρθῶς βιών... ἀλλὰ ὃτι οὐδὲ ἐν σαρκὶ λοιπὸν ἔστιν ὁ πνευματικὸς ἄνθρωπος, ἀγγελὸς ἐνετεύθη ἡ ἁπλὴ γενόμενος, καὶ πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀναβαίνεις, καὶ λοιπὸν τὸ σῶμα ἀπλῶς περιφέρεσιν.
food, drink, and excessive desires, the Christian body is light and luminous. The spiritual Christian, trained in the discipline of worldly renunciation, can expect her “flesh” to become “entirely spiritual, crucified in all parts.” Her body “flies with the same wings as the soul.”

Through the discipline of worldly renunciation, the spiritual Christian offers her body as “living sacrifice” to God (Rom 12.1). Chrysostom elaborates on this “living sacrifice” by contrasting it with Jewish sacrifice; whereas the former is spiritual, he argues, the latter is carnal. He argues that, “to distinguish [this

---

108 Hom. Rom. 13.8 (PG 60, 518). Τί οὖν; οὐκ ἦσαν ἐν σαρκὶ, ἀλλὰ ἁσώματοι περιήγησαν; καὶ πῶς ἂν ἦχοι τοῦτο λόγος; Ὁ ραγάς, ὅτι τὸν σαρκικὸν βίον ἤνεγκε; Καὶ τίνος ἐνεκεν οὐκ εἶπεν, Υμεῖς δὲ οὐκ ἔστε ἐν ἁμαρτίᾳ; Ἡ νά μάθη, ὅτι οὐ τὴν τυραννίδα τῆς ἁμαρτίας ἐξέβησεν μόνον ὁ Χριστός, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν σαρκα κοινοτέραν καὶ πνευματικοτέραν ἐποίησεν, οὐ τῷ τὴν φύσιν μεταβαλέιν, ἀλλὰ πετέρωσαι μᾶλλον αὐτὴν. Καθάπερ γὰρ πῦρ ὁμιλουτος σιδήρῳ, καὶ ὁ σίδηρος γίνεται πῦρ ἐν τῇ οἰκείᾳ μέσῳ φύσει: οὕτω καὶ τοῖς πιστῶσι καὶ πνευμά έχοντοι ἢ σαρξ λοιπον πρὸς ἐκείνην μεθίσταται τῇ ἐνέργειας, ὡς πνευματικὴ γίνομεν, σταυρομενὴ πάντοθεν, καὶ τῇ ψυχῇ συναναπτερουμενή. Chrysostom explains the mechanics of this spiritual transformation of the flesh in the following passage. After quoting Romans 8:9 (“But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit”), he states, “What then? Were they not in the flesh, and did they go about without any bodies? What sense would this be? You see that it is the carnal life that he [Paul] intimates. And why did he not say, ‘But you are not in sin?’ It is that you may come to know that Christ did not extinguish the tyranny of sin only, but made the flesh to weigh us down less, and to be more spiritual, not by changing its nature but, rather, by giving it wings. For as when fire comes into contact with iron, the iron also becomes fire, though it stays in its own nature still; thus with them that believe, and have the spirit, the flesh from then on goes over into that manner of working and becomes wholly spiritual, crucified in all parts, and flying with the same wings as the soul” (13.8). The Origenist controversy, which began around the turn of the fifth century, sparked theological debate over the nature of the body and flesh in the resurrection. Chrysostom’s understanding of flesh becoming “wholly spiritual” may have Origenist overtones. For more on Chrysostom’s role in the Origenist controversy, see Elizabeth Clark, The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 22-23.

109 In an analysis of Ambrosiaster’s Liber quaestionum, Andrew Jacobs writes that “the categories of carnalis and spiritualis function as a shorthand for the qualitative differences between Jews, mired in the blindness of the fleshly law, and Christians, liberated by spiritual grace.” A similar statement might be applied to Chrysostom’s efforts in his sermons Adversus Iudaeos. See, in addition, Daniel Boyarin, Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture, who argues that the association of Jews with carnality was a “topos of much Christian writing in late antiquity” (2); and David Brakke, “Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria,” JECS 9 (2001): 453-482. Taking his cue from Boyarin’s study, Brakke “examines Athanasius’ construction of the Jews as symbols of difference.
sacrifice] from the Jewish, [Paul] calls it ‘holy, acceptable to God, your reasonable service.’ For theirs was a bodily one, and not very acceptable.” In contrast to the carnal Jew, the spiritual Christian becomes “the light of the world.” Waking each day before the sun—“healthy, wakeful, and sober”—she lives as angels live in heaven. On this model, the idealized Christian body becomes unspeakably beautiful because it is styled after the image of Christ.

In The Body and Society, Peter Brown argues that themes of sexuality and renunciation loom so large in Chrysostom’s sermons precisely because the fourth-century priest theorizes Christian identity, in large part, by its relation to sexual chastity. Brown writes:

[I]t was through such themes that John wished to express a new view of the civic community. The body and its vulnerability, and especially its universal vulnerability to sexual shame and to sexual temptation, became, for Chrysostom, the one sure compass that would enable the Christians of Antioch to find their way in an urban landscape whose ancient, profane landmarks, he so dearly hoped, would disappear.

within the Chrystian community, specifically as the embodiment of the particularity or locality of heresy (‘flesh’) in opposition to the catholicity or universality of orthodoxy (‘spirit’) (456).


112 Hom. Col. 8 (PG 62, 353).

113 Brown, Body and Society, 306.
Chrysostom asserts, moreover, that the perfect spiritual body is free from pain, as the
apostle Paul’s body was when he endured “hunger, beatings, and prisons.”114 Paul’s
suffering, Chrysostom claims, was “slight” and “momentary” precisely because he
had successfully “trained the flesh to be in harmony with the spirit.”115

Whereas Chrysostom imagines the idealized Christian body to be light,
ascendant, and spiritual—incapable of feeling passion or bodily suffering—he
constructs the Jewish body as the negation of these things; it is a burdened, fat,
inebriated body, continually subjected to oppression and pain on account of its
indulgence of bodily appetites. By this vivid comparison of the spiritual Christian
and the carnal Jew, Chrysostom endeavors to elaborate the absolute difference
between Jewish and Christian identity. Considered in this way, religious identity is
forged and “naturalized” through this very process of mapping difference on the
body.

Fixing Jewishness

In this chapter I have explored a variety of stereotypes that Chrysostom
utilizes to produce the Jew as Other—both as the (desired and seductive) negation of
the chaste Christian and as the carnal counterpart to the person of spirit. In particular,

114 Hom. Rom. 13.8 (PG 60, 518). Therefore he scorned all luxuriousness and pleasure, and found his
luxury in hunger and beatings and prisons, and he did not even feel pain in these things. And this he
shows when he says, “For this slight momentary affliction. . . .” (2 Cor 4:17); so well had he trained
the flesh to be in harmony with the spirit.” Διὸ τρυφῆς μὲν ἀπάσης καὶ ἱδονῆς κατεγέλα, ἐνετρύφα δὲ λιμῶ καὶ μάστιξι καὶ δεσμωτηρίοις, καὶ οὐδὲ ἤλεγε ταῦτα πάσχων. Καὶ τοῦτο δηλόν ἐλεγε. Τὸ γὰρ παραστικὰ ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν οὕτως ἢ καλῶς καὶ τὴν ἀσφικα παιδεύσας συντρέχειν τῷ πνεύματι.

115 Hom. Rom. 13.8 (PG 60, 518).
I have emphasized his use of sexual stereotypes—including his characterizations of Jews as *malakoi* and *pornai* and Judaizers as sexual aggressors—to demonstrate how he deploys categories of sexuality to denigrate Jewishness while, simultaneously, producing Christianness as pure and sexually chaste. In the remainder of this chapter, I wish to frame my discussion of Chrysostom’s sexual stereotypes by exploring how his sexualized portrayal of Jews functions as a discursive strategy to “fix” the identity of the Other. In this context, I turn to the work of postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha to illuminate some of the dynamics at play in Chrysostom’s sexualized representation of Jews.

Recently, some scholars of early Christianity and Judaism have found Bhabha’s analysis of colonial discourse helpful for examining the construction of identity in late ancient religious texts. For example, Daniel Boyarin and Virginia Burrus argue that Bhabha’s notion of “cultural hybridity” represents a particularly apt way to describe religious formations in the late ancient Mediterranean world.\(^\text{116}\)

David Brakke, moreover, draws on Bhabha’s work on racial stereotypes in his analysis of representations of Ethiopian demons in monastic literature of late ancient Egypt.\(^\text{117}\) And Andrew Jacobs uses Bhabha’s notions of “hybridity” and “colonial

---

\(^\text{116}\) Daniel Boyarin and Virginia Burrus, “Hybridity as Subversion of Orthodoxy? Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity” *Social Compass* 52 (2005): 431-441. The authors write, “Our aim is to mark the extent to which religious cultures—particularly in contexts of overt pluralism and inequalities of power—are neither static nor autonomous but are always emerging ‘at the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space,’ as Bhabha puts it” (432). See also Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 12-16.

mimicry” to analyze Christian imperial discourse, particularly as it relates to Jews and
the holy land.\textsuperscript{118}

In \textit{The Location of Culture}, Bhabha analyzes how the stereotype functions as
“the major discursive strategy” of colonial discourse.\textsuperscript{119} According to Bhabha, the
stereotype functions in a similar way to the concept of “fixity.” He explains: “Fixity,
as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a
paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as
well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition.”\textsuperscript{120} Using this theoretical
frame, we find that Chrysostom’s effort to “fix” Jewish identity betrays itself as such
a “paradoxical mode of representation” because it attempts to construct the Jew as an
“unchanging,” “eternal” type—wholly differentiated from the Christian—while
simultaneously gesturing to the disordered overlap and dangerous proximity of
Jewish and Christian identities in late fourth-century Antioch. As Boyarin and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{118} Jacobs, \textit{Remains of the Jews}. Using post-colonial discourse analysis as his
theoretical frame, Jacobs argues that “Christians staked their imperial claims on a self-conscious appropriation of Jewish space
and knowledge; that is, they embedded their power and authority in the authenticated existence of a
religious, political, and cultural ‘other.’ Christian imperial discourse was henceforth split against
itself, between desire and need for the Jewish other that authenticated Christian power and its fear and
anxiety generated by Jewish otherness” (14).
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{119} Bhabha, \textit{Location of Culture}, 94.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{120} Bhabha, \textit{Location of Culture}, 94.
\end{flushright}
Burrus suggest, “hybridity inflects Jewish and Christian identity in precisely the places where ‘purity’ is most forcefully inscribed.”

According to Bhabha’s understanding of the operations of colonialist discourse, the stereotype “is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved.” In this latter example, racial and sexual stereotypes combine to construct the African as subhuman—indeed, “bestial”—in comparison to his or her white colonialist counterparts. Building on the work of Franz Fanon and Jacques Lacan, Bhabha contends that, in colonial discourse, difference is frequently articulated in terms of race and sexuality. Indeed, the construction of colonial subjectivity and power depend, in part, upon such “anxiously repeated” representations of difference.

He continues:

[Epithets racial or sexual come to be seen as modes of differentiation, realized as multiple, cross-cutting determinations, polymorphous and perverse, always demanding a specific and strategic calculation of their effects. Such is . . . the moment of colonial discourse. It is a form of discourse crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations.

---

121 Boyarin and Burrus “Hybridity as Subversion of Orthodoxy?” 432.

122 Bhabha, Location of Culture, 94–95.

123 He writes, “The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference—racial and sexual. Such an articulation becomes crucial if it is held that the body is always simultaneously (if conflictually) inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power” (Bhabha, Location of Culture, 96).
that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization.\textsuperscript{124}

Applying this theory of the stereotype in colonial discourse to Chrysostom’s sermons \textit{Adversus Iudaeos}, we find that the fourth-century Antiochene’s use of sexual stereotypes in his own “ideological construction of otherness” functions in congruent fashion to that of nineteenth-century European colonizers. The Jews—configured by Chrysostom as the religious, cultural, and ethnic Other\textsuperscript{125}—are said to embrace practices of \textit{porneia} so abhorrent that any pure (orthodox) Christian should shun and denounce them entirely. In his sermons, Chrysostom “anxiously repeats” this point while gesturing to the very real experience of overlap, complexity, and hybridity within his community. At one point, Chrysostom even admits his own frustration with the dangerous intimacy of Jewish and Christian identities: “This is my strongest reason for hating the synagogue,” he states, “it has the Law and the prophets. And now I hate it more than if it had none of these.”\textsuperscript{126} Faced with such a “territory

\textsuperscript{124} Bhabha, \textit{Location of Culture}, 96.

\textsuperscript{125} For an analysis of the ways in which Chrysostom aligns ethnic and religious identity, especially with reference to his construction of Jewishness, see Isabella Sandwell, \textit{Religious Identity in Late Antiquity}, 148, 181. In his first sermon against the Jews, Chrysostom uses “ethnic reasoning” when he associates Christianness with Roman identity and Jewishness with barbarians and “Persians.” Comparing the “Judaizer” to a defecting Roman soldier, he writes: “If any Roman soldier serving overseas is caught favoring the barbarians and the Persians, not only is he in danger but so also is everyone who was aware of how this man felt and failed to make this fact known to the general. Since you are the army of Christ, be overly careful in searching to see if anyone favoring an alien faith has mingled among you” (\textit{Adv. Jud.} 1.4.9 [PG 48, 849-850; FC 68, 17]). For more on how early Christians utilized “ethnic reasoning” in religious identity-construction, see Denise Kimber Buell, \textit{Why this New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Adv. Jud.} 6.6.9 (PG 48, 913; FC 68, 171). Charlotte Fonrobert comments on this passage when she writes, “Perhaps for John the problem is not that his people socialize with the Jews per se but that the very boundaries between Jewish and Christian practice remain blurred and porous, at least in the eyes of his flock. We may suspect that he has to convince even himself of the absolute difference between Jewish and Christian practice, if we recall the old principle that the person who screams the loudest is
without border lines”—where Christian-Jews share sacred texts, mingle in sacred spaces, and dance and feast together on holy days—Chrysostom resorts to the fierce rhetorical weapon of sexualized invective in an attempt to delineate clear borders and construct rigid hierarchies between “Judaism” and “Christianity.” In his effort to clarify and construct boundaries, Chrysostom endeavors to “fix” Jewishness as indelibly licentious and debased.

I began this chapter with a narrative of violence—a story related by Chrysostom that rhetorically aligns “Judaizing” heresy with violence toward women. I wish to close by signaling another form of violence that is inscribed in and, I would argue, enabled by Chrysostom’s text: namely, Christian violence toward Jews. In particular, I suggest that Chrysostom’s stereotypes of Jews and “Judaizers”—as licentious, predatory, sexually deviant, diseased, defiling, animalistic, carnal, and immoral—comprise a vicious rhetoric that creates the conditions for (as well as the ecclesiastical justifications of) physical violence against Jews.127 Bhabha suggests that, in our analysis of stereotypes, we should move beyond “the ready recognition of

often guilty of (or insecure about) the very thing he or she does not like. Exclaims the orator, famously: “This is the reason I hate the Jews, because they have the law and the prophets: indeed I hate them more because of this than if they did not have them.” A shared biblical heritage, in other words, blurs the boundaries between Christianity and Judaism, boundaries that Chrysostom attempts to strengthen by the very force of his hatred” (Fonrobert, “Jewish Christians, Judaizers, and Anti-Judaism,” 238-239).

127 Dayna Kalleres makes a similar point when she writes, “The boundary between the Jews and Christians, erected by these verbal encounters, was fluid and fluctuating, maintained through sporadic encounters, which Chrysostom advocated. The people demonized in these verbal encounters became the boundary markers. As mentioned previously, Chrysostom remarks that violence could very easily arise in these encounters. Regardless of whether or not this actually happened during Chrysostom’s tenure in Antioch, his particular instructions for verbally battling the daemonic Jew and daemonically contaminated Judaizer would have contributed to a world view which justified physical anti-Jewish violence” (“Exorcising the Devil,” 131-132).
images as positive or negative”; instead, our efforts should aim at “understanding the processes of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse.”

According to Bhabha, we should engage with the image’s “effectivity, with the repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence that constructs . . . both colonizer and colonized.”

With this in mind, we ask: What are the “processes of subjectification” made possible through Chrysostom’s sermons *Adversus Iudaeos*? What are the possible (and plausible) material effects of his stereotypical discourse? What positions of “power and resistance, domination and dependence” are produced in and by this particular construction of Jewish and Christian identities? In my conclusion, I approach some of these questions by examining how Roman imperial legislation of the decades immediately following Chrysostom’s tenure in Antioch elaborates and develops some of the themes encountered in this chapter. In particular, I suggest that late fourth- and early fifth-century legislation against the Jews draws on some of these same stereotypes of Jews as licentious and polluting agents within the community in order to curtail Jewish rights, restrict Jewish rituals, and regulate Jewish sacred spaces. In addition, I briefly explore the “effectivity” of anti-Jewish texts such as Chrysostom’s by examining imperial legislation that endeavors (like Antioch’s famous priest) to control the material conditions of Jews and Christians in the late empire.

---

128 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 95, emphasis in original. See also Brakke’s use of this passage from Bhabha in *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p. 158.

129 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 95.
CONCLUSION

In my introduction I suggested that sexuality functioned as “a dense transfer point for relations of power” between Jews and Christians in late antiquity. I argued that this description of sexuality, offered by Foucault, helps to elucidate certain representations of Jews and Jewishness in early Christian literature. In the chapters that followed, I explored how early Christians utilized discourses of sexuality to construct “border lines” and establish hierarchies. We observed, for example, how Justin Martyr employs sexuality as a criterion with which to distinguish Christian from Jew. For him, instances of (past and present) Jewish licentiousness serve as “proof” of Jews’ inferiority in general, especially as regards their “misuse” of scripture; Justin thus invokes sexuality as a means by which to assert Christian superiority. Taking a different tack, Origen and Hippolytus construct Jews as sexually threatening to “chaste” Christians. In this way, they use sexuality to depict Jews as “lions” who abuse their power to exploit vulnerable Christian “lambs.” Finally, Chrysostom caricatures Jews as subjects of deviant sexuality in order to establish Christian dominance and justify Christian violence toward Jews.

In the course of my argument, I have traced how this discourse of Jewish sexuality developed in Greek texts between the first and fourth centuries, and I have considered how different early Christian writers formulate their arguments in relation to Paul’s letters. Whereas Paul understood porneia as a problem closely linked to gentile idolatry, second-century writers such as Justin Martyr and the author of the
Epistle of Barnabas began to identify porneia as a problem that troubled Jews in particular. According to these two second-century authors, porneia presented a crisis for Jews, in part, because it interfered with their practices of biblical interpretation. For Justin, Jewish exegetes were blind to the spiritual interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures; they had eyes only for those texts that “concerned base and corruptible passions.”¹ Similarly, for the author of Barnabas, Jews interpreted (or, rather, misinterpreted) their own scriptures “according to the desires of their own flesh.”² In these configurations, Jewish biblical interpreters were depicted as having committed corresponding acts of sexual and textual impropriety. Jews’ inability to control bodily appetites contributed to their inability to interpret biblical texts properly, and vice versa.

In these passages, Justin and the author of Barnabas take for granted the idea that porneia severely hinders the practice of spiritual biblical interpretation. In addition, they build on this idea to argue that Jewishness, as opposed to Christianness, is more closely aligned with porneia and, by implication, with non-spiritual interpretations of scripture. Justin and Barnabas’s constructions of Jewish porneia and carnality, moreover, mark a sharp divergence from Paul’s understanding of porneia as a problem of idolatrous Gentiles, predominantly.

Several decades after Justin’s death, Origen reintroduces Paul into the discussion of biblical hermeneutics, and he utilizes Paul to confer apostolic

¹ Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, 134.1.
² The Epistle of Barnabas, 10.9.
legitimacy on his particular construction of Jews as literal and carnal interpreters. Like Justin and Barnabas, Origen imagines porneia as a peculiar hindrance to biblical interpreters, yet unlike Justin and Barnabas, he turns to Paul to prove his point. For Origen, practices of sophrosyne—bodily self-control—are prerequisites for one’s spiritual approach to biblical texts. Paul, for Origen, becomes the paradigmatic model for the joint Christian practices of bodily chastity and spiritual exegesis. By “subjecting” his flesh to spirit, Paul, in Origen’s view, was able to transcend “the letter that kills” and interpret scripture according to the spirit that “gives life.”

In various performances of “spiritual” biblical interpretation, Origen reshapes Paul’s language to bolster his claim that Jews are carnal interpreters of their own sacred texts. For Origen, Paul’s phrase in 1 Cor 10:18, “Israel according to the flesh,” comes to designate Jews of both past and present, especially those who cling to “outdated” literalist interpretations of scripture. In Origen’s view, Jewish literalism and carnality function as foils for Christian spiritualism and sophrosyne. In this way, Origen’s formulation of a Christian exegetical practice coincides with his construction of Jewish exegesis as carnal, literal, and obsolete. Likewise his formulation of a Christian practice of world-renunciation coincides with his construction of Jews as inescapably carnal and worldly.

Biblical tales of sexual violence, moreover, offer opportunities for early Christian exegetes to compare the church’s enemies (Jews and heretics) to sexual predators. For example, Origen, like Hippolytus before him, utilizes the story of

---

3 See 2 Cor 3:6: “[F]or the letter kills, but the spirit gives life.”
Susanna and the Elders to depict Jews as sexual corruptors of chaste (Christian) women and textual corruptors of sacred scriptures. Origen, in particular, identifies the plight of the “besieged” Christian exegete with that of Susanna, on the one hand, and associates his Jewish contemporaries with the villainous elders of the past, on the other. In this way, he uses gender as a tool to map Jewish-Christian difference while simultaneously accentuating and, more importantly, sexualizing the threat that Jews pose to Christians. Whereas Church Fathers sometimes found it convenient to “feminize” the church by comparing it to an imperiled and “chaste” heroine of the biblical past, at other times it was more convenient to “masculinize” Christian identity by emphasizing Christian excellence in self-mastery, *sophrosyne*, and other virtues associated with “maleness.” A Christian who could control his body and renounce his appetites was fitter to lead than a licentious, immoderate Jew.

Over a century after Origen’s death, John Chrysostom utilizes sexual invective against Jews in his homiletic denunciations of Jews and “Judaizing” practices. In more pronounced rhetoric than that of Origen, Justin, or *Barnabas*, Chrysostom accuses Jews of sexually immoral practices and behaviors, including prostitution, effeminacy, and sexual violence. Chrysostom embellishes his sexual invective against Jews by quoting isolated phrases from the prophets: the Jew is described as a “lustful stallion” (Jer 5:8), a “dog” (Isaiah 56:10), a “stubborn heifer” (Hos 4:16), and a beast “fit for slaughter.” Chrysostom also invokes images of disease and contagion to depict Jews and “Judaizers” as polluting agents within the community. Indeed, in some of the first lines of his first sermon *Adversus Iudaeos,*
he describes Jewishness as an “illness” that threatens the purity of the “body of the Church.” As I argued in Chapter Four, these stereotypes of Jews as sexually licentious, bestial, diseased, and defiling combine in Chrysostom’s sustained construction of Jews as sexualized subjects of justified violence. Such a rhetorical construction of Jews as licentious and polluting agents within the community occurs not only in theological treatises and sermons of the late fourth century but also in imperial laws of the period. It is to an analysis of representations of Jews in late imperial legal literature that I turn in order to indicate some future directions for research.

Considerations for Further Research: Jews in Imperial Legislation

In his book, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, Amnon Linder argues that the rhetoric of Roman legal texts of the fourth and fifth centuries represent Jews as “the absolute negation of a whole series of positive values comprehended in a predominantly religious context, such as wholesomeness, health, purity, life, honour, wisdom, and sanity.”⁴ Linder maintains that in contrast to these positive (Christian/Roman) values, “Jews were depicted as representing the opposite—deformity and illness, pestilence, filth, abomination, death, infamy, and madness.”⁵

---


⁵ Linder, *Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, 60. It is worth quoting the entire passage from Linder: “Another group [of words] reflected the belief that the Jews represented the absolute negation of a whole series of positive values comprehended in a predominantly religious context, such as wholesomeness, health, purity, life, honour, wisdom, and sanity. The Jews were depicted as representing the opposite—deformity and illness, pestilence, filth, abomination, death, infamy, and
In what follows, I briefly explore how some Roman laws of the fourth and fifth centuries deploy stereotypes against Jews in order to justify official attempts to curtail Jews’ legal rights.

Before reviewing the legal texts, we should note that Linder, along with other scholars, warns against any approach that would view Roman imperial legislation as direct evidence for “what really happened.” Instead, he suggests that the legislation’s “official origin and character make it particularly useful for observing the interplay between individuals and institutions, between ideologies and practical contingencies.” Seth Schwartz elaborates on this point when he writes that “the madness. This included the following words: ‘turpitudo’, ‘turpitude,’ a synonym of ‘deformitas’; ‘perversitas’, ‘perversity’; ‘contagium’, ‘disease,’ ‘contagion’; ‘polluere’, ‘pollute’; ‘pestis . . . contagione emanet’, ‘a plague . . . that spreads by contagion’; ‘attaminare’, ‘to contaminate’; ‘foedare’, ‘to defile’; ‘inquinare’, ‘to defile’; καθαρεύειν, ‘to purge (from Jews)’; ‘execrandus’, ‘execrable’; ‘caeno confundere’, ‘corrupt with filth’; ‘flagitium’, ‘deed of disgrace’; ‘sensibus excacatus’, ‘senseless,’ in contrast to ‘santias mentis’; ‘amentia’, ‘madness’; ‘vecordia’, ἀλοιπόν, ‘insanity’; ‘stultitia’, ἀνοικτία, ‘stupidity.’”

David Hunt writes that “there is a great gulf set between the emperor’s issuing a law banning pagan sacrifices and what actually happens ‘on the ground’ in the local setting” (David Hunt, “Christianising the Roman Empire: the evidence of the Code,” in *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity*, ed. Jill Harries and Ian Wood [London: Duckworth, 1993], 143-158, see esp. p. 144). Similarly, Seth Schwartz writes that we must “beware of translating the laws into human action in any simple way. Roman imperial laws were usually, though not always, reactive—responses to conditions brought to the emperor’s attention by administrators or private citizens. Once issued, laws were technically applicable everywhere, but there is ample evidence that they were not, indeed could not be, everywhere enforced, that in some cases the emperors were lax about enforcing laws they themselves had made, even when they had the means to do so” (Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001], 186). Schwartz sums up this argument when he writes that “we cannot write social history from prescription” (187). Finally, Leonard Rutgers argues that “not much can be learned about the Roman Jewish community from the *Codex Theodosianus*, except in a very general way; the laws in question relate to the Jews in the later Roman empire as a whole rather than to the Jewish community of Rome specifically” (Leonard Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995], 211-212). My focus will remain on the literary representation of Jews in the *Codex Theodosianus*, with some speculation as to how legal discourses were brought to bear on the material situation of Jews in the empire.

ideological shift in relations between the Jews and the state, which can be read with perhaps misleading ease in the law codes, masked messy social realities." Like Linder, Schwartz suggests that if we cannot identify the precise historical reality “behind” the laws, we can identify broader social tensions, pressures, and ideologies that informed and “precipitated” them.\(^8\)\(^9\)

It is worth highlighting Linder’s suggestion that we utilize these laws as a way to theorize the relationship between “ideologies” and “practical contingencies.” Without positing a one-to-one relationship between law and reality, I suggest that the language of these laws signals some of the possible material effects of the discursive stereotyping of Jews in the fourth and fifth centuries. In what follows, I first identify continuities between legal and theological caricatures of Jews—between the rhetorical construction of Jews in Chrysostom’s sermons and in Roman imperial legislation. I then analyze laws that mention violence against Jews and synagogues in order to investigate the relationship between stereotypical discourse and material violence.

In 339, Constantine II issued a law concerning Jewish proselytizers in a Christian women’s weaving establishment. The law first accuses Jews of leading these women “to their fellowship in turpitude”; it then argues that henceforward the Jews shall not “join Christian women to their deeds of disgrace, or, if they shall do so,


they shall be subjected to capital punishment.”

This law relies upon stereotypes of Jewish practices as disgraceful and Jewish proselytism as immoral and dangerous; it also insinuates (as Chrysostom does a few decades later) that Christian women are particularly vulnerable to Jewish designs in this arena. Issued in between the time of Origen and John Chrysostom, this law echoes both theologians’ rhetorical constructions of Jews as licentious predators who “prey” upon innocent and vulnerable Christian women.

In 383, three years before John Chrysostom delivered his first sermon *Adversus Iudaeos*, Gratian issued a law in the name of Valentinian II and Theodosius that sought to regulate and punish Christians who participated in pagan, Jewish, or Manichean rituals. Regarding Jews, the law states that “those who despised the dignity of the Christian religion and name and polluted themselves with the Jewish contagions will be punished for their disgraceful acts.”

Not only are Jewish practices portrayed here as “disgraceful,” but also Jewishness itself is constructed as a contagious disease that threatens to “pollute” Christians. Images of pollution and contagion occur again in a law from 384. Gratian, on behalf of Valentinian II and Theodosius, forbid Jews to buy Christian slaves, writing: “On no account shall a Jew

---

10 Linder, *Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, no. 11: “After other matters, in regard to women formerly occupied in our weaving establishment, whom the Jews led to their fellowship in turpitude, it is resolved that they shall be restored to the weaving establishment, and it shall be observed in the future, that they do not join Christian women to their deeds of disgrace, or if they shall do so, they shall be subjected to capital punishment” [*Post alia: Quod ad mulieres pertinet, quas Iudaei in turpitudinis suae duxere consortium in gynaecio nostro ante versatas, placet easdem restitui gynaecio idque in reliquum observari, ne Christianas mulieres suis iungant flagitiis vel, si hoc fecerint, capitali periculo subiagentur.*]

buy a Christian slave, neither shall he contaminate him with Jewish sacraments and
convert him from Christian to Jew.”\textsuperscript{12} In this law, Jewish sacraments are singled out
as the contaminating agents, suggesting that it is through participation in Jewish ritual
practices, in particular, that a Christian becomes “polluted” with the Jewish “disease.”
These laws of the 380s anticipate the anti-Jewish rhetoric of Chrysostom, who, as we
have observed, vividly invokes images of disease and pollution to describe the so-
called “Judaizing” threat within his community.

Early in the fifth century, legal texts began associating Jewishness with
“perversity.” For example, in 409, Honorius issued a law in the name of Theodosius
II that condemned “God-fearers” and conversion to Judaism. The law states:

Some people, moreover, oblivious to their life and their position, dare to
transgress the Law to such an extent, that they force some to cease being
Christian and adopt the abominable and vile name of the Jews. . . [T]hose
imbued in the Christian mysteries shall not be forced to adopt the Jewish
perversity, which is alien to the Roman Empire, and abjure Christianity.\textsuperscript{13}

Honorius and Theodosius II presented a similar characterization of Jews as
“perverse” in a law from 418 that prohibited Jews from military service. The law
states that those “who are subject to the perversity of this (Jewish) nation and are

\textsuperscript{12} Linder, Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, no. 17, A Jew should not buy a Christian slave nor acquire him in a gift. If anyone should not observe this, he shall forfeit the ownership impudently acquired. . . The others, however, who partake in the right religion and are held under the rule of the nefarious superstition, which appears to have acquired them in the past, or should acquire them hereafter . . . shall be possessed by it on this condition, that it shall not corrupt them with the filth of its proper sect, to their will or against their will Ne quis omnino Iudaeorum Christianum comparet servum
nue ex Christiano Iudaicis sacramentis adhaminet.

\textsuperscript{13} Linder Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, no. 39: Quam quidam adhuc, vitae suae etiam et iuris
innmemores, adrectare ita audent, ut de Christianis quosdam foedum cogant taetrumque Iudaeorum
nomen induere. . . ne mysteriis Christianis inbuti perversitatem Iudaicam et alienam Romano imperio
post Christianitatem cogantur arripere.
proven to have entered the military service, we decree that their military belt shall be undone without any hesitation.”

Around the same time, Honorius and Theodosius II issued a law that forbid Jews to purchase or acquire Christian slaves. This law depicts Judaism as a “nefarious superstition,” and it states that Jews shall no longer “corrupt” Christians with the “filth” of their sect. Later, in a law from 438 that offers an official policy toward “heretics,” Theodosius II decreed that Jews and Samaritans shall no longer serve as public administrators, “lest the abominable sects proliferate licentiously in indiscriminate confusion in our lifetime.” Taken together, these laws contribute to the discursive construction of Jewishness as immoral, vile, licentious, and defiling. In addressing practical concerns of Jewish participation in Roman society (such as slave ownership, public administration, military service, and proselytism), these laws draw on certain negative stereotypes of Jews to justify limitation and diminishment of Jewish status in the late Roman empire. In these examples, we see the “ideology” of

14 Linder, Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, no. 45: Illos autem, qui gentis huius perversitati devincti armatam probantur adpetisse militiam, absolvit cingulo sine ambiguitate decernimus, nullo veterum meritorum patrocinante suffragio.

15 Linder, Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, no. 44: Iudaeus servum Christianum nec conparare debet nec largitatis titulo consequi. Qui non hoc observaverit, dominio sibi petulanter adquisito careat . . . Verum ceteros, quos rectae religionis participes constitutos in suo censu nefanda superstition . . . sub hac lege possideat, ut eos nec invitos nec volentes caeno propriae sectae confundat.

16 Linder, Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, no. 54: “For this reason, although according to the ancient maxim no cure should be applied to the desperately ill, nevertheless, lest the abominable sects proliferate licentiously in indiscriminate confusion in our lifetime, oblivious of the quality of our times, we decree in this law—that shall stand forever—that no Jew, and no Samaritan, nor any one constant in either of these laws, should accede to honors and dignities, to none of them shall be opened an administration with public obedience, neither shall he serve as Protector.” Quam ob rem cum sentential veteri desperatis morbis nulla sit adhibenda curatio, tandem, ne ferales sectae in vitam, inmemores nostri saeculi, velut indiscreta confusione licentious evagentur, hac victura in omne aevum lege sancimus neminem Iudaenum, neminem Samaritam neutra lege constantem ad honores et dignitates accedere, nulli administrationem patere civilis obsequi, nec defensoris fungii saltem officio.
Christian anti-Judaism mutually informing the “practical contingencies” of regulating Jewish participation in the civic life of the empire. The “rhetoric” of anti-Jewish stereotypes thus shapes and produces the “reality” of Jewish disenfranchisement.

Seth Schwartz, Fergus Millar, Marcel Simon, and Amnon Linder agree that a general rise in hostility toward Jews occurred in the late fourth and early fifth century. This trend toward increasing hostility began around the same time that John Chrysostom was preaching against Jews and “Judaizers” in Antioch. Schwartz argues, “As the interests of the state and the orthodox church gradually and incompletely converged, the state became increasingly hostile toward Jews.” From the legal code we learn that following this “convergence” of church and state, Jews are barred from service in the military and government, forbidden to own slaves, and prohibited from building new synagogues. Fergus Millar contends that after 380,


19 Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel*, 222.


new restrictions on converts to Judaism come into play, including the confiscation of property of Christian converts to Judaism.\textsuperscript{24}

More generally, the authors of the legal codes of the 380s and 390s began to categorize “Judaism” as a separate, coherent, and competing “religious organization,” one that was assimilated more and more frequently with “heretics” and “pagans.”\textsuperscript{25} Linder registers the numerous instances in which the Theodosian Code associates Jews with heretics and pagans. In particular, Linder suggests that this assimilation of Jews with other “enemies of the church”

indicates a fundamental change in the Jewish policy of the Imperial government towards the beginning of the fifth century, and [this] was bound to affect the legal status of the Jews during that period. Throughout the greater part of the fourth century the Jews still benefitted from the legal status Tertullian defined as “religio licita,” a religion recognized and protected by the State. By the end of that century, however, the State tended to assimilate them into other religions and sects prohibited, or severely restricted, by law, and to apply to the Jews interdictions and restrictions formerly applied against pagans and heretics only.\textsuperscript{26}

The legal literature of the late fourth and early fifth centuries thus signals a shift in the way “Judaism” is conceptualized vis-à-vis Christianity, paganism, and heresy. As Linder suggests, this general shift in classification underlies and “motivates” the

\textsuperscript{24} Millar, “Jews of the Greco-Roman Diaspora,” 117-118.

\textsuperscript{25} See Schwartz, \textit{Imperialism and Jewish Society}, 186, 192. See also David Hunt, who argues that by the last years of the fourth century, the Theodosian code utilized the term “\textit{superstitio}” to classify Jews, heretics, and pagans (Hunt, “Christianising the Roman Empire, 143-158, see esp. p. 145). See also Linder, \textit{Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation}, 55-58.

\textsuperscript{26} Linder, \textit{Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation}, 62-63.
increasingly restrictive laws that are issued in the decades immediately before and after the turn of the fifth century.  

As Schwartz reminds us, however, the rise of hostile language, legislation, and violence against Jews did not occur at the same time in every place. He writes:

The ever shriller rhetoric of imperial legislation about the Jews, in part because deepening imperial hostility, and the episcopal hostility that influenced it, are important per se as expressions of official ideology. But it is not legitimate to infer from either rhetoric or law alone that the conditions of Jews everywhere correspondingly deteriorated.

In this passage, Schwartz helpfully indicates the difficulties of tracing direct relationships between the “rhetoric” of the law and the “reality” of Jewish conditions. I suggest that legislation regarding the destruction and building of synagogues in the late fourth and early fifth centuries provides a particularly relevant site for investigating these complex intersections of ideology and practice in this time period. In the next section, I analyze Roman laws that seek to regulate synagogue destruction and construction and ask whether these laws help elucidate the relationship between ideology and practice—between “rhetoric” and “reality”—in late antiquity.

### Material and Discursive Violence against Jews

In a series of laws issued between the end of the fourth century and the beginning decades of the fifth century, legislators consistently recognized synagogues

---

27 Linder, Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, 63.

28 Schwartz, Imperialism and Jewish Society, 187.
as sites worthy of some form of governmental protection. In a law from 393, for example, Theodosius states that “the sect of the Jews is prohibited by no law,” and thus the destruction of synagogues should be prevented: “[R]epress with due severity,” orders Theodosius, “the excess of those who presume to commit illegal deeds under the name of the Christian religion and attempt to destroy and despoil synagogues.”

Arcadius (397), Honorius (412), and Theodosius II (420 and 423) issue similar edicts that condemn the “injuring and persecuting of Jews” and the “occupation” and burning of synagogues by Christians. The building of new synagogues, however, was prohibited by several laws from the 420s and following. In analyzing these laws, Linder maintains that “[s]uch relatively frequent legislation indicates that the government was not entirely effective in enforcing these laws,” and he goes on to indicate that from 415 on, “it is apparent that the authorities gradually yielded to the pressure of fanatical Christians.” Moreover, Schwartz suggests that the prohibition on the building of new synagogues may represent a “concession to the apparently numerous bishops and monks who opposed the imperial protection of synagogues.” In this context, the relationship between “rhetoric” and “reality” is

29 Linder, Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, 74.
30 Linder, Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, 21.
31 Linder, Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, 25, 40, and 46-49. See esp. 48.
32 Linder, Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, 49.
33 Linder, Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, 74.
34 Schwartz, Imperialism and Jewish Society, 195. Schwartz continues by arguing that “the prohibition of synagogue construction provides us with an important warning about the functioning of the law.
complex, but we can infer from the number of laws concerning violence against Jews and destruction of synagogues that such violence did occur and that it prompted diverse and impassioned responses from governors, emperors, bishops, and monks.”

One such bishop who famously opposed imperial protection of synagogues was Ambrose, bishop of Milan in the late fourth century. After Christians burned a synagogue in Callinicum in 388, Ambrose intervened with and opposed Theodosius’ ruling that the Christian community of Callinicum rebuild the synagogue at its own expense. In a letter to the emperor, Ambrose argues that the burning of a synagogue is a divinely sanctioned act, since “God himself” condemns the synagogue as a “home of unbelief, a house of impiety, and a receptacle of folly.” Indeed, Ambrose states that he himself would gladly take the blame for the burning of the Callinicum synagogue since such an act forcefully displays “the judgment of God” against those “places where Christ [is] denied.” Ambrose’s letter to the emperor not only testifies to certain material effects and social consequences of Christian anti-Jewish ideology but also indicates that imperial and episcopal authorities did not always agree in cases because, as is well known, the great age of synagogue construction in Palestine was in the fifth and sixth centuries, precisely the period when such construction was illegal” (195).

---

35 As Annabel Wharton reminds us, imperial efforts “to protect synagogues only provide further documentation of the radical displacement of the sacred space of the Jews”; and the early Christian Fathers’ fictionalized narratives of Jews’ failure to rebuild the temple “are the literary counterparts of the all-too-real violence that was contemporaneously directed against synagogues” (Wharton, “Erasure: eliminating the space of late ancient Judaism,” in From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity, ed. Lee Levine and Zeev Weiss, Journal of Roman Archeology Supplementary Series 40 [Portsmouth, Rhode Island: Journal of Roman Archeology, 2000], 207, 200).

36 Ambrose, Epistle 40.14 (NPNF 10, 442).

37 Ambrose, Epistle 40.8 (NPNF 10, 441).
regarding Jews and their sites of worship. In many cases that involved violence against Jews or destruction of synagogues, imperial legislation was created to place limits on ecclesiastically-sanctioned violence.\(^{38}\)

Given the rhetoric of the legal literature, the stereotypical discourse of theological literature, and the Christian attempts at “erasure”\(^ {39}\) of Jewish space at the end of the fourth century and beginning of the fifth, we might consider the following questions: What is the relationship between material violence, such as the destruction of synagogues, and rhetorical violence, such as John Chrysostom’s characterization of Jews as animals “fit for slaughter”? Do the stereotypes of Jews promulgated in Chrysostom’s sermons, for example, contribute to a climate in which acts of violence against Jews are made possible, even endorsed? Is there a specific relationship between sexual stereotypes of Jews, on the one hand, and Christian violence against Jews, on the other? Finally, does stereotypical discourse itself constitute an act of violence?

In approaching these questions about stereotypical representation and violence, it is useful to reflect upon a more general question about the relationship between “rhetoric” and “reality.” Questions about the relationship of “rhetoric” and

\(^{38}\) See Linder, *Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, nos. 46-49. Peter Schäfer comments on imperial attitudes toward Jews under Theodosius I, arguing, “In view of such legislation, it is hardly appropriate to regard ‘the great assault on the Jews and Judaism’ as beginning with Theodosius I. None of the Christian emperors was actively pro-Jewish, but, as the edicts of Theodosius I demonstrate, the law could still come down in their favor if it was politically convenient to do so. However, the underlying negative tendency could only get stronger the more the emperor in question was prepared to concede to the growing self-assurance of Christianity as its influence spread throughout the empire” (Peter Schäfer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World* [London: Routledge, 2003], 186).

\(^{39}\) I borrow this term from Wharton’s essay.
“reality” have troubled and divided scholars of early Christian-Jewish relations for some time, as Andrew Jacobs notes. Some scholars claim that anti-Jewish texts, such as Chrysostom’s sermons against the Jews, are rhetorical and symbolic; these scholars suggest that texts such as these construct Jews as “straw men” against which Christian orthodoxy is formulated.\(^{40}\) Other scholars contend that we can read anti-Jewish texts as reflective and representative of “what actually happened.”\(^{41}\) Jacobs offers a “middle way,” utilizing post-colonial discourse analysis to trace the “material effects” of Christian imperial rhetoric. Jacobs argues:

> My understanding of Christian culture as imperial during this period should signal that the language of Christians was not incidental or without consequence: when imperial subjects speak authoritatively, we cannot dismiss it as “mere rhetoric.” Nor, however, can we benignly condone imperial Christian language as “merely reflective” of “real” conflict between Jews and Christians, thereby flattening the imbalance of power that defines imperial existence. . . . Language is not a reflection of real cultural and political worlds; neither is language a merely rhetorical derivation of the real world. Language—or, to be more precise, the network of linguistic and material practices that we call discourse—is itself a site for the production of reality.\(^{42}\)

On this model, discourse itself comprises a “material event.”

Many theorists of colonialism are interested in the ways in which colonial language impacts the lives of the colonized, and many of them turn to Foucault’s


\(^{42}\) Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*, 207.
conception of “discourse” (that “network of linguistic and material practices”) to make sense of language’s material effects. For example, Robert J. C. Young writes that “[w]hat Foucault is trying to make clear is that a statement [énoncé], in this context, is above all not simply a text or a piece of language. The statement itself constitutes a specific material event, a performative act or a function, an historical eruption that impinges on and makes an incision into circumstance.” Applying this Foucauldian understanding of language, discourse, and énonciations to my analysis of Christian representations of Jews, I suggest that stereotypical discourse and sexual slander function not merely as linguistic devices of ancient invective but as “performative acts” and “historical eruptions” that themselves produce reality for late ancient Jews and Christians. Considered in this way, we might view sexual stereotypes that depict Jews as degenerate and subhuman not as mere rhetorical caricatures but as “performative acts” of violence that create conditions for material acts of violence against Jews and their sacred spaces.

43 Elizabeth Clark notes that receptions of Foucault’s conception of discourse among historians have been less positive. In History, Theory, Text, Clark writes, “Foucault’s work after the Archeology of Knowledge stressed more fully that ‘discourse’ did not mean ‘language’ apart from the situations of its production or its material grounding in institutions and disciplines. This approach he shared with French literary theorists of the 1960s and 1970s who specialized in ‘discourse analysis’; their explorations of textuality similarly emphasized the materiality of language and the conditions of its production. Foucault’s elaboration of ‘discourse’ and ‘discursive formations’ was welcomed by these literary scholars—but not by many historians” (Clark, History, Theory, Text, 114).

In his book, *There is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*, Michael Gaddis analyzes literary representations of violence in late ancient Christian texts. He argues that “discourse about violence affected the ways in which violence could be used in practice,” signaling a complex, interactive relationship between the “ideology” and “practice” of violence in the Roman empire.\(^{45}\) He recommends that historians identify the “ideas and communities of support” that “underlie” violent acts perpetrated by Christians against Jews, pagans, and “heretics.”\(^{46}\) Moreover, he contends that “[i]n the late antique context, it is less important to tie particular violent acts to particular individuals than it is to explore the larger complex of attitudes, values, and prejudices that could give rise to such violence.”\(^{47}\) I suggest that we use Gaddis’ recommendation to identify space for future work on the relationship between representation and violence in late antiquity. In particular, we might ask, how does

---

\(^{45}\) Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 39 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3. Gaddis also notes that, “following Foucault, we have begun to approach the history of modern educational, medical, and penal institutions by characterizing the disciplinary power they exercise over their human subjects as a form of violence, even when the mechanisms of control are far more subtle and sophisticated than simple physical force. When we speak of ‘violent’ rhetoric or ‘hate speech,’ we signal an understanding that words alone may have a violent quality, blurring the commonsense distinction between word and deed” (3).


sexual slander function within the “larger complex of attitudes, values, and prejudices” that underlie acts of violence? How do representations of the Other as bestial, licentious, and contagious contribute to a climate in which the Other is conceived as a dehumanized subject of justified violence? More generally, does discursive violence count as violence in late antiquity?\(^{48}\)

_Closing Thoughts: Language, Violence, Resistance_

In her 1997 book, _Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative_, Judith Butler takes up the question of the relation between language and violence in a modern context. She argues that her initial questions about the relationship between language and violence are rooted in a prior question about the construction of the Other. She writes, “If language can sustain the body, it can also threaten its existence. Thus, the question of the specific ways that language threatens violence seems bound up with the primary dependency that any speaking being has by virtue of the interpellative or constitutive address of the Other.”\(^{49}\) Furthermore, in her analysis of contemporary hate-speech, Butler notes that “being called a name can be the site of injury,” but she also suggests that name-calling can function, paradoxically, as the site of subversion and resistance. She writes that “this name-calling may be the initiating moment of a countermobilization. The name one is called both

\(^{48}\) See the essays in the recent volume, _Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices_, ed. H. A. Drake (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2006). Surprisingly, few contributors to this volume broach the subject of the relationship between discursive and material violence in late antiquity.

subordinates and enables, producing a scene of agency from ambivalence, a set of
effects that exceed the animating intentions of the call.”\(^{50}\) In this way, Butler points
to potentialities and possibilities that are opened up within the act of name-calling and
within the language of hate-speech.

Homi Bhabha says something similar about the stereotype. He argues that the
stereotype is a “limited form of otherness”; it is always partial and incomplete in its
masking of ambivalence.\(^{51}\) By reading “otherness” as “at once an object of desire and
derision,” Bhabha reveals the “boundaries of colonial discourses” and the possibilities
for transgression “of these limits from the space of that otherness.”\(^{52}\) I close by
suggesting that further research into the relationship between discursive and material
violence in late antiquity takes into account the possibilities for resistance and
transgression that are enabled by stereotypical discourse. In relation to the present
project, in particular, we might ask: What are the positions of resistance and
subversion made possible by the sexualized representation of Jews in late antiquity?
How did late-ancient Jews contest and transgress the limits of Christian stereotypical
discourse “from the space of otherness?”

\(^{50}\) Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 163.

\(^{51}\) Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 111.

\(^{52}\) Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 96.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

ANCIENT WORKS


252


MODERN WORKS


Baer, Y. “Israel, the Christian Church, and the Roman Empire.” Scripta Hierosolymitana 7 (1961): 79-149.


________. “Roman Imperial Policy toward the Jews from Constantine until the End of the Palestinian Patriarchate.” *Byzantine Studies/ Études Byzantines* 3 (1976): 1-29.


Pendergraft, Mary. “’Thou Shalt not Eat the Hyena’ A Note on ‘Barnabas’ Epistle 10.7” *Vigilae Christianae* 46 (1992): 75-79.


Siegfried, C. *Die hebräischen Worterklärung des Philo und die Spuren ihrer Einwirkung auf die Kirchenväter*. Magdeburg, 1863.


BIOGRAPHY

Susanna Laing Drake was born in Lafayette, Indiana on December 26, 1977. She grew up in East Tennessee and graduated from Oak Ridge High School in 1996. She attended Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa, and graduated in June 2000 with a degree in Philosophy and a concentration in Gender and Women’s Studies. After Grinnell, Susanna continued her education at Harvard Divinity School, receiving her Masters in Theological Studies in June 2003. She entered the doctoral program in Religion at Duke University in August 2003 and pursued research in early Christian studies, New Testament, and art history. Her research was supported by funding from the James B. Duke fellowship and the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute Dissertation Working Group Fellowship. Susanna is currently an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota.