

DE GRUYTER

CONTROL, COERCION, AND CONSTRAINT

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN OVERCOMING
AND CREATING STRUCTURES OF DEPENDENCY

Edited by Wolfram Kinzig and Barbara Loose



UNIVERSITÄT **BONN**



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Control, Coercion, and Constraint

Dependency and Slavery Studies



Edited by
Jeannine Bischoff and Stephan Conermann

Volume 14

Control, Coercion, and Constraint



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Bonn, March 2024

Wolfram Kinzig and Barbara Loose

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Wolfram Kinzig and Barbara Loose

Introduction

The ongoing debate about postcolonialism and recent events like the toppling of the statues of enslavers in England, the restitution of art looted by France during the colonial era, and the founding of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin have increased awareness in the West and especially in Europe of how historical and contemporary forms of coercion and oppression have impacted societies all over the world.

In the past, research on various forms of bondage and coercion was usually framed in terms of the binary opposition of slavery and freedom. In its research, the “Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies” (BCDSS) of the University of Bonn¹ attempts to overcome this binary opposition as it seeks to address economic, legal, religious, social, and cultural structures of dependency that resist straightforward classification as slavery. In this context, the concept of “asymmetrical dependency” can serve as an analytical tool for studying a wide range of phenomena, including but not limited to slavery. In terms of a preliminary definition, researchers at the centre (Julia Winnebeck, Ove Sutter, Adrian Hermann, Christoph Antweiler, and Stephan Conermann) have proposed the following three markers of asymmetrical dependency in a programmatic article recently published in the *Journal of Global Slavery*:

1. Asymmetrical dependency occurs within relations between two or more actors. The position of an actor can, in principle, be assumed by all entities, i.e., human beings, animals, elements of nature, material artefacts, gods, and spirits.
2. Asymmetrical dependency is based on the ability of one actor to control the actions of another actor and/or their access to resources.
3. Asymmetrical dependency is usually supported by an institutional context in such a way as to ensure that the dependent actors cannot simply change the situation by either going away (“exit”) or by articulating impactful protest (“voice”).²

This approach allows us both to identify different types of dependency and to widen the focus of research in historical, geographical, and interdisciplinary terms, as, for example, it facilitates the study of cultures that have no terminology for slavery or where indistinct but nevertheless potent forms of coercion do not coincide with a particular legal status. More importantly, in the context of this edited volume, the concept allows us to widen the scope of our analysis to include dependencies on a transcendent power (such as gods or spiritual realities) that also lead to the formation of hierarchies, which may be restricted to the metaphysical realm but may also entail

¹ See <https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/en> [accessed 29.01.2024].

² Julia Winnebeck, Ove Sutter, Adrian Hermann, Christoph Antweiler and Stephan Conermann, “The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency,” *Journal of Global Slavery* 8 (2023): 7–8.

earthly institutional consequences. Winnebeck et al. have explicitly addressed this phenomenon in their seminal article:

[. . .] one could argue that the assumption that a divine being has instituted a particular social order might both stabilize and restrict A's power over B. Such a belief might reduce the potential for change. At the same time, a divine order demanding a particular behaviour towards others, as in the case of the 'golden rule,' might restrict the scope of violence towards an asymmetrically dependent actor even if societal norms place few limitations upon it. Furthermore, when considering gods, demons, spirits, etc., as actors within relationships of asymmetrical dependency, we might ask to what extent human actors and members of a particular social group claim to hold power or execute control on behalf of these entities.³

Within this theoretical framework (which includes further distinctions like those between "sayings" and "doings"⁴), the principal interest of this volume is to show the role of religion, both in overcoming and creating structures of dependency.

The contributors to this volume were asked to address the following questions: where in history did religious agents contribute to the abolition of such structures? Conversely, to what extent were religious agents responsible for and instrumental in establishing social and other hierarchies, be it, for example, between priests and ordinary people or even among believers (such as in a caste system)?

As is often the case in history, there are no simple answers to these questions. On the one hand, the equality of all human beings before God is deeply rooted in Christian, Jewish, and Islamic thought. Conversion to one or the other religion has, therefore, often led to the transformation or even the abolition of existing social structures, institutions, and their corresponding dependencies, which, in turn, strengthen the social agency of the members of a given religion. On the other hand, while control, coercion, and constraint of individuals or groups are indeed frequently criticized in religious discourse, it is commonly acknowledged that religious aetiologies have also been used to justify the subjection of individuals and people groups. In addition, throughout history, religious institutions themselves have often mirrored the social hierarchies and inequalities of their surrounding societies by creating similarly rigid systems of dependency within their own institutional, social, legal, and spiritual structures. The (full) realization of freedom and equality is then often postponed to a distant future, to a later life, or even to the afterlife. Moreover, not even the metaphysical world is free of dependencies: almost all major religions envisage hierarchies of gods, angels, and demons in their respective discourses.⁵ In Christianity, for example, the New Jerusalem is described as a divine monarchy in which the resurrected humans will serve God as slaves on whose foreheads the divine name is tattooed to indicate that they are God's property (Revelation 22: 3–4).

³ Winnebeck et al., "The Analytical Concept": 23.

⁴ Cf. Winnebeck et al., "The Analytical Concept": 16–20.

⁵ Regarding Christianity see, for example, Winnebeck and Munkholt in this volume: 227–247 and 181–204.

Finally, the question of the role of religion in abolishing but also perpetuating slavery is still a much-debated topic within the historical and social sciences. This topic is all the more pressing in light of the contemporary enslavement of ethnic groups on the basis of their religion, like, e.g., the Yazidis and the Rohingya.

About this volume

This volume collects contributions from the humanities, social sciences, and theology, which deal with the role of religion in overcoming and creating structures of dependency. As previously noted, the contributions formed part of a lecture series designed by Maria Munkholt Christensen, Julia Winnebeck, Barbara Loose, and Wolfram Kinzig held during the 2021–2022 academic year at the University of Bonn. The lecture series was jointly organized by the university’s “Center for Religion and Society” (ZERG)⁶ and the BCDSS.⁷

Of course, this volume does not claim to be exhaustive. Readers will inevitably notice a certain emphasis on Christianity. However, some contributions that deal with dependency structures in Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism clearly show that our methodological approach is also applicable to societies in which non-monotheistic religions are or have been dominant. As diverse as the authors’ research foci are, so too are their approaches to exploring the role of religion in overcoming and creating structures of dependency. Consequently, we have chosen the following thematic sections to organize this volume’s contents:

1 God, Satan, and Humankind: Liberation from and Dependency on Supernatural Forces

The articles included in the first section explore how the relations between humans and supernatural forces in sources from the Ancient Near East, the Bible, and early Christian rituals can best be described.

Jan Dietrich’s essay on ‘Freedom and Dependency in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East’ begins with a reflection on the first mythical narratives from Mesopotamia, which describe the creation of humankind as a workforce for the gods (except, perhaps, for the king who is awarded a god-like status). Dietrich then traces ‘how the distinction between prototypical humans and the king led to the emergence of the

⁶ See <https://www.zerg.uni-bonn.de/> [accessed 29.01.2024].

⁷ Some of the lectures (Hegewald, Kinzig, Munkholt, Winnebeck) are also available online at <https://www.youtube.com/@zergunibonn9490> [accessed 01.02.2024].

idea of equality and non-dependency between all humans' as expressed in the Hebrew Bible.⁸ The development of a concept of God's sole sovereignty over Israel is seen here as a precondition for the emergence of the idea that 'humans are created as god-like representatives on Earth.'⁹

Ulrich Berges' analysis of the biblical evidence is slightly less optimistic. He sees the 'overcoming and creation of asymmetrical dependencies' in the Bible as 'two sides of the same coin.'¹⁰ In this context, he investigates the semantics of dependency in the Book of Isaiah. Berges points out that, in the Old Testament, the relationship between humans and God is clearly characterized by a hierarchical dependency structure that is dialectical: on the one hand, it is based on the 'liberation of his [God's] people from bondage in Egypt, the house of slavery (Exodus 20:2)', but, on the other hand, it leads to a new kind of divine enslaving, as expressed, for example, in Leviticus 25:42 (tr. NRSVue): 'For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold.'¹¹ Given this dialectic, apparent linguistic references to human dependency and freedom must be carefully reconsidered, especially in the Book of Isaiah, since they may not express "freedom" but, perhaps, "release from bondage", in which case, submission to the divine Lord may not be free-willed but forced subjugation to a new master.¹²

Berges' careful analysis parallels *Wolfram Kinzig's* findings regarding Christian baptismal theology. Kinzig explains that in late antique baptismal liturgies and sermons explaining said liturgies, conversion to Christianity was seen as the liberation of the convert from the power of the devil. At the same time, the renunciation of Satan entailed a new form of dependency: the baptismal rites expressed and enacted the absolute submission of the converts to Christ as their new master. Thus, the conversion to Christianity was a 'change of allegiance and replacement of one relationship of dependency with another,'¹³ although this new dependency (on Christ) was often praised as an act of liberation.

2 Interactions between Religion and Politics

The second section comprises articles that primarily highlight the complex interactions between religions and the political structures in which they are embedded.

⁸ Dietrich in this volume: 12.

⁹ Dietrich in this volume: 24.

¹⁰ Berges in this volume: 27.

¹¹ Berges in this volume: 41.

¹² Cf. Berges in this volume: 27–44.

¹³ Kinzig in this volume: 48.

Ludwig Morenz explains how the development of alphabetic writing in Serabit on the Sinai Peninsula in the early second millennium BCE can be understood as a sign of overcoming the oppression of the Canaanites by the Egyptians. He focuses on the Canaanite “He”-tribe as the likely agent of this momentous invention, which took place in a sacred area dedicated to the Egyptian goddess Hathor. He thus calls into question the prevailing image of the oppressed and uneducated Canaanites and asserts their role as a people who sought to cooperate with the Egyptians but, in the end, followed their own agenda.

In the second article, we turn to Tibet’s imperial period (*ca.* 600–850 CE). *Lewis Doney* shows how descriptions of the life of the emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan (reigned 756–*ca.* 800) in later historiographical and biographical sources mirror the rise in status of Buddhist masters. They could gradually ‘come to be seen as superior to the royalty on whom they were formerly dependent and so create a social situation that undergirded the dependency of the Tibetan people on their clergy (as the dominant class) for permission to use their land in exchange for taxation.’¹⁴ Doney describes how, with the help of certain narrative strategies, the clergy managed to utilize the power vacuum that existed in central Tibet after the fall of the empire in order to gain a privileged position in society.

Moving into nineteenth-century North America, *Marion Gymnich* traces the picture of religion and its meaning for enslaved people in the antebellum South, using the example of Harriet Jacobs’ slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). On the one hand, Jacobs focuses on how religion was used to justify the oppression of enslaved people. On the other hand, she emphasizes the absurdity of the enslavers’ self-image, who saw themselves as good Christians but acted against Christian values in their treatment of enslaved black people. In this context, the systematic use of religion as a means of oppressing enslaved black people becomes a means of political coercion.

The last two articles in this section focus on religious symbols as expressions of relationships of dependency in the service of political endeavours.

Sabine Feist analyses how, in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, relics of Christian martyrs and saints were used to exert political pressure. The agents in this process could be bishops or emperors who handed over, refused to hand over, or procured relics to demonstrate their own supremacy, create transregional sacral networks, and promote political relations.

While this text is about the *preservation* of spiritually charged artefacts for religious and political purposes, *Julia A.B. Hegewald* deals with their systematic *destruction*. Using the example of the desecration of temples and sacred icons of the Jaina in medieval South India by the then-emergent group of the Viraśaivas, she describes the

¹⁴ Doney in this volume: 90.

significance of the transformation and destruction of religious artefacts for the manifestation of the power of one religious group over another.

3 Religion and Gendered Dependency

The volume's third section deals with the manifestation of structures of dependency at the intersection of religion and gender.

In her contribution, *Maria Munkholt Christensen* describes social hierarchies, or the lack thereof, within late antique nunneries. Based on monastic rules and hagiographical accounts, she illustrates how women of all strata of society, including enslaved women, could enter monastic communities. Although it is difficult to draw conclusions from these idealized accounts regarding social realities, it seems, nevertheless, that in some monasteries, women from different backgrounds lived in "full" equality with each other, whereas in other communities traditional social barriers were upheld. Furthermore, contrary to what one might expect, enslaved people who contributed to a monastery's maintenance are frequently found in late antique monastic texts.¹⁵

Sinah Theres Kloß explores the question of whether or not the religious tattoos of present-day Hindu women in the Caribbean, the so-called *godna*, can indeed be perceived as a sign of dependency. While these have long been described as signifying a woman's dependence on her husband and in-laws, they increasingly developed into a unifying symbol of a relational bond between a young bride and her own family, especially her mother, as well as a marker of a certain privileged religious status. Based on interviews with tattooed women, Kloß traces these changes in the interpretation of the *godna*.

4 Religion and the Dialectic of Overcoming and Creating Dependency

The book's fourth and final section addresses the role of religion in overcoming traditional political, social, and legal structures of dependency. It also examines the creation of new religious hierarchies that replace old ones.

Julia Winnebeck focuses on the manifestation of relations of asymmetrical dependencies in the practice of penance and ecclesiastical law as recorded and systematized in Christian penitentials from the sixth to the ninth centuries. She sees penance as an

¹⁵ See now also Johanna Schwarz and Julia Winnebeck, "Sklaven Gottes – Sklaven der Kirche: Der Umgang mit Sklavinnen und Sklaven im Mönchtum," *Welt und Umwelt der Bibel* 28, no. 2 (2023): 54–57.

‘ecclesiastical institution which not only regulated the spiritual practice of both clergy and laypeople but also served as a medium of social control and a gateway to dependency relations such as slavery and bonded labour.’¹⁶ In using this tool of spiritual discipline, the Church played a crucial role in forming and maintaining new structures of religious asymmetrical dependencies.

Michael Schulz examines Bartolomé de Las Casas’ argument against the ethical justifiability of enslaving indigenous people in South America. An analysis of Aristotle’s notion of *éthos* allows de Las Casas to argue for the equality of all humans. Cultural diversity is acquired and cannot be used to legitimize slavery on the basis of natural differences.

From *Martin Schermaier’s* contribution, we can see that not only Las Casas’ argument but the entire debate on liberty in the European philosophical and theological tradition down to Spanish Scholasticism was strongly influenced by Aristotle and how it developed over the centuries. He focuses on the concept of *dominium in se ipsum*, which in the scholastic tradition was transformed from a concept of inner freedom and thus of moral responsibility into a criterion of outer freedom: whoever was the master of his actions could not be completely at the mercy of another’s caprice, and whoever acquired ownership of the goods of this world could not himself be the property of another. The scope of these propositions determined contemporary concepts of freedom. In addition, Schermaier points out that some advocates of the equality of all humans had undergone considerable intellectual development in their lifetime; thus, in his early writings, Las Casas argued *in favour* of the ‘enslavement of African natives to alleviate the labour shortage in the New World’.¹⁷

Three centuries later, the Anglican Evangelical William Wilberforce also turned his attention to the question of the justifiability of the slave trade. *John Coffey* explains how this Englishman campaigned for the abolition of, first, the slave trade and, later, slavery in general. Furthermore, Coffey asks why Evangelical Christians were so keen to end the Atlantic slave trade and West Indian slavery. He identifies their eschatological expectations as a key impulse behind their abolitionism. Finally, he discusses how their religion prompted them ‘to abolish slavery but also to reinforce colonial dependency’¹⁸ because they considered alleged African “barbarism” to be culturally inferior to European civilization.

In sum, this collection of case studies illustrates the ambivalent role of religion in the history of strong asymmetrical dependencies. The editors hope it may foster further reflection on this history, especially on questions such as: are there religions that promote the political, legal, and social freedom of humans more than others? What is the role of the development and disappearance of religious “fundamentalisms” in this re-

¹⁶ Winnebeck in this volume: 227.

¹⁷ Schermaier in this volume: 291.

¹⁸ Coffey in this volume: 300.

spect? Does the “enlightenment” of religion make a difference? Does it matter what kind of ideology, doctrine, or theology a religion promotes regarding overcoming and creating structures of dependency, or does the move towards freedom or dependency, ultimately, depend solely on religious practice and politics and on actual power relations within societies? Finally, are societies in which the influence of religion is marginal (such as socialist countries) more or less prone to promoting freedom?

In any case, recent developments such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and again on 24 February 2022, the terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the Israeli military response have made abundantly clear that asymmetrical relations between states and ethnic groups cannot be sufficiently understood without considering the role of religion in overcoming and creating structures of dependency.

Thus, this book is intended as a source of inspiration and a stimulus to incorporate dependency studies in general and the role of religion in particular into established perspectives on social asymmetries.

God, Satan, and Humankind: Liberation from and Dependency on Supernatural Forces

Jan Dietrich

Freedom and Dependency in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East

Freedom, or Liberty, is an idea – some would even say a utopian idea that will perhaps never be fully realized in human history. Some scholars also argue that the idea of freedom has never been a value outside of the Western world. It is said that freedom first emerged as an idea in Greek antiquity. The concept supposedly arose as part of the “Greek miracle”, at least in so far as it is understood as an explicitly political or even philosophical concept to be scrutinized and discussed and which could be described by the specially coined Greek term, ἐλευθερία (*eleuthería*).¹ The idea of liberty stands in contrast to the terms “dependency” and “slavery”, which are descriptive socio-economic terms. The respective phenomena to which they refer emerged quite early in human history and could be used to describe socio-economic realities from deep in the past, long before the advent of classical antiquity. Indeed, when viewed through a wide lens that spans periodizations of social history, it becomes clear that the reality of dependency is old, while the idea of freedom is quite young.

According to early creation narratives, when humankind was made from clay, humankind was dependent on the gods for whom they had to work.² The oldest written myths in history, those from Mesopotamia, often suggest that in the time before the creation of humankind, some gods had to work for others. These lower, subordinate gods started to complain. The solution was to create humankind, usually out of clay,³ as workmen for the gods. Humans had to praise the gods, dig canals, and plough fields to provide the gods with food and drink in their temples. Furthermore, a late Neo-Assyrian myth distinguishes between two categories of humans, which is relevant to the following reflections on freedom and dependency. At first, the cuneiform tablet *VAT 17019*, written in a Neo-Babylonian style, depicts humankind as having been created for a typical purpose, i.e., to work for the gods. However, in a second movement of the creative act, the gods fashioned the king, whom they separated from normal human beings:

VAT 17019 (Berlin, Vorderasiatische Abteilung, Tontafel 17019):

Ea (god of wisdom) opened his mouth to speak, saying a word to Belet-ili (goddess of creation):
‘You are Belet-ili, the sister of the great gods; it was you who created man, the human (*lullú*)

¹ See, e.g., Kurt Raaflaub, *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece: Revised and Updated Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

² See, e.g., Takayoshi Oshima, “When the Gods Made Us from Clay,” in *Menschenbilder und Körperkonzepte*, eds. Angelika Berlejung, Jan Dietrich, and Joachim Quack (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012): 407–32.

³ In some cases, mingled with other substances like the blood or the reason of a god.

amēlu). Fashion now the king, the counsellor man (*šarru māliku amēlu*)! Gird the whole of his figure so pleasingly, make perfect his countenance and well formed his body! And Belet-ili fashioned the king, the counsellor man.⁴

In this quote from *VAT 17019*, humankind is separated into two categories: 1) Subordinate humans who work for the gods, and 2) the king, created as the god's representative on earth and provided with god-like splendour and might. Apart from the king, all humans share a dependent status which is regarded as an anthropological universal. Of course, this is only a myth. Nevertheless, it is a myth that sheds light on the socio-economic realities of the period in which it was composed.

In the following sections, we shall see how the distinction between prototypical humans and the king led to the emergence of the idea of equality and non-dependency between all humans. To achieve this goal, we will follow four steps. We will set out on a path that begins with the emergence of singular and dispersed ideas of negative liberation (i.e., liberation *from* something or someone). We will then explore the development of repeatable forms of liberation. In the end, we will arrive at the emergence of the general anthropological conceptions of liberation and freedom. Along the way, we will look at dependency as a socio-economic reality. We will encounter situations in which kings carry out selective acts of liberation and note how the idea of freedom emerges as part of the differentiation of law. Finally, we shall come to a deeper understanding of the anthropological punchline of the idea of humankind as kingly representatives of God.⁵

1 Flight from Bondage

The notion of “health” develops upon the realization of “illness” (cf. Plato, *Politeia* IX 583c–d). In the history of ideas and in the experiences of individuals, health may be present as a vague sensation of vitality, but unless prompted by an encounter with unhealthiness, it does not exist as a conscious idea or a concrete term. Illness makes people fully aware of health as an idea and ideal concept. The privation of vital states

⁴ Translation from Karen Radner, “Assyrian and Non-Assyrian Kingship in the First Millennium BC,” in *Concepts of Kingship in Antiquity: Proceedings of the European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop, Held in Padova, November 28th–December 1st, 2007*, eds. Giovanni Lanfranchi and Robert Rollinger, *History of the Ancient Near East / Monographs 11* (Padova: S.A.R.G.O.N. Editrice Libreria, 2010): 27. For the original edition of the text and its German translation, see Werner Mayer, “Ein Mythos von der Erschaffung des Menschen und des Königs,” *Orientalia* 56 (1987): 55–68.

⁵ In some parts, this article builds upon my earlier article Jan Dietrich, “Liberty, Freedom, and Autonomy in the Ancient World: A General Introduction and Comparison,” in *Research on Israel and Aram: Autonomy, Independence and Related Issues: Proceedings of the First Annual RIAB Center Conference, Leipzig, June 2016*, eds. Angelika Berlejung and Aren Maeir, *Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 34* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019): 3–22. In the present article, a new angle is taken in trying to show a thread from flight to freedom.

makes people conceive of health. Likewise, from the perspective of a history of ideas and social values, in the early high cultures, as well as in archaic Greece, independent people conceived of themselves as “noble”, honourable people with full city rights.⁶ Just as the realization of illness leads to the conceptualization of health, the realization of dependency brings the idea and objective of freedom to the fore.

In the early Mesopotamian city-states, as well as at the dawn of the Egyptian state, the first forms of “high culture” emerged. Here, writing was invented to control the economy of the city-temple-state in Mesopotamia and the palace economy in Egypt. Together with this development, a stratified society emerged with a class of dependent workmen. These workmen were, in one way or another, dependent on the state (palace or temple) by forced labour, primarily in the sense that they were caught in a system of *corvée* (*Fronddienst*) or debt slavery.⁷ How could they escape from this situation? The typical avenue of escape was flight, which made the workman or debt slave a fugitive. A plethora of written sources from the temple and palace archives report the flight of these fugitives. Sometimes, they were caught in the act or later apprehended while hiding someplace:

Nippur, *Amar-Suena* 1:

Gugu,
 slave of Ur-Nungal
 ran away from him
 and was taken;
 he put out his eye.
 Oath of the king – when going?
 Shall I in the future run away,
 let me be destroyed, he said.
 (3 Witnesses: Lugal-azi-[]
 Aba-En-[]
 I-ti-[]
 They are its judges,
 Sons of Nippur.
 Year: Amar-Suena (became) king.⁸

⁶ The later Hebrew term *herut* (“freedom”) stems from the usual ancient Hebrew term “noble” (*ḥor*), see, e.g., Nehemiah 5:7–8: ‘After thinking it over, I brought charges against the nobles (*ḥorīm*) and the officials; I said to them, “You are all taking interest from your own people.” And I called a great assembly to deal with them, (8) and said to them, “As far as we were able, we have bought back our Jewish kindred who had been sold to other nations; but now you are selling your own kin, who must then be bought back by us!” They were silent, and could not find a word to say.’ (NRSV) See also 1 Kings 21:8, 11; Nehemiah 4:8, 13; 7:5.

⁷ For the Hebrew Bible, see especially 1 Samuel 8:11–17. For the ancient Near East, see most recently Christin Möllkenbeck, *Institutionelle Sklaverei in Tempel und Palast in Südmesopotamien während der altbabylonischen Zeit (2000–1500 v. Chr.)*, dubsar 23 (Münster: Zaphon, 2021).

⁸ Daniel Snell, *Flight and Freedom in the Ancient Near East*, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2001): 157. Cf. Muazzez Çiğ and Hatice Kızılyay, *Neusumerische Rechts- und Verwaltungsurkunden aus Nippur*, vol. 1 (Ankara: TTK, 1965): 1 (Ni. 737).

Here, as in many similar cases, we do not find a term for freedom. It seems that the idea of freedom as a reflective concept has not yet emerged. Instead, the flight of the fugitive testifies to escapist wishes connected to the socio-economic realities of dependency. Flight implies a process of negation; it recounts an escape from a state of bondage, but only in the negative. At that early stage, dependency as a socio-economic reality came first, freedom second, and “freedom from” emerged only upon the negation of the escapee’s former situation. If things had remained the same, the full idea of freedom would not have emerged.

2 Acts of Liberation

The social institution of *corvée* and debt slavery eventually gave way to the concept of “liberation”. Liberation was first developed as a process of “release”. Only later did it evolve into the concept of liberty, i.e., freedom. Within the social institution of *corvée* and debt slavery, “liberation”, i.e., “release”, emerged in special political situations. While the social institutions of *corvée* and debt slavery, along with the fugitive’s flight therefrom, may be part of the socio-economic *longue durée* of the ancient world, political acts of collective release are not. They belong to the political history of ancient Near Eastern kings, which had an impact on the socio-economic situations of society, but only selectively, point by point. In Mesopotamia, the term *andurāru* (cf. Hebrew *dôrôr*)⁹ means “liberation” or “release”, i.e., the manumission of slaves, the cancellation of *corvée* and taxes, or the nullification of debts.¹⁰ It was part of royal propaganda to highlight that the king granted liberation. Typically, at the beginning

⁹ See Leviticus 25:10; Isaiah 61:1; Jeremiah 34:8. 15. 17; Ezekiel 46:17.

¹⁰ See CAD s.v. *andurāru*, and Hans Ebeling, *Freiheit, Gleichheit, Sterblichkeit: Philosophie nach Heidegger* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982); Manfred Dietrich, “Die Frage nach persönlicher Freiheit im Alten Orient,” in *Mesopotamica – Ugaritica – Biblica. Festschrift für Kurt Bergerhof zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres am 7. Mai 1992*, eds. Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament – Veröffentlichungen zur Kultur und Geschichte des Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments* 232 (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 1993): 45–58. For other terms like *mār banūti*, *elēlu* and *zakū*, see Stephanie Ernst, “Frei, Freiwillig, Freilassen – Begriffe für Freiheit im Alten Testament,” in “*Ruft nicht die Weisheit . . . ?*” (*Spr 8,1*): *Alttestamentliche und epigraphische Textinterpretationen. Symposium in Skåholt, 1.–3. Juni 2009*, ed. Kristin Ólason (St. Ottilien: EOS, 2011): 25–26; Cornelia Wunsch and Rachel Magdalene, “Freedom and Dependency: Neo-Babylonian Manumission Documents with Oblation and Service Obligation,” in *Extraction and Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper*, eds. Michael Kozuh et al., *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 68 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014): 337–46. For the ancient Near Eastern background of Solon’s *σεισάχθεια* (*seisáchtheia*, i.e., “shaking off of burdens”), see Josine Blok and Julia Krul, “Debt and Its Aftermath: The Near Eastern Background to Solon’s *Seisachtheia*,” *Hesperia* 86 (2017): 607–43. For ancient Greece and Rome see, e.g., Heinz Barta, *Homologie: Das Entstehen des modernen Vertrages im antiken Griechenland* (Vienna: Jan Sramek Verlag, 2021): 148–50, with the bibliography given there.

of a new reign, the new king legitimized himself by enacting so-called justice decrees (*mīšarum*-acts), by which the people of the land were released from corvée and their debts nullified. With these acts, the king tried to cope with the socio-economic imbalances that resulted from mass indebtedness and other difficulties which small Mesopotamian landowners perpetually encountered.¹¹ By way of example, let us look at three citations from different times and regions in ancient Near Eastern history:

Urukagina of Lagash (southern Babylonia) (ca. 2350 BC):

He cleared and cancelled obligations for those indentured families, citizens of Lagaš living as debtors because of grain taxes, barley payments, theft or murder.¹²

Ammiṣaduqa of Babylonia (ca. 1640 BC):

§ 20 If a citizen of Numhia, of Emutbal, of Idamaras, of Uruk, of Isin, of Kisurra, [or of Malgium] – an obligation requires him to give his [child], his wife, [or himself] for silver, to work off the debt or as a security deposit, because the king has established equity (*mīšaram*) for the land, (the obligation) is remitted; his release (*andurārsu*) is granted.¹³

Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria (745–726 BC):

A precious branch from Baltil (*pīr'i Baltil^{ki} šuquru*) is the king of Assyria ...
He shepherds nations, establishes liberation (*šākin andurāri māt Aššur*) in the land of Assyria.¹⁴

In addition to *andurāru* and *mīšarum*, there is another term in the Akkadian sources that is important for us to consider, namely, *kidinnūtu*:

Kiddinutu is the Akkadian word for the special rights of a temple city, derived from the *kiddinu*, a pole or stela placed at the gate of the city specifying the rights of the inhabitants. [. . .] The difference between an act of *misharum* or *andurarum* and the establishment of *kiddinutu* lies in this: an edict of *misharum* or *andurarum* annuls economic injustices that have already taken place and restores social justice and equity; the proclamation of *kiddinutu* for a city establishes protec-

¹¹ See Hans Neumann, "Recht im antiken Mesopotamien," in *Die Rechtskulturen der Antike: Vom Alten Orient bis zum Römischen Reich*, ed. Ulrich Manthe (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2003): 88–89.

¹² Snell, *Flight and Freedom*: 64.

¹³ Translation according to William Hallo, "The Edicts of Samsu-iluna and his Successors (2.134)," *COS II* (2003): 364. Cf. Fritz Kraus, *Königliche Verfügungen in altbabylonischer Zeit*, *Studia et Documenta* 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1984): 180–81. Cf. Hattusili I of Anatolia (ca. 1620 BC): 'I, the great King Tabarna, have taken the grinding stones from the hands of the female slaves and the work from the hands of the male slaves, and I freed them from contributions and corvée. I have loosened their belts and given them to the Sun-goddess of Arinna, my lady.' From Snell, *Flight and Freedom*: 67.

¹⁴ From Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995): 65–66. For more parallels in German translation, cf. Dietrich, "Die Frage nach persönlicher Freiheit im Alten Orient": 49–57; Eckart Otto, "Soziale Restitution und Vertragsrecht in Mesopotamien. *Mīšaru(m)*, (*an*)-*durāru(m)*, *kirenzi*, *parā tarnumar*, *š^emiṭṭa*, *d^rrôr* in Mesopotamien, Syrien, in der Hebräischen Bibel und die Frage des Rechtstransfers im Alten Orient," *RA* 92 (1998): 125–160.

tion for the citizens against socio-economic abuses henceforth. Thus, one is oriented to the past, the other to the future.¹⁵

Esarhaddon of Assyria (680–669 BC):

I reestablished liberation for the enslaved Babylonians, the people of the *kidinnu* who were liberated (^{tu}*šubarrû*) by order of the gods Anu and Enlil. Those who were sold and carried off into slavery and distributed among the masses, I gathered them and counted them among the Babylonians. I returned their captured property; I clothed the naked and sent them on the road of Babylon . . . the *kidinnu* right which was cancelled and stolen from them, I returned to its place, and I rewrote their tablet of rights (*tuppi zakûti*). I Esarhaddon . . . establish the *kidinnûtu* of Baltil and institute the *šubarrû* of Nippur, Babylon, Borsippa, and Sippar; I pay the damages due their residents, I gather the residents of Babylon who are dispersed, and settle them a restful settlement (*šubat nēhtî*).¹⁶

In addition to kings, private slave owners could also grant the release of slaves. Neo-Babylonian documents show that “freedom” still was not appreciated as a status on its own but as something attached to the state of nobility. Here, release documents called *tuppi mār banûti* (“tablet of free status”) granted the legal status of a *mār banûti* (“son of nobility”), nullifying the former slave’s debts and granting independence from the former master’s property rights.¹⁷

The aforementioned documents show that liberation is different from freedom or liberty in that it still does not imply a positive state or a reflective idea as such but a single selective process of negation. In the words of the British philosopher Isaiah Berlin, liberation is conceived of negatively as deliverance from a state of bondage; it is still a negative “freedom from”, not the positive idea of “freedom to”.¹⁸ It comes to the

¹⁵ John Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*, Vetus Testamentum Supplements 115 (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 27, with reference to Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 97–132 and 231–47. Cf. also CAD 8 s.v. *kidinnu* and *kidinnûtu*, as well as John Bergsma, “Release from Debt,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law*, ed. Brent Strawn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 205–13.

¹⁶ From Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 109. *šubarrû* is another term connotating “freedom from” (service obligations), cf. CAD s.v. *šubarrû*.

¹⁷ As Cornelia Wunsch and Rachel Magdalene have argued, the Neo-Babylonian manumission of slaves can be differentiated according to two steps. First, the slave’s manumission grants a legal free status of a *mār banûti*. Nevertheless, the manumitted slave has received “only” the legal status of a freedman equal to that of a freeborn (*mār banûti*) who still might be subject to the *patria potestas* of the household’s master – like every freeborn son or daughter living under the potestas of the household’s father. It is only with the second step, when “emancipation” as a further release from *patria potestas* is granted, that the freedman is no longer subject to any foreign potestas (Wunsch and Magdalene, “Freedom and Dependency”: 337–46).

¹⁸ For the distinction between “freedom from” (negative liberty) and “freedom to” (positive liberty) cf., e.g., Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Four Essays on Liberty*, ed. Isaiah Berlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969): 118–72. The “freedom to” is, in its positive cultural and socio-psychological sense over against “freedom from” in its cultural and socio-psychological escapist sense, also highlighted by Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Ishi Press, 2011). In Deuteronomy 20:5–7, a positive meaning of “freedom” may be present concerning the man who is expected to con-

fore mainly in special political situations, i.e., early in the reign of a new king, when politics intermittently restructures socio-economic realities. So how do we get from the single event of liberation to the idea of freedom?

3 Liberty and the Differentiation of Law

As I mentioned above, the beginning of scientific and abstract thinking starts (at the latest) with the invention of scripture for utilitarian economic reasons of the earliest temple and palace economies. Another important step, however, emerges with the differentiation of law in the Luhmannian sense (*Ausdifferenzierung des Rechts*), i.e., when law emerges as a field of its own with rules of its own, independent from the socio-economic sphere. As Niklas Luhmann asserts:

[The differentiation of law] requires a binary code that contains a positive value (justice) and a negative value (injustice), and that artificially excludes both contradictions (justice is injustice, injustice is justice) and other values (utility, political expediency, and so forth). This coding is of decisive significance for the differentiation of the legal system, as it provides the system with its own internally constituted form of contingency. Everything that enters the law's sphere of relevance can be either lawful or unlawful, and anything that does not fit into this code is of legal significance only if it is important as a preliminary question in decisions about justice and injustice.¹⁹

So, why do I quote this? The differentiation of law as a field of its own, with rules of its own, can be instantiated by looking at the principles of impartiality (Deuteronomy 16:19–20) and legal inquiry (Deuteronomy 13:15; 17:4; 22:20). In the biblical Book of Deuteronomy, both these principles are installed to abstract from socio-economic, political, cultural, or religious powers considered in preferential treatments. In contrast to preferential justice systems, impartiality and legal inquiry search for the truth only and whether a case is just or unjust.²⁰ In Deuteronomy 16:19–20, it is stated:

duct military duties: if he has just built a house, planted a vineyard or married, he is “free” to look after his house, his vineyard, or wife. See Ernst, “Frei, Freiwillig, Freilassen”: 26.

¹⁹ Niklas Luhmann, “Law as A Social System,” *Northwestern Law Review* 83 (1989): 140.

²⁰ “Truth” (*ʿmēt*) is highlighted in all of the three cases of Deut 13:15; 17:4; 22:20; see Jan Dietrich, “Grenzen ziehen, Begriffe bestimmen und kritische Fragen stellen: Zum Umgang mit Traditionen in späten alttestamentlichen Texten,” in *Heilige Schriften in der Kritik*, ed. Konrad Schmid, Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 68 (Leipzig: EVA, 2022): 219–36. In these cases, a “correspondence theory of truth” is applied, see Diethelm Michel, “Ämät: Untersuchung über ‘Wahrheit’ im Hebräischen,” *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 12 (1968): 30–57; Jan Dietrich, “Wahrheit und Trug,” in *Handbuch Alttestamentliche Anthropologie*, eds. Jan Dietrich et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024): 274–77. For the correspondence theory of truth, see, e.g., Karen Gloy, *Wahrheitstheorien: Eine Einführung* (Tübingen: Francke, 2004): 92–167; Richard Kirkham, *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995): 119–40.

You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (NRSV)

Impartiality installs justice as a category of its own, independent of economic, social, or cultural forms of capital (as understood by Pierre Bourdieu). For our purposes, the law of impartiality may serve as a prime example of the differentiation of law in the ancient world. The biblical Book of Deuteronomy enshrines the differentiation of law as a social system. This codification probably occurred in Jerusalem in the seventh century BC.²¹

Nevertheless, the differentiation of law as such started even earlier. Concerning the idea of freedom, my thesis is that the differentiation of law as a field of rules of its own gave rise to the (*legal*) *idea of liberation*, i.e., to liberation in the new form as a (legal) idea or concept. By way of example, let us begin in the eighteenth century BC with Hammurapi's law code. Here, the Babylonian king Hammurapi refers several times to the manumission of slaves (cf. CH §§ 117; 171; 280).²² Of particular importance, in § 117, we read:

If a man is gripped in poverty, and he has sold his wife, or his son, or his daughter for silver, or has put them into bound-service, they shall work in the house of their purchaser or of their bond-master for three years but in the fourth year their liberation (*andurāršunu*) shall be agreed.²³

In this case, independent from the precise debt to be paid, the debt slave can rely on a new rule: namely, that by the rule of law, every fourth year, liberation will come, independent from individual and selective manumissions of the slave owner or from individual and selective political decrees of kings. In the code of Hammurapi, therefore, legal certainty and predictability are connected to liberation (at least in principle, whether or not the regulation was enforced in real life). The decree thus raises the single selective act of manumission to the (legal) idea or concept of liberation, giving way to the idea of liberty. It is by legal certainty and predictability that the single events of liberation are transformed into the concept of liberty. In the Hebrew Bible, this transformation is taken up and connected with two additional features. First, the term *ḥāpšī* is used to designate the liberated status of the freed debt slave.

²¹ For perhaps contemporaneous wisdom texts cf. Amenemope XX 21–XXI 4; Proverbs 18:5; 24:23; 28:21; furthermore 6:35 and Job 13:6–10; 32:21; 34:19. For later developments, cf. Deuteronomy 1:17; 10:17 as well as Genesis 19:21; Leviticus 19:17; Malachi 2:9; cf. Siegfried Herrmann, "Weisheit im Bundesbuch. Eine Miszelle zu Ex 23,1–9," in *Alttestamentlicher Glaube und Biblische Theologie*, ed. Jutta Hausmann (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992): 56–58; Eckart Otto, *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994): 68.

²² See Erich Ebeling, "Freiheit, Freilassung," in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie (RLA)*, vol. 3, eds. Erich Ebeling, Ernst Friedrich Weidner, and Michael Peter Streck (Berlin: De Gruyter: 1971): 111.

²³ Transcription and translation according to Mervyn Richardson, *Hammurabi's Laws: Text, Translation and Glossary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000): 79.

Exodus 21:2:

When you buy a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh he shall go out a free person (Hebr. *hâpšî*), without debt. (NRSV)

Similar to the Akkadian terms mentioned above, the term *hâpšî* is often used to designate people who have been selectively exempt from taxes (1 Samuel 17:25) or when a person is selectively released from a special state of bondage (Isaiah 58:6; 61:1; Ezekiel 13:20). In the law text cited above, however, and independent from the question of whether or not such law texts were ever enforced in social life, the term *hâpšî*, translated by the Septuagint with the Greek word ἐλεύθερος (*eleútheros*; “free”) is now connected with a right. That right generated a permanent legal certainty that all debt slaves should be freed regularly after six years. No individual and selective will of a debt owner or king could infringe upon this regulation, and liberation is not dependent upon the will of the king or debt owner. Instead, the status of “freedman” (*hâpšî*) is granted with legal certainty on a regular basis, elevating the single event of liberation to a new level, i.e., liberation as liberty, as a (legal) idea and as a reliable, regularly occurring legal concept.²⁴

Additionally, in biblical law, the juridical idea of liberty is closely connected to the Exodus narrative. We cannot delve into questions of historicity in this brief article, but concerning cultural memory, the Exodus narrative is *the* core myth of ancient Judaism. The Exodus grants collective identity to the early Jews through a story that builds upon the idea of liberation. In this story, the kingly figure, who grants liberation, is replaced by God, who, when electing Israel and starting his new reign as *the God* of the Israelites, liberates them from the hands of Pharaoh. This negative form of “liberation from” is supplemented by a positive “freedom to” when God, during the Israelites’ wanderings through the desert (a status of “freedom from”, in which the people did not know what to do with their liberty), implements new rules at mount Sinai that regulate the organization of the new society (“freedom to”). In contrast to the single *mīšarum*-acts of Mesopotamian (and Egyptian!) kings, the Exodus story is retold again and again as part of the collective memory of all Israel, as if all later generations are and have been liberated together with the first-generation:

Deuteronomy 6:20–21:

When your children ask you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your children, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.’ (NRSV)

²⁴ Metaphorically, the permanence of the free status is also highlighted in Job 3:19 concerning death: ‘The small and the great are there, and the slaves are free from their masters.’ (NRSV) Cf. also Job 39:5–6 about the “freedom” of the wild ass.

So, here as in the previous citations, the single event of liberation has developed, as part of trans-generational memory, into the reliable and permanent idea of liberty. Narrated in this form, the status of a freedman is granted *permanently* to an entire nation. The linkage between the Exodus story and the law codes is itself an innovation. We do not find that the legal idea or concept of liberty is explicitly supported by such a motif clause elsewhere in the ancient Near East. This is a move that starts with the Book of Deuteronomy and may perhaps be dated to the seventh century BC, along with the idea of impartiality. The law of liberation is now justified by the Exodus motif:

Deuteronomy 15:12–15:

If a member of your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and works for you six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free (*hâpsî*). And when you send a male slave out from you a free person (*hâpsî*), you shall not send him out empty-handed. Provide liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press, thus giving to him some of the bounty with which the LORD your God has blessed you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; *for this reason* I lay this command upon you today. (NRSV)

The law of liberation is thus explicitly supported by the story of Israel's liberation from Egypt, connecting both the legal, reliable, regular concept of liberation with the trans-generational narration of liberation from Egypt. With these developments, important steps toward the idea of freedom were taken. Furthermore, the deep sympathy for debt slaves expressed here is something we do not find in ancient Greek sources.²⁵

4 Freedom and the Image of God

From a dependency perspective, some exegetes problematize the whole idea of Israel's liberation from Egypt. For instance, some Deuteronomistic texts highlight that the Israelites were freed from service to Pharaoh so that they could conduct service for God. Whether referring to service rendered to Pharaoh or to God, the texts use the verb "to serve" (Hebrew *'awad*). Additionally, economic (and juridical) terms are used to describe the liberation from Egypt by God as an act of economic (and juridical) release, thus making the Israelites dependent on God as if they were merely released

²⁵ 'This passage shows clearly and explicitly that there were Israelite thinkers who actually empathized with slaves and valued even the slaves' freedom; this empathy is more explicit than anything adduced from Classical Greek literature.' (Snell, *Flight and Freedom*: 130).

from slavery to Pharaoh into life as slavish property in service to God.²⁶ For example, the historical sociologist Orlando Patterson states:

Hebrew 'redemption' is not a progress from domination by a tyrant or occupation by an alien power to independence and freedom, but rather an escape from slavery to Pharaoh to service (= slavery) to God.²⁷

Frankly, it might not be that simple. Already in the ancient Near East, the kings could grant freedom from forced labour by dedicating the people to the service of a God, i.e., a temple economy (remember Esarhaddon's *kidinnūtu*-edict referenced above). Apparently, service to a god is supposed to be less harsh than service to a debt owner:

Enmetena from Lagash (ca. 2450 BC):

He established amargi ('liberation') for Lagash. To the mother he restored her children, and to the children he restored their mother. He instituted 'liberation' for the interest on barley . . . He similarly instituted 'liberation' for the people of Uruk, Larsa and Patibira. He restored them to the goddess Inanna of Uruk, he restored (Larsa) to the god Utu of Larsa, he restored (Patibira) to Lugalemush of Emush.²⁸

Hattusili I of Anatolia (ca. 1620 BC):

I, the great King Tabarna, have taken the grinding stones from the hands of the female slaves and the work from the hands of the male slaves, and I freed them from contributions and corvée. I have loosened their belts and given them to the Sun-goddess of Arinna, my lady.²⁹

Kurigalzu from Babylon (ca. 1390 BC):

(The king) who established freedom for the people of Babylon, freed her people from forced labor (*ilku*) for the sake of the god Marduk, who loves his dynasty.³⁰

Cruciform Monument (Neo-Babylonian, but ascribed to Manishtishu from Akkad, ca. twenty-third cent. BC):

²⁶ See., e.g., Orlando Patterson, *Freedom: Freedom in the Making of the Western World*, vol. 1 (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Irmtraud Fischer, "Was kostet der Exodus? Monetäre Metaphern für die zentrale Rettungserfahrung Israels in einer Welt der Sklaverei," *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 21 (2006): 25–44. In the Mesopotamian Atrahasis-myth, the minor gods are granted liberation (*andurāru* and *šubarrū*) from labour. Instead, humankind is created to work for the gods and to serve the gods; see, e.g., Dietrich, "Die Frage nach persönlicher Freiheit im Alten Orient": *Freiheit*: 50–51 and 54–55.

²⁷ Patterson, *Freedom*: 33.

²⁸ Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 78.

²⁹ Snell, *Flight and Freedom*: 67.

³⁰ Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 80, after Alfred Boissier, "Document Cassite," *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 29 (1932): 93–104, 96, lines 13–14; Rudolf Kraus, "Ein mittelbabylonischer Rechtsterminus," in *Symbolae ivridicae et historicae Martino David dedicatae*, vol. 2, eds. Johan Ankmum, Robert Feenstra, and Wilhelmus Leemans (Leiden: Brill, 1968): 38–39.

He (the god) opened up for me the path of *mišarum* . . . 38 cities were liberated for Shamash (*ana Šamaš lū uššur*), indeed, I sought no forced labor (*ilku*) for them, I drafted them not into military service. They shall serve in the Ebabar (Shamash) temple alone.³¹

Cf. for Egypt Pepi II of Egypt (*ca.* 2200 BC):

They shall not be taken for labor other than their service of the god Min of Koptos.³²

There are even more reasons to disagree with Patterson’s thesis, at least when it comes to the Priestly writings.³³ According to Leviticus 25, one is not even allowed to treat the Hebrew debt slave as a slave:

Leviticus 25:39–43:

If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves (*‘awad* + *‘wodat ‘æwæd*). They shall remain with you as hired or bound laborers. They shall serve (*‘awad*) with you until the year of the jubilee. Then they and their children with them shall be free from your authority; they shall go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property. For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold. You shall not rule over them with harshness, but shall fear your God.³⁴ (NRSV)

When referring to the slave’s new relationship with God, other verbs are also used alongside “to serve” (Hebrew *‘awad*). Specifically, the verb *ḥāgag* (“to feast”) or *śāmaḥ* (“to rejoice”). Furthermore, the new status acquired when being freed from Egypt is described as one of straightening the back, i.e., unbending the low-down backs of the Israelites and lifting the heavy weights from their shoulders to let them walk erect as living statues of God:

31 Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 80, after Edmond Sollberger, “The Cruciform Monument,” *Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux* 20 (1967–1968): 51–70. Cf. Farouk Al-Rawi and Andrew George, “Tablets from the Sippar Library III. Two Royal Counterfeits,” *Iraq* 56 (1994): 135–48.

32 Weinfeld, *Social Justice*: 80, after Hans Goedicke, *Königliche Dokumente aus dem alten Reich* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967): 117–18.

33 As for the Deuteronomistic writings, Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985): 74 may be cited: “The difference is this: slavery is begun and sustained by coercion, while service is begun and sustained by covenant.”

34 Cf. Leviticus 25:53; Jeremiah 34:9; Nehemiah 5:5, and to this Wolfgang Oswald, “Sklaven und Freie,” in *Handbuch Alttestamentliche Anthropologie*, eds. Jan Dietrich et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024): 350–53. In addition, the biblical law not to deliver fugitive slaves (Deuteronomy 23:16–17 = English Deuteronomy 23:15–16; cf. 24:7) totally rejects the ancient Near Eastern traditions with its contracts (e.g., RS 17.79+374,98), edicts and laws (e.g., CH §15–20; HL § 22–24; 173b) about the required deliverance of fugitives; see, e.g., Snell, *Flight and Freedom*: 74–92, 129–30.

Exodus 5:1:

Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival (*hāgag*) to me in the wilderness.” (NRSV)

Leviticus 23:40:

On the first day (of booths, J.D.) you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice (*sāmah*) before the LORD your God for seven days. (NRSV)

Leviticus 26:13:

I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be their slaves no more; I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect (*qôm^emîyût*). (NRSV)

As a further testament to the distinctions between the Israelite’s relationship with Pharaoh and that to God, already in Deuteronomy, it is stated many times that the Israelites shall rejoice when feasting before God (Deuteronomy 12:7. 12. 18; 14:26; 16:11. 14; 26:11; 27:7). To put it differently, one would not have a party with Pharaoh, but one might have a party with and rejoice before God. Furthermore, in Leviticus 26:13, a late priestly text, the term *qôm^emîyût* was invented to form a new abstract term to describe the permanent status of the freed Israelites. This reminds one of the priestly creation story where humankind is created in God’s image:

Genesis 1:26:

Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ (NRSV)

Humankind is created in the image (*ṣælæm*) and likeness (*d^emût*) of God.³⁵ These two terms are also attested, in their ancient Aramaic form, on the statue of King Hadad-Yis^{ci} found at Tell Fekherye in Northern Syria. The inscription describes the statue as the king’s image, intended to be permanently present in the temple of the storm God Hadad.³⁶ Additionally, in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, the king is often described as an image of the gods and a representative / substitute ruler on earth.³⁷ Therefore,

35 See for the following Jan Dietrich, “Anthropologies of the Hebrew Bible,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Anthropology and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Emanuel Pfoh (London: Bloomsbury, 2023): 245–62.

36 COS 2.34; KAI 309; cf. Ali Abou-Assaf, Pierre Bordreuil and Alan Millard, *La statue de Tell Fekherye et son inscription bilingue assyro-araméenne*, Recherche sur les Civilisations: Etudes Assyriologiques 10 (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1982).

37 For Egypt, see Boyo Ockinga, *Die Gottebenbildlichkeit im Alten Ägypten und im Alten Testament*, Ägypten und Altes Testament 7 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1984); for Mesopotamia, see, e.g., Stefan Maul, “Der assyrische König – Hüter der Weltordnung,” in *Gerechtigkeit: Richten und Retten in der*

in Genesis 1:26–28, humankind is like an ancient Near Eastern king, taking the form of a living statue of God and as God’s representative on earth, who rules over all the animals across the three dominions of the world (sea, air, and land).³⁸ In contrast to the Mesopotamian creation story referenced above, here, humankind is not set apart from the king to act in slavish service to the gods. Humans are created as god-like representatives on Earth.

As Leviticus 26:1 highlights the statue of a god has to be “erected” (*qûm* Hifil). When Leviticus 26:13 refers to the Israelites as freed and erect people, the abstract term *qôm’ mîyût* clearly refers back to the prohibition of erecting cult statues. Unlike those statues, the freed nation of Israel walks erect as a god-like image. No slavish status can be found here, and the idea of liberty or freedom comes to the fore, not as an abstract term (like Greek ἐλευθερία), but the idea of God is being used (as a tool, so to speak) (1) to support the legal concept of liberation (Deuteronomy 15), (2) to tell a story, trans-generationally, of permanent liberation from political powers, i.e., Pharaoh (Exodus-story), and (3) to craft a strong image of freedom by using the “metaphor” of “walking erect” as an “image of God” (Leviticus 26).

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³⁸ See Bernd Janowski, *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Grundfragen – Kontexte – Themenfelder* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019): 407–15.

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Ulrich Berges

The Semantics of Dependency in the Book of Isaiah and Beyond

1 Introduction

The main title of the present volume, ‘Control, Coercion, and Constraint’, is supplemented by the subtitle ‘the Role of Religion in Overcoming and Creating Structures of Dependency’. Furthermore, the invitation for this project stated:

Religious narratives have served to justify the subjugation of individuals and entire peoples. Moreover, throughout history, religious institutions have often reflected the social hierarchies and inequalities of the societies around them – creating similarly rigid systems of dependency within their own structures. On the other hand, the realization of freedom and equality is often postponed to a distant future, to a later life, or even to the hereafter.¹

The ambiguity of the relationship between dependency and religion is almost palpable. On the one hand, religious systems of all stripes are forming strong dependencies through their hierarchies; on the other hand, the same systems are often accompanied by promises of liberty and liberation. Thus, the overcoming and creation of asymmetrical dependencies are two sides of the same coin. This fact is particularly relevant in the context of the Old Testament (OT), the founding document of Judaism and Christianity. Recognition of the ambiguity generated by religion’s simultaneous capacity to enshrine asymmetrical dependencies and promise liberation predates the advent of modern biblical scholarship and historical-critical methodologies. The vocabulary of the Old Testament itself reveals a certain consciousness of this ambivalence, particularly concerning the lexeme עבד (*‘ābad*).

2 The Semantics of עבד in the Hebrew Bible

עבד (*‘ābad*) is the lexeme that indicates the epitome of strong asymmetrical dependency in biblical Hebrew.² It covers a wide range of real dependencies. At the same

¹ Author’s English translation from the German original.

² Cf. Helmer Ringgren, Horacio Simian-Yofre and Udo Rüterswörden, “עבד / עבד / עבדה,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 10, eds. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Heinz-Josef Fabry, and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000): 376–405; Claus Westermann, “עבד,” in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 2, eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1976): 182–200; Eugene Carpenter, “עבד,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 3, ed. Willem VanGemeren

time, its use in the Old Testament reveals a significant development in the metaphorical-theological conception of the term.³

The root is known in many Semitic languages, including Ugaritic, Arabic, Ethiopian, Aramaic, Syriac, and Phoenician. *ʾābad* can refer to any form of work or labour. In the standard stem (Qal) in Biblical Hebrew, the verb means ‘to work, to perform, to serve, [or] to worship’. In the causative stem (Hiphil), it means ‘to let work, to make someone serve, [or] to enslave’.⁴

The Hebrew Bible employs a variety of derivatives of the root, all of which have something to do with work or labour. The activities and actors referenced by the derivatives operate on a more or less pronounced gradient of dependence מַעֲבָד: deed, act; עֲבָד: servant, subordinate, slave; עֲבָדָה: service, work, labour, worship; עֲבָדָה: servants, workforce (only in Genesis 26:14; Job 1:3); עֲבָדוּת: servitude; bondage (only in Ezra 9:8–9, 17). The root also appears within the context of personal names. In such instances, it often designates a subordination, e.g., *Ebed-melech* (עֲבָד־מֶלֶךְ) in Jeremiah 38:7–9, *Abed-Nego* (אֲבֵד נְגוּא) (Daniel 3:29), and *Abdeel* (עֲבָד־אֵל) (Jeremiah 36:26). The noun עֲבָד (‘*æbħæd*’) is of particular importance, since it ranges from the designation of a male slave (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 23:16) to that of a minister who stands in the service of his king (e.g., 2 Kings 5:6; 22:12; 2 Chronicles 34:20). The connecting element is always the dependent position of the ‘*æbħæd*’ in relation to its master, be it an owner, a king, or even YHWH himself.

In some 300 cases, there is a non-metaphorical usage of the verb with the specifications: “to work / to till the ground” (e.g., Genesis 2:5; 4:12; Exodus 20:9; Ecclesiastes 5:12); “to labour for somebody else” (e.g., Genesis 29:15–17; Jeremiah 22:13); “to be a political vassal” (e.g., Genesis 15:14; Exodus 1:13; 6:5; 2 Kings 17:3; 18:7); “to serve in forced labour / corvée” (e.g., Genesis 49:15; Joshua 16:10; 1 Kings 9:21); “to serve in debt-slavery” (e.g., Exodus 21:2, 5–7; Leviticus 25:39–40, 46; Deuteronomy 15:12, 18; 23:15). In the metaphorical use of the verb the following categories play a role: “to be

(Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997): 304–9; Friedrich Vinzenz Reiterer, “Dienst,” in *Wörterbuch alttestamentlicher Motive*, eds. Michael Fieger, Jutta Krispenz, and Jörg Lanckau (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2013): 101–6; Angelika Berlejung and Annette Merz, “Sklave / Sklavin,” in *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe zum Alten und Neuen Testament*, eds. Angelika Berlejung and Christian Frevel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006): 371–74.

³ See especially the various publications of Edward J. Bridge, “The Use of Slave Terms in Deference and in Relation to God in the Hebrew Bible” (PhD diss., Macquarie University Sydney, 2010); Edward J. Bridge, “Loyalty, Dependency and Status with YHWH: The Use of *bd* in the Psalms,” *Vetus Testamentum* 59, no. 3 (2009): 360–78; Edward J. Bridge, “The Use of עֲבָד in Prophetic Literature,” *Australian Biblical Review* 60 (2012): 32–48; Edward J. Bridge, “Female Slave vs Female Slave. אִמָּה and אִמָּהָ in the HB,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 12 (2012): 1–21; Edward J. Bridge, “Enslaved to an Artifice: A Study into the Truth behind the Title of Deference, ‘Slave / Servant’, as used in the Ancient Near East before the Time of Alexander the Great,” *Humanity* 2 (2008): 1–11; Edward J. Bridge, “The Metaphoric Use of Slave Terms in the Hebrew Bible,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 23 (2013): 13–28.

⁴ Niphal, Pual, Hophal do not add anything new to the meaning of the root.

in an inferior status” (Genesis 25:23; the older son will serve the younger); “to serve in order to strengthen a mutual relationship” (1 Kings 12:7); “to serve YHWH / other deities” (e.g., Exodus 23:33; Numbers 8:25; 16:9; Deuteronomy 4:19; Isaiah 19:21; 43:23–24 [YHWH is enslaved / belaboured by the sins of his people]).⁵

The metaphorical use of the noun *‘əḇæḏ* moves increasingly away from the original meaning of the lexeme, i.e., someone who works in a strongly subordinate fashion for somebody else. The noun is frequently used as an honorary title, applying, among other things, to high-ranking servants of a king (2 Kings 22:12). It is also used by vassal kings (2 Kings 17:3) when addressing the overlords to whom they are subservient (2 Kings 16:7). Furthermore, it is not difficult to see how the terminology could be used metaphorically to describe not only the asymmetrical relationships between human actors, but to delineate that of humans with YHWH, the divine master. For example, Abraham addresses God thus: ‘My Lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant’ (Genesis 18:3; cf. Exodus 32:13). Nearly all religious heroes of Ancient Israel, like the patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, and other prophets, Job, etc. receive the honorary title *‘əḇæḏ*.⁶ The same is true for women like Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel; she describes herself as God’s handmaid (הַעֲבָדָה; 1 Samuel 1:11; for שֶׁפְּתָהּ, see Joel 3:2; Psalms 123:2).⁷ Some foreign kings like the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6; 43:10) and the Persian Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1) are called YHWH’s *‘əḇæḏ* too because they depend on YHWH’s world-wide rule.

On the metaphorical level, one encounters the noun עֲבָדָה which indicates the service of God in the cult (e.g., Exodus 12:25; 30:16; Numbers 4:47). In the Book of Psalms, the petitioner designates himself often as *‘əḇæḏ* (especially in Psalms 119 [14 times]; cf. Psalms 25, 27, 69, 109). The last usage occurs in Psalms 143:12: ‘In your steadfast love cut off my enemies, and destroy all my adversaries, for I am your servant’ (tr. NRSV). Remarkably, the notion that a person has been born into slavery is used metaphorically in the religious realm. For example: ‘Turn to me and be gracious to me;

5 Bridge, “Use of Slave Terms”: 58–63.

6 Abraham (Genesis 26:24; Psalms 105:6, 42); Isaac (Genesis 24:14; 1 Chronicles 16:13); Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Exodus 32:13; Deuteronomy 9:27); Moses (some 40 times: Exodus 14:31; Numbers 12:7; Joshua 1:2, 7, 13, 15 etc.); Joshua (Joshua 24:29); David (1 Samuel 23:10; 25:39; Psalms 18:1; 36:1 etc.); the prophets (2 Kings 9:7; 17:3; Jeremiah 7:25; 26:5; Ezekiel 38:17; Amos 3:7; Daniel 9:11); Job (Job 1:8; 2:3; 42:7–8; only in the prologue and the epilogue).

7 For the differences between the usages, see *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. “שֶׁפְּתָהּ”: “שֶׁפְּתָהּ” is a girl who is not free but is as yet untouched, whose duty was primarily to serve the woman of the house [. . .] הַעֲבָדָה is a woman who is not free, and who could be a man’s secondary wife, as well as the wife of man who like her is bound in service”; see the critique of Bridge, “Female Slave”: 21: ‘Since שֶׁפְּתָהּ is mostly used for the patriarchs’ slave wives in Genesis, the proposal that שֶׁפְּתָהּ refers to female slaves of the lowest status and הַעֲבָדָה to female slaves in marriage contexts also cannot be sustained.’

give your strength to your male servant; save the child of your serving girl' (Psalms 86:16 (tr. NRSV); cf. 116:16).⁸

A unique feature occurs in the so-called Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40–54; 55), where Israel / Jacob is depicted as the faithful and obedient *'æbæd* of God. In the third part of the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 54; 55–66), the term is used only in the plural (עֲבָדִים), designating the faithful remnant of post-exilic Israel (Isaiah 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8–9, 13–15; 66:14), in contrast to the unfaithful apostate cohort.⁹

Some conclusions may be drawn from this brief overview of the usage of the lexeme עֲבָד in the OT. The increasingly metaphorical use of this word stems from the reality of strong asymmetrical dependency in Biblical Israel: '[. . .] the metaphorical use of slave terms in the Hebrew Bible, whether for deference, courtiers, kings, prophets and so on, is lexicalized language drawn from the institution of slavery.'¹⁰ The term "lexicalized" refers to the fact that '[. . .] biblical writers and ancient Israelites would not have thought consciously of any associations of slavery that could be evoked in any particular use of the terms' (e.g., the self-designation of the pious petitioner as *'æbæd*).¹¹

The unconscious use of slave / servant terminology on the part of the biblical authors and their ancient and modern readers carries the risk that the root עֲבָד is perceived only as a general marker of relationship, without considering the inherent asymmetry of the two parties involved. It has rightly been pointed out that the term is a 'dynamic concept of relations',¹² but it should be added that it always carries an asymmetrical gradient, which is to be expected in thoroughly hierarchical societies like those of the Ancient Near East, including Biblical Israel. In such societies, power relations are always unequal, a fact that is reflected in the use of slave-master terminology in the Old Testament.

According to Edward Bridge, the associations in the metaphorical use differ according to genre and context: when slave terminology is used in deference among humans, the emphasis lies upon the inferior status of the one who designates himself as *'æbæd*; when used in relationship with God as אֲדֹנָי / κύριος "Lord" the associations are mainly loyalty and possession.¹³ In contrast to the use among humans where the self-designation "your *'æbæd*" can be employed deceptively (e.g., 2 Samuel 13:14; 14:22; 15:8), in deference to God, such misuse is impossible. As an *'æbæd* of God, one is under the protection of the

⁸ Something similar occurs with the noun תּוֹשָׁב "resident alien / sojourner": 'Hear my prayer, YHWH, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! For I am a stranger with you, a sojourner, like all my fathers' (Psalms 39:13 [tr. NRSV]).

⁹ See Ulrich Berges, "The Servant(s) in Isaiah," in *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 318–33.

¹⁰ Bridge, "Use of Slave Terms": 294.

¹¹ Bridge, "Use of Slave Terms": 294.

¹² Ingrid Riesener, *Der Stamm 'bd im Alten Testament. Eine Wortuntersuchung unter Berücksichtigung neuerer sprachwissenschaftlicher Methoden*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 149 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1978): 268: "dynamischer Relationsbegriff".

¹³ Bridge, "Use of Slave Terms": 294–96.

supreme Lord, to whom one owes unreserved loyalty.¹⁴ A release out of this dependency is unthinkable unless one dies under the divine wrath and enters the realm of the nether-world (cf. Psalms 88:6).

3 The Semantic of Slavery and Servitude in the Book of Isaiah

That the nouns *‘əḇæḏ* and *‘bāḏim* play an important role in Isaiah 40–54 and Isaiah 55–66, respectively, is an undisputed fact in the exegesis of this major prophetic book. Much ink has been spilt on explorations of the individual and / or collective identity of the *‘əḇæḏ*. The relationship between the passages in which Israel / Jacob is referenced through the use of this term (Isaiah 41:8–9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1–2, 21; 45:4; 48:20) and those texts that lack such explicit identification (in the so-called servant songs: Isaiah 41:1–3; 49:1–3; 50:4–6; 52:13–15) is best explained by the literary creativity of the prophetic authors in exilic and post-exilic times: the nameless servant is first and foremost a literary fiction, a theological idea that is historically concretized in those deported to Babel who, after the Persian king Cyrus took power, returned to the heavily destroyed Jerusalem and Juda. Only while the faithful were returning home did the blind and deaf servant become a witness of divine liberation for Israel and the nations.¹⁵ Once they completed their journey, it was the *‘bāḏim* who strove to open the YHWH-religion to worshippers from the nations, regardless of ethnic origin, but with a strong focus on ethical behaviour (cf. Isaiah 56:1–3). This program led to a conflict between the *‘bāḏim* and the priestly establishment at the Jerusalem Temple. Indeed, amid the dispute, the *‘bāḏim* were almost “excommunicated” (Isaiah 65:1–3).

Nevertheless, these historical and theological details are not the subject of the following pages. Instead, the following sections focus on the question, which has so far been addressed only preliminarily, i.e., what associations are to be reckoned with in the *‘əḇæḏ-‘bāḏim* terminology in Isaiah 40–66? According to Edward Bridge, the possible associations attached to the slavery terminology in the Old Testament are “possession”, “inferior status”, “work, debt / poverty”, “oppression”, “propensity to run away”, and as a derived connotation “loyalty”.¹⁶ The question arises: how many of these associ-

¹⁴ Bridge, “Use of Slave Terms”: 295: ‘Status due to association with power maps to a recognition even in the ancient world that a slave carries his master’s authority when on his master’s business.’

¹⁵ Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40–48*, 2nd ed., Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament 36 (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2020): 60–62: That Jacob / Israel is the *‘əḇæḏ* of YHWH is seldom affirmed outside the Isaianic chapters, i.e., in 1 Kings 8:32, 36; 2 Chronicles 6:23, 27; Jeremiah 30:10; 46:27–28; Nehemiah 1:6, 10. These references are all of post-exilic origin.

¹⁶ Bridge, “The Use of עבד”: 33: ‘The aim of my study is to determine possible associations, or connotations, from the biblical practice of slavery evoked by the use of עבד to refer to people in relation to God.’

ations are evoked by the terms *‘əbæd* and *“bādīm* in the second half of the Book of Isaiah? This question is anything but trivial since the result influences the translations of the terms in their literary contexts.

The question is also interesting from a literary-historical perspective. In the pre-exilic prophets, the term *‘əbæd* is not used in a religious context of deference. The word is only employed by the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic authors at the end of the eighth and in the seventh century BCE to contrast Assyrian hegemony with the relationship between YHWH and his dependents.¹⁷ Something analogous happens to *“bōdāh* in the priestly writings and the Chronicles since, in pre-exilic times, “work / labour” did not mean the cultic service to God.¹⁸ Also striking is the fact that Levites and priests are never called *“bādīm*, nor do they refer to themselves thus, which contrasts with descriptions of pious lay people (?) in the Book of Isaiah. That YHWH is the owner of his people, over whom he placed Moses as the supreme *‘əbæd* (slave / servant) over all his household, is made clear in Numbers 12:7.¹⁹ Only with Moses does God, who spoke to the prophets through visions, speak face-to-face, e.g., ‘not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house’ (tr. NRSV).²⁰

Before we turn to the individual passages in Isaiah 40–66, it should be emphasized once again that the *‘əbæd* title for Jacob / Israel comes from the exilic and post-exilic periods. In the exile (587–539 BCE) and its aftermath, this designation includes the hope that YHWH will not let his people, i.e., his property, be lost: ‘The demoralized nation in exile is contrasted with God’s intense concern for them’ (e.g., Isaiah 42:18–43:7; 45:9–14; 46:8–13; Jeremiah 30:10).²¹

A text like Isaiah 14:2 shows how, in retrospect, the Babylonian captivity was interpreted as slavery and the end of exile as a total change of fate: ‘And the nations will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess the nations as male and female slaves in YHWH’s land; they will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them’ (tr. NRSV).²²

In Isaiah 20:3, the prophet is referred to in a word of God as עֶבֶדִי (“my *‘əbæd*”), which is one of the honorary titles for the true prophets of YHWH. On the one hand, it refers to God’s authoritative commission by which the prophet is enslaved to his duty,

17 Cf. Riesener, *‘bd im Alten Testament*: 270.

18 Cf. Riesener, *‘bd im Alten Testament*: 271.

19 Martin Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose. Numeri*, 4th ed., *Das Alte Testament Deutsch* 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982): 85: That God speaks with Moses from face to face is justified by his position ‘[. . .], die vergleichsweise bezeichnet wird als die Stellung des obersten Sklaven, der zugleich der Vertraute seines Herrn und dem das ganze “Hauswesen” seines Herrn anvertraut ist.’

20 Moses as the *‘əbæd* of God in the prophets and psalms only in Isaiah 63:11; Malachi 3:22; Psalms 105:26; Daniel 9:11.

21 Bridge, “The Use of עֶבֶד”: 36.

22 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, *The Anchor Bible* 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000): 282: ‘[. . .] once they return foreigners will serve them as slaves or at least as *Gastarbeiter* (45:14; 49:7; 60:10–16; 61:5–7) [. . .].’

and on the other, to his total dependence on divine supremacy. It is probably not by coincidence that the title applies here and only here to the prophet Isaiah when he is forced by God to walk naked through Jerusalem for three years as a warning to the city's inhabitants and its leadership not to join the Philistine uprisings against Assur in the years 714–711 BCE. The term's association is broader than just a reference to Isaiah's prophetic action. It also invokes the cruel fate experienced by war captives. In Mesopotamia, armed conflict was the primary contributing factor to enslavement. The Old Testament itself evidences the reality of enslavement as a weapon or consequence of war.²³ For example, 1 Samuel 4:9 declares: 'Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, in order not to become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight.'²⁴

The ubiquity of slavery in the Ancient Near East is difficult for modern readers to grasp. This hermeneutical blind spot influences modern translations of biblical passages, which were shaped by the asymmetrical dependencies of that distant period and cultural context(s). It is thus important to recognize that strong asymmetrical dependencies fundamentally shaped the lives and worldviews of those who wrote, redacted, and read Old Testament texts. Such a realisation helps modern readers to grasp why Isaiah 24:2, for example, depicts the destruction of the whole world order, which affects all social status groups, including slaves and their owners. The pericope also makes it clear that, in addition to speaking of male slaves, references to female slaves (as maids) also abound: 'And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress, as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor' (tr. NRSV).²⁵ The reluctance to use the term slave and instead to opt for words like "servant" in modern translations must be examined against the background of the *de facto* slavery in Israel and its environment. Though "servant" might be an applicable English translation of the Hebrew terminologies

23 Helmer Ringgren, "עבד," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 5, eds. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986): 996: 'Die Sklaven im alten Mesopotamien (sumer. *ùr*, akk. *wardum/ardu*, nbabyl. meist *qallu*) waren zunächst Kriegsgefangene, die für schwere öffentliche Arbeiten eingesetzt wurden'; Ignace Jay Gelb, "Prisoners of War in Early Mesopotamia," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 32, no. 1–2 (1973): 95: 'Immediately upon their capture, POWs are slave property of the crown / state. As such, they are abused and exploited in the extreme. They may be worked to death on monumental projects of the crown.'

24 For female slaves, Nahum 2:7: 'It is decreed that the city be exiled, its slave women led away, moaning like doves and beating their breasts' (NRSV). See also Deuteronomy 20:13–14.; Judges 5:30; Judith 16:4; cf. Dominik Markl, "Women in War in the Ancient Near East and the War Captive Wife in Deuteronomy," in *Sexualität und Sklaverei*, eds. Irmtraud Fischer and Daniela Feichtinger, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 456 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2018): 203–23.

25 Willem André Maria Beuken, *Jesaja 13–27*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament 35 (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2007): 315: 'wie dem Sklaven, so seinem Herrn; wie der Magd, so ihrer Gebieterin'; Otto Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja. Kapitel 13–39*, 3rd ed., *Das Alte Testament Deutsch* 18 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983): 145–46: 'wie dem Sklaven so seinem Herrn, wie der Magd so ihrer Dame'; cf. Lutherbibel 2017, Elberfelder Bibel, Neue evangelistische Übersetzung: "Knecht / Magd"; differently Zürcher Bibel: "Sklave / Sklavin".

in some pericopes, such a lexical softening should not be undertaken without careful consideration of the asymmetrical dependencies that dominated Ancient Near Eastern societies, including biblical Israel. Whether and to what extent this caution applies to the term *‘əḫæḏ* and the plural *‘āḫādim* in Isa 40–66 is the subject of the next section.

3.1 The *‘əḫæḏ* in Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40–54)

In several places throughout Isaiah 40–49 Israel / Jacob, i.e., the exiled people, is addressed by YHWH as עֶבְדִי (“my *‘əḫæḏ*”) whom he has “chosen” (בָּחַר), “called” (קָרָא), and “formed” (יָצַר) (cf. 41:8–9. 43:10. 44:1–2). This *‘əḫæḏ*, who lived in forced labour in Mesopotamia until the Persians set him free, belongs to YHWH alone. The connotation of the term in question is one of possession. It also indicates that the institution of slavery extends into biblical conceptions of the relationship between human and divine actors. However, the difference between human-to-human slavery and human-to-YHWH slavery cannot be overlooked. Dependence on YHWH serves to protect his *‘əḫæḏ* from enslavement to another human so long as the slave professes allegiance to his master and puts himself at the master’s service.²⁶

According to Claus Westermann, the primary association of the word is not that of being a subordinate but one of belonging to the master. He also states that the religious use is not to be derived from the profane but that both are equally original.²⁷ That said, Westermann underestimates the importance of the social institution of slavery for the metaphorical use of the term. The total dependence of the slave on his master is striking, especially when used in a religious context, even if the assumption of a dependency relation does not work to the detriment of the subordinate.²⁸

The designation of the subordinate as *‘əḫæḏ* undoubtedly belongs to the ancient royal ideology, which is also reflected in the image of King David (cf. 1 Kings 11:13, 34).²⁹ However, the connotation in Isaiah 40–54 is not only one of royal ideology. It also concerns the commissioning of the *‘əḫæḏ*, his work, and the task assigned to him by YHWH. The chosen *‘əḫæḏ* is appointed as a “messenger” (Isaiah 42:19), as a “witness” to the superiority and exclusivity of the God of Israel (Isaiah 43:10): ‘Ultimately, a messenger does work for the sender, thus the metaphoric use of עֶבֶד for Israel as

26 Bridge, “The Use of עֶבֶד”: 37.

27 Claus Westermann, “עֶבְדִי”: 191.

28 Claus Westermann, “עֶבְדִי”: 191: ‘Es kann niemals Knechtschaft im negativen Sinn bedeuten.’; see the severe critique of Hector Avalos, *Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Ethics of Biblical Scholarship*, *The Bible in the Modern World* 38 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013): 62–65: Regarding this mitigating interpretation of the lexeme עֶבֶד in Old Testament Scholarship; 71–72: According to him even circumcision has its roots in the institution of slavery.

29 Matthias Köckert, “Die Erwählung Israels und das Ziel der Wege Gottes im Jesajabuch,” in *Wer ist wie du, HERR, unter den Göttern?* *Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Ingo Kottsieper et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994): 282.

God's מַלְאָךְ evokes the association of slavery, "work".³⁰ This image of the messenger doing the work of the divine sender resembles that of a prophet, who has to submit completely to the will of God, even if it contradicts his own nature and ideas: 'From the moment he answered Yahweh's call, the classical prophet ceased to be a free man. He was now in bondage to the divine word. He must go where he was sent and say what he was commanded to say.'³¹

What does the bondage of the prophet to YHWH mean for the translation of *'æbæd* in Isaiah 40–54? The translation "servant" can be accepted so long as the strong asymmetrical dependency in the relationship between the human "servant", and the divine Lord is kept in mind. To strengthen this assertion, one might also employ terms like "bondsmen" or "serf".³²

Isaiah 49:7 serves as a counterpoint to translations of *'æbæd* that might downplay the connotation of strong asymmetrical dependency in the relationship between YHWH and the people in his possession. In that verse, *'æbæd* is used to describe the exiled Israelites in contrast to oppressors. Here, the term clearly ought to be translated as "slave": "Thus says YHWH, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers. "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of YHWH, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you" (tr. NRSV).

This verse from the editorial supplement (Isaiah 49:7–12) to the second song of the servant in Isaiah 49:1–6 interprets the exiled people and the desolate city Zion with reference to the fourth song as oppressed by the nations and forced into a slave existence.³³ If this oldest reading of Isaiah 53 interprets the character staged here as a "slave of rulers", the question is justified as to which elements in the fourth song were decisive for such an interpretation.

First, it is the term עֶבֶד ("my *'æbæd*") in Isaiah 52:13 and 53:11 that evokes the association of subordination and total dependence, especially after its anticipation in Isaiah 49:7. One of the main points of the fourth song is the protagonist's incredible reversal of fortune. The character transitions from the deepest humiliation to the

³⁰ Bridge, "The Use of עֶבֶד": 37; see page 45: 'In effect, he is a messenger-slave who is fully obedient to Yhwh.'

³¹ David Arthur, *A Smooth Stone: Biblical Prophecy in Historical Perspective* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001): 104, quoted in Bridge, "The Use of עֶבֶד": 41.

³² In German one might think of "Leibeigener" instead of "Knecht" or "Magd" which are due to the translation of Martin Luther and reflect the feudal conditions of the sixteenth century, thus Rainer Kessler, "Knechtschaft (AT)," *Das Wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet*, 2006, <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/23712/> [accessed 13.08.2022]; Rainer Kessler, "Sklaverei (AT)," *Das Wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet*, 2019, <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/28970/> [accessed 13.08.2022].

³³ Odil Hannes Steck, "Der Gottesknecht als 'Bund' und 'Licht': Beobachtungen im Zweiten Jesaja," in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 90 (1993): 123; cf. Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 49–54*, *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament* 37 (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2015): 43–45, 225–26.

highest echelon, surpassed only by the royal position of the heavenly king, YHWH himself (cf. Isaiah 52:13 and Isaiah 6:1). There is only one other instance in the Book of Isaiah in which a comparable elevation can be found. Namely, the case of the female protagonist, Zion, who had to bend her back so that her conquerors could walk over her (Isaiah 51:23). The holy city is depicted as a female captive of war, deprived of her garments, humiliated by her conquerors, tied up with an iron collar around her neck, sold like a war-slave by her God (Isaiah 52:1–3).

Since the fates of the ‘captive Jerusalem // captive daughter Zion’ (Isaiah 52:2) must be seen in close relation to the suffering *‘æbhæd* in Isaiah 53, the association of a slave figure with these characters is not far-fetched. Isaiah 49:7 provides support for this assertion. The redactors who supplemented the second poem (Isaiah 49:1–6) have taken the expression “despised” (נִבְזָה) from Isaiah 53:3, where it is used twice. The word בזה expresses the deepest disregard that people can have for others; it implies worthlessness and abhorrence (cf. 1 Samuel 15:9; Jeremiah 22:28). Those addressed by this predicate are regarded by their fellowmen as ostracized outcasts. In social terms, they are non-existent.³⁴ No other passage expresses this state better than the lament in Psalms 22:7: ‘I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people’ (tr. KJV).

This stripping of social location perfectly matches the phenomenon that Orlando Patterson describes as social death: ‘If the slave no longer belonged to a community, if he had no social existence outside of his master, then what was he? The initial response in almost all slaveholding societies was to define the slave as a socially dead person.’³⁵ The slave owner’s authority over his property was virtually without limits; he could subject the slaves to corporal punishment that could even prove fatal.

The notion of social death is reflected in the persona of the suffering *‘æbhæd* when he is described in Isaiah 53:4 as ‘smitten of God and afflicted’ (KJV). The interpretation that the primary cause of his suffering was an incurable (skin-) disease overlooks the fact that none of the terms here are otherwise used to refer to a disease without further addition or qualification.³⁶ The semantic elements “to touch” (נגע), “to smite” (נכה), “to strike down” (דכה), “to reach / to fall upon” (פגע) are also associated in the Old Testament with diseases whose cause is YHWH himself (cf. Genesis 19:11; Deuteronomy 28:22, 27–28, 35; 1 Samuel 5:6, 12; Isaiah 1:5) but the closest parallel can be found in Jeremiah 30:13–14: ‘There is no one to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you. All your lovers have forgotten you; they care nothing for you; for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe, because your guilt is great, because your sins are so numerous’ (tr. NRSV). It is not the

³⁴ Manfred Görg, “בְּזָה,” in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 1, eds. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973): 584.

³⁵ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982): 38.

³⁶ In Leviticus 13–14; Deuteronomy 24:8 the disease infestation is always indicated by the combination of נגע “touch / strike / plague” and צרעת “human disease / leprosy”.

diseases themselves that put down the *'æbæd*, but the blows of God, for which, in Isaiah 53, he no longer needs enemies as executors.³⁷ In this context, it is not without significance that in the first instance of its use in Jeremiah 30:11, the *'æbæd* title applies to Jacob, the exiled people of Israel. Secondly, it is important to note that the verb נכה “to smite” is also used in the legal provision that addresses a slave owner who has beaten his male or female slave to death (Exodus 21:20, 26).

The final characterization of the *'æbæd* in Isaiah 53:4 is that he was ‘afflicted’ (מְעַנֶּה) by God. The verb ענה II indicates a reduction in status by force: ‘By applying physical or psychological violence, the status of a person is changed for the worse.’³⁸

Indeed, Sarai used physical and psychological violence to negatively alter Hagar’s status after the former asked the latter to bear a son for Abraham. Sarai dealt with Hagar so harshly – degrading her from second wife to a pure female slave – that Hagar fled with the child (Genesis 16:6). The same kind of degradation and loss of status was inflicted by God on his *'æbæd* (Niphal ענה II in Isaiah 53:7) who did not raise his voice in protest but kept silent. The goal of strict obedience is forced upon children and slaves alike (Micah 1:6) by the head of the household through beatings and other corporal punishments (for slaves: Proverbs 29:19, 21; Sirach 33:25–33; for sons / children: Proverbs 29:15, 17; Sirach 30:1–13; 42:9–14). Such beatings are justified via reference to an inner purification that expels evil: ‘Blows that wound cleanse away evil; beatings make clean the innermost parts’ (Proverbs 20:30). It is precisely this inhuman pedagogy that stands behind God’s blows against the people (Isaiah 1:6a), towards whom he acts like a father who beats his disobedient children: ‘From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds’ (tr. NRSV).

The noun תבירה “bruise / stripe / blow” rarely occurs in the OT (Genesis 4:23; Exodus 21:25; Psalms 38:6; Proverbs 20:30) and only once more in the Book of Isaiah, i.e., as the result of God’s beating of the *'æbæd*: ‘by his bruises, we are healed’ (Isaiah 53:5 [tr. NRSV]). The agreements between Isaiah 1 and 53 are too numerous to be purely accidental (cf. “to smite” [נכה] and “sickness” [הולי]). The chastisement of the people as disobedient children and that of the *'æbæd* as the one beaten by God are intertwined. Against the backdrop of Isaiah 1:6 the result of the divine blow against the innocent *'æbæd* appears even more dramatic: ‘From the sole of the foot to the head, there was nothing sound left on the body of the beaten man, it was covered with untreated colourful bumps, weals and fresh wounds.’³⁹ How many slaves have experienced such beatings? How many have perished miserably under such torture?

37 Berges, *Jesaja 49–54*: 248–50.

38 Erhard Gerstenberger, “ענה,” in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 6, eds. Heinz-Josef Fabry and Helmer Ringgren (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1989): 253 (author’s own translation from German).

39 Zoltán Kustár, “Durch seine Wunden sind wir geheilt”: Eine Untersuchung zur Metaphorik von Israels Krankheit und Heilung im Jesajabuch, *Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament* 154 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002): 192–93 (author’s own translation from German).

Apart from children and slaves, there is no other group of people upon whom such brutal treatment could be inflicted in the Ancient Near East and Ancient Israel. Since the fourth “servant song” in Isaiah speaks explicitly of the *‘əḥæd*, it is almost imperative to think here of the fate of the slave of God. The reference here is to a chattel slave, not one who has fallen into debt bondage due to financial hardship. In the latter case, the release would have had to occur after mistreatment by a master (Exodus 21:26–27). This rule does not apply to a chattel slave whose owner can mistreat him at will because the slave is the owner’s property (Exodus 21:21).⁴⁰

If one takes the use of slave terminology in Isaiah 53 seriously, a further consequence arises: the environment (the We-group) believed that the slave referenced in the pericope deserved the mistreatment he received. However, in reality, he was blameless. His abuses should have been inflicted on those who unjustly despised him. They were the disobedient children and slaves of God. The sufferer in the fourth song has no prophetic traits and is not depicted as a persecuted servant of God by his fellowmen.⁴¹ This *‘əḥæd* is completely inactive; he proclaims nothing; he does not even open his mouth. Instead, he endures everything like a slave who is beaten by his divine master for the offences of others. Only those who, in retrospect, recognize the patient endurance of the slave of YHWH as the God-willed substitute for their disbelief and disobedience can be counted among the *“ḥādīm* (plural of *‘əḥæd*).⁴² Through them, the divine slave receives an offspring which lives up to his ideal of obedience and loyalty to YHWH (Isaiah 53:10).

3.2 The Servants in Isaiah 54–66

As just noted, it cannot be a coincidence that from Isaiah 54:17b onwards, the *‘əḥæd* is no longer referenced in the singular, but as עֲבָדִים (*“ḥādīm*), that is in the plural (Isaiah 54:17; 56:7; 63:17; 65:8–9, 13–15; 66:14). Recently, the shared theological viewpoints and literary similarities of this group to the authors and singers of the Psalms have been clarified.⁴³ Thus, the term *“ḥādīm* is quite common in the song- and prayerbook

⁴⁰ For this distinction see Innocenzo Cardellini, *Die biblischen “Sklaven“-Gesetze im Lichte des keilschriftlichen Sklavenrechts: Ein Beitrag zur Tradition, Überlieferung und Redaktion der alttestamentlichen Rechtstexte*, Bonner Biblische Beiträge 55 (Königstein: Peter Hanstein Verlag, 1981): 267–68.

⁴¹ Against Bridge, “The Use of עֲבָדִים”: 46: עֲבָדִים, used for the Servant’s title, evokes the same associations of slavery as for prophets: “possession”, “work”, but the status idea is heightened, despite his sufferings.’

⁴² Cf. Fredrik Hägglund, *Isaiah 53 in the Light of Homecoming after Exile*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe 31 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008): 171.

⁴³ Ulrich Berges, “Sing to the LORD a New Song’: The Tradents of the Book of Isaiah and the Psalter,” in *The History of Isaiah: The Formation of the Book and its Presentation of the Past*, eds. Jacob Stromberg and J. Todd Hibbard, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 150 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021): 213–37; Ulrich Berges, “Isaiah 55–66 and the Psalms: Shared Viewpoints, Literary Similarities, and Neighboring Authors,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 141 (2022): 277–99.

of Israel, especially in the Books of Psalms IV and V (Psalms 34:23; 69:37; 79:2, 10; 89:51; 90:13, 16; 102:15, 29; 105:25; 113:1; 123:2; 134:1; 135:14). Already at first glance, it becomes clear that in both, the final third of the Book of Isaiah and in the Psalter, the designation *^abādīm* is related to the proper worship of YHWH.

In a dramatic reading of the Book of Isaiah, the plural *^abādīm* points to a collective of believers who long for the return of all exiled Jews to Jerusalem and for the centrality of Zion and its temple as a place of prayer for devotees from Israel and the nations.⁴⁴ Only through the return from exile will God's plan come true. Only then will God install his *'əbæd* as light, instruction, and witness for Israel and the nations (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). This is how the divine word in Isaiah 43:10a finally comes true: 'You are my witnesses, says YHWH, and my servant whom I have chosen.'

Insofar as the addressees accept the responsibility of serving as witnesses for the uniqueness of YHWH, they constitute the *'əbæd*, belonging to the *^abādīm*. They are on YHWH's side, and he is on theirs. There is no longer any dissonance between YHWH and his own, no blind and deaf *'əbæd* (Isaiah 42:19). There are no more divine beatings, but only protection and blessing for the *^abādīm*. No other text expresses this better than Isaiah 54:13, where the *^abādīm* of YHWH are depicted as children of mother Zion and disciples of God, whom He himself teaches and provides great peace.⁴⁵ In their attachment and loyalty to the Divine Lord, they resemble their predecessors in faith and trust: 'The use of עֲבָד for a group of Yhwh worshippers is similar to its use for the patriarchs. That is, they are people loyal to Yhwh. This is shown by the text's claim that they worship YHWH and further Yhwh's will. This use of עֲבָד calls up the association of slavery, "work".'⁴⁶

However, whether the previously referenced association is valid in Isaiah 54–66 must be questioned. The connotation "work" in the sense of a dependent or even slavish activity is certainly not implied here. For example, in Isaiah 56:6, one reads: 'And the foreigners who join themselves to YHWH, to minister to him, to love the name of YHWH, and to be his *^abādīm*, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant' (tr. NRSV). The Septuagint (LXX) translates the Hebrew verb שָׁרַת as δουλεύω ("to serve") only in this context. Elsewhere it is normally translated as λειτουργέω ("to worship"), thus strengthening the reference to the noun δοῦλος ("slave" / "bondsmen" / "servant") in the same verse.⁴⁷ In the profane sphere, the Hebrew word

44 Berges, "The Servant(s) in Isaiah": 318–33.

45 Marjo Christina Annette Korpel and Johannes Cornelis de Moor, *The Structure of Classical Hebrew Poetry: Isaiah 40–55*, Oudtestamentische Studien 41 (Leiden: Brill, 1998): 605: 'The children of Zion are the servants of the LORD if they learn from his teaching [. . .] Again our structural analysis lends support to the interpretation of the servant of the LORD as a corporate personality.'

46 Bridge, "The Use of עֲבָד": 47.

47 The LXX adds also καὶ δούλας ("and female slaves / bondmaids") to exclude from the outset the idea that a priestly ministry could be meant, see Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 55–66*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament 53 (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2022): 138 and 158–59.

שרת always means to serve higher-ranking persons and never indicates the activity of a slave: ‘it is the servitude by free people, often an act honoring the servant’.⁴⁸ Two thirds of the references are about cultic service before God, especially in the priestly writing, Ezekiel and Chronicles.⁴⁹

In Isaiah 56:6, as well as in Isaiah 60:7, 10; 61:6, there is also a cultic imprint. Thus, the *“bādīm* are not described as slaves or bondsmen but as worshippers who should be honoured for putting themselves entirely at the service of their God. Therefore, the translation “servants” seems very much appropriate in this context.

The next reference to the term in Isaiah 63:17 supports the previous assertion, because an emerging tension between God and the pious is detected and averted by them through their prayer: ‘Why, YHWH, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you? Turn back for the sake of your *“bādīm*, for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage?’ (tr. NRSV). Here, the divine hardening of the people’s heart (Isaiah 6:10) that had led to the exilic catastrophe once again stands before the petitioners as a threat. However, the difference this time is that the *“bādīm* recognize the impending danger and ask God to turn to them and the people again. By recognizing the danger, they take the first step towards averting it: ‘They ask why YHWH hardens their heart. Thus, hardness is perceptible to the hardened.’⁵⁰

Additionally, in Isaiah 63:17, there is a recourse to the confession of those who belong to the descendants of the *‘əbāəd*, since the vocabulary does not coincidentally resemble each other: ‘All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way’ (Isaiah 53:6a [tr. NRSV]; cf. תעה “to go / to lead astray”; דרך “way”). The *“bādīm* are that part of post-exilic Israel that perceive friction between YHWH and his people. In the face of this realization, they stand ready to intervene. According to them, God must lay down his wrath. Otherwise, they will no longer be able to maintain their loyalty to him.⁵¹ The deity accepts their supplication and responds to it. In all subsequent references to the *“bādīm* in Isaiah 65–66, the gentle tenor is apparent: YHWH stands only on their side, and because of them, he will not destroy all his people. They are the good grapes in the wine press (Isaiah 65:8–9). The divine blessings lay exclusively upon them; their opponents, on the other hand, should expect only hardship and disaster (Isaiah 65:13–15; 66:14). The constellation of the pious worshipers with their God, on the one hand, and the opponents who oppose cultic and social purity, on the other hand,

48 Claus Westermann, “שרת,” in *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 2, eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1976): 1020 (author’s own translation from German); cf. Genesis 29:15, 18, 20; 39:4; 40:4; Exodus 24:13; 33:1; Numbers 11:28; Joshua 1:1.

49 Westermann, “שרת”: 1021 (cf. Numbers 1:50; 3:31; 4:9, 12, 14; Ezekiel 44:11, 17, 19, 27; 46:24; Ezra 8:17; Nehemiah 10:37, 40).

50 Torsten Uhlig, *The Theme of Hardening in the Book of Isaiah: An Analysis of Communicative Action*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe 39 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009): 313.

51 Willem André Maria Beuken, “The Main Theme of Trito-Isaiah: ‘The Servants of YHWH,’” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 47 (1990): 75: ‘Their servitude is more a goal in view than an existing reason.’

corresponds to both the tone and tenor of the Psalms. The tradents of both books in their respective final forms stood in close connection with each other. The association that the term *“bādīm* evokes in both the Psalms and the last third of the Book of Isaiah is not one of slavish dependence but of loyalty in the service of the divine Lord.⁵² For this reason, the widespread translation “servants” is very suitable (see ASV; ESV; KJV; NRSV).⁵³

4 Conclusion

The world in the Ancient Near East and Ancient Israel is hierarchically conceived and ordered in every respect. No area of the real or imagined world is exempt. In the OT, freedom as such is a state that could not be imagined, unlike release. That is why, in contrast to the Greco-Roman world where terms like (ἐλεύθερος / ἐλευθερία; *liber / libertas*) abound, Biblical Hebrew does not even have a word for freedom. Therefore, when one reads about a “free person” (פְּדוּי) in modern translations, they can be easily misled. פְּדוּי indicates not a freeman but a *freedman*. This assertion is confirmed by the fact that fourteen out of the seventeen times it appears, the word is connected to the verbs יצא Qal “to leave / to go out” (Exodus 21:2, 5) and שלח “to send away / to release” (Exodus 21:26–27; Deuteronomy 15:12–13, 18; Isaiah 58:6; Jeremiah 34:9–11, 14, 16; Job 39:5).⁵⁴

The relationship between the human and the divine spheres, i.e., between humans and YHWH, the God of Israel, is deeply influenced by hierarchical social relations, which are characterized by strong asymmetrical dependency. The influence of strong asymmetrical dependency as a social reality upon the theological imagination of Biblical Israel is made very clear at the beginning of the Decalogue. All the divine laws have their origin in God’s liberation of his people from bondage in Egypt, the house of slavery (Exodus 20:2), before ultimately making them into his own slaves (Le-

52 Bridge, “The Use of עֶבֶד”: 47: ‘In contrast to when עֶבֶד indicates Israel, Israel’s leaders, prophets and the Servant figure, no status is inferred. The use of עֶבֶד as a title for individuals draws upon the derived association of slavery, “loyalty”: the group of people so designated are claimed to be dedicated to obeying God, in contrast to their opponents.’

53 The German translation “Knechte” (see e.g., Lutherbibel 2017; Elberfelder Bibel; Einheitsübersetzung) remains too attached to a medieval context, differently “Diener” (Zürcher Bibel); gender-neutral “die in meinem Dienst stehen” (Bibel in gerechter Sprache).

54 See Job 3:19, where the protagonist praises the hoped-for death as the great equalizer: ‘The small and great are there; and the servant is free [פְּדוּי] from his master’ (KJV); further discussion concerning the פְּדוּי, see Ulrich Berges, “Die Sklavengesetze im Pentateuch: Befreiung oder gesetztes Unrecht?” in *Vor allen Dingen: Das Alte Testament. Festschrift für Christoph Dohmen*, eds. Barbara Schmitz, Thomas Hieke, and Matthias Ederer, Herders Biblische Studien 100 (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2023).

viticus 25:42). As Thomas Krüger has pointed out, this strict attachment to the one and only God is ethically ambiguous because:

The precarious character of such a bond with an overpowering authority as a reason for enabling human freedom becomes clear at the beginning of the Decalogue: Man is dependent on (one) God for the sake of his freedom. However, the attachment to (one) God carries the risk of losing his freedom to this God [. . .] In any case, ethics must presuppose a certain degree of human freedom, without indulging in illusions about the extent of this freedom [. . .].⁵⁵

This ambiguity also concerns the root עִבַּר in the Old Testament that, along with its derivatives, indicates work, subordination, servitude, slavery, and dependency. In metaphorical-theological usage, the root points to a relationship between YHWH and humans that is characterized by strong asymmetrical dependency. The noun in the singular *‘əḥæd* plays a vital role because it can be used for real slavery *and* total subordination under God’s will and rule. Based on the literary context, it always depends on what kind of association the word will activate: inferior status, dependent work, obedience, loyalty, etc. Nevertheless, with all secondary uses, one should not forget that the metaphorical meaning derives from the phenomenon of real dependency and slavery in the Ancient Near East and Ancient Israel. With this in mind, the references of *‘əḥæd* and *‘ḥādīm* in the Old Testament and especially in the Book of Isaiah must be re-evaluated, since they do not express only free-willed submission but, at times, forced subjugation by the divine Lord. In this regard, Isaiah 53 is a potent reminder that service under God’s rule might result in a silent and submissive endurance of a beating with his rod.

Neither the Old nor the New Testament pioneered the abolition of slavery, but this millennia-old social institution has had a lasting impact on the image of the godhead in the Abrahamic religions and their holy scriptures. Returning to the metaphor of the two hands, anyone who denies the ambiguity that exists between affirmations of the God of liberation, on the one hand, and the severe dependency foisted upon God’s servants in the Biblical narrative, on the other, is guilty of a kind of historical oblivion that can no longer be tolerated in modern societies. Those who study ancient societies and texts, along with those who continue to practice historic religious traditions, should develop a deep awareness of the way the concepts discussed here have been and continue to be used to demand submission to divine authority in ways that conceal and perpetuate human claims to status and power.

⁵⁵ Thomas Krüger, “Woran orientiert sich die Ethik des Dekalogs?” in *Das menschliche Herz und die Weisung Gottes: Studien zur alttestamentlichen Anthropologie und Ethik*, ed. Thomas Krüger, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 96 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009): 160 (author’s own translation from German).

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Wolfram Kinzig

‘I Abjure Satan, his Pomp, and his Service’: Exchanging Religious Dependencies in the Early Church

1 A Piece of Ecclesial Gossip

In a letter from 428 or 429 CE, Augustine (354–430), bishop of the North African port Hippo Regius, told his friend Alypius, bishop of Thagaste (some sixty miles south of Hippo), a piece of ecclesial gossip.¹ The protagonist of the story, which Augustine had only heard second-hand, was a certain Dioscorus, the chief physician (*archiater*) of an unknown location.² Dioscorus must have enjoyed a considerable reputation as a doctor because Augustine did not feel it necessary to provide further biographical information about him. Dioscorus was a kind man but a fierce critic of Christianity. Thus, it came as a great surprise that when his daughter fell seriously ill, Dioscorus prayed to Christ and vowed to become a Christian should she be saved. His prayers were answered, and his daughter recovered. Yet, the good doctor reneged on his vow. As a result, he was afflicted by a temporary loss of sight, which he interpreted as a divine punishment for breaking his promise. Here is the central sequence of the story in Augustine’s own words:

He cried out and confessed [*confitens*] and vowed again that he would fulfil what he had vowed [*voverat*] if light be returned to him. It returned; he fulfilled [his vow], and still the hand [of the Lord] was raised. He had not committed the creed [*symbolum*] to memory, or perhaps had refused to commit it, and made the excuse that he was unable. God saw. Immediately after all the ceremonies of his reception [*post festa omnia receptionis suae*], he was undone by a paralysis in many, indeed almost all, his members. Then, being warned by a dream, he confessed in writing

1 Augustine, *Epistula 227* (FaFo § 636i). The date is uncertain. In the title and the explicit of the letter Alypius is called an old man (*senex*). This may, however, also be an honorific title; cf. André Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du C.N.R.S., 1982): 53, 64, s.v. ‘Alypius’. The letter is also discussed by Todd S. Berzon, “Between Presence and Perfection: The Prorean Creed of Early Christianity,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 29 (2021): 593–96, but his conclusions are very different from mine.

2 Cf. J.R. Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire (PLRE)*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 367, s.v. ‘Dioscorus 3’ (cf. also PLRE, vol. 1: 261, s.v. ‘Dioscorus 2’); Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne*: 279, s.v. ‘Dioscorus 1’. It is unlikely that Dioscorus was *archiater* in Hippo. In that case, Augustine would no doubt have known the story first-hand.

Note: In what follows FaFo refers to the source texts collected in Wolfram Kinzig, *Faith in Formulae: A Collection of Early Christian Creeds and Creed-Related Texts*, 4 vols., Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017). Dr Maria Munkholt Christensen and Nathalie Kröger have kindly proofread this article.

that he had been told that this had happened because he had not recited the creed [*quod symbolum non reddiderit*].

After that confession [*post illam confessionem*], the use of all his members was restored to him, excepting only the tongue; nevertheless, he, being still under the same affliction, disclosed in writing that he had nonetheless learnt the creed [*symbolum*] and still retained it in his memory; and so that frivolity which, as you know, blemished his natural kindness and made him exceedingly profane when he mocked Christians, was altogether destroyed in him.

Unfortunately, the sources do not tell us what exactly happened *before* Dioscorus turned to Christ in prayer. The famous physician must have tried several cures which may have involved certain pagan rituals but which, in the end, remained unsuccessful. He may then have resorted to praying, perhaps, first to some local deity, again to no avail. At this point, he may have realized that his gods were, ultimately, less potent than he had assumed, and in his distress he turned to the God of the Christians and took a vow, or, in more modern words, he struck a deal: he promised to become a Christian and, in return, expected his daughter to be cured by divine intervention. Dioscorus' behaviour was by no means eccentric. He continued to operate within the parameters of Roman religion, which were based on the principle *do ut des*, i.e., I promise the gods veneration if they do something for me in return.³ Dioscorus' actions appeared to bring about the long-expected success. Indeed, his daughter recovered.

But Dioscorus tried to cheat God. Although he had taken a vow and was, therefore, committed to honouring his obligations,⁴ he tried to withdraw. The repercussions of his decision were severe: he was twice struck by illness. After first going blind, Dioscorus decided to register for the catechumenate. However, in the end, he hesitated to go through with the preparatory rites for baptism. One part of the catechumenate was the *traditio* and *redditio symboli*. At some point before the date of baptism (usually Easter), the bishop 'handed over', that is, explained, the creed (*symbolum*) to the candidates for baptism and asked them to memorize it. Then, some days later, the candidates had to solemnly 'give it back', that is, recite it in the presence of the bishop. Here, at the *redditio*, Dioscorus had managed to withdraw from the recitation of the creed. He may have pretended some illness, shyness, or poor memory – in any case, he had obviously been excused. We do not know why Dioscorus sought such a recusal. It may have been due to the stubbornness of an elderly man, or the decision

3 Cf. Kurt Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte*, Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 5.4 (1967; repr. of 2nd ed., Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992): 46–47; Karl Hoheisel, "Do ut des," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2, eds. Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow, Matthias Laubscher, and Karl H. Kohl (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990): 229; Jörg Rüpke, *Religion of the Romans* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007): 149.

4 Cf. Bernhard Kötting and Bernhard Kaiser, "Gelübde," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 9 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1976): 1078–80; Jörg Rüpke, *On Roman Religion: Lived Religion and the Individual in Ancient Rome*, Townsend Lectures / Cornell Studies in Classical Philology (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016): 121–24.

may have been based on fear of what would happen to him if he gave up the traditional worship which his forefathers had practised for centuries and which, in his view, had guaranteed his professional success. Be that as it may, in the end, Dioscorus seems to have been baptized.⁵

But then something happened which made him change his mind once again. His daughter’s cure may have triggered this conversion process, but ultimately it was accelerated by the series of illnesses that struck Dioscorus. After having suffered a stroke, and as the result of a dream, Dioscorus finally understood that the traditional gods no longer determined his fate. Instead, the Christian God had taken over. Thus, a new system of religious dependency was established. In the end, unable to speak, Dioscorus performed the *redditio* in writing.⁶

2 Preparation for Baptism in the Early Church

Whatever the details of this story (and I will come back to some aspects of it later), it makes clear that the ancient Mediterranean world operated within a system of dependencies that transcended the empirical realm. The social order that structured society and in which most people lived as members of the lower classes or even slaves in a situation of utter dependency on the goodwill of their masters or owners⁷ was embedded in a broader hierarchy. This structure also included the realm that was believed to exist beyond what could be perceived by human bodily senses and which could only be accessed by those endowed with a philosophical intellect, if at all.

This metaphysical realm encompassed the gods and all other spiritual beings, including angels, demons, and the devil. The visible world was generally considered subordinate to the will and actions of these supernatural beings. In early Christianity, it was thought that humans could extract themselves from the power of the devil and the traditional gods (who were considered evil demons) via a system of rites that had

5 At least, this is what the words *post festa omnia receptionis suae* suggest.

6 Apparently, after having suffered a stroke subsequent to his baptism, he first disclosed that he had not taken part in the *redditio symboli*. He then partly recovered from his illness but remained unable to speak. Only then does he appear to have written down the creed. Augustine does not say whether Dioscorus’ health was fully restored in the end. It is equally unclear whether the words *post illam confessionem* imply some kind of formal penitential act.

7 According to recent estimates, 90 percent of Roman society was unable to afford a slave (and were hence considered of lowly status), whereas slaves constituted just under 10 percent of the imperial population. Cf. Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Roman World AD 275–475* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 24–25, 58–60.

legal implications. Through these rites, Christians could forsake all other supernatural allegiances and place themselves under the sole authority of Christ. It is this change of allegiance and replacement of one relationship of dependency with another that I want to explore in this article.

Ultimately, conversion to Christ was, of course, sealed by baptism itself. Yet, the submersion of the convert in water was only the end of a longer process known as the catechumenate. I do not want to explain the system of the catechumenate here as its details are quite complicated. Instead, I will briefly sketch its fundamental structure and then deal with two aspects in greater detail.⁸

By the end of the second century, Christian initiation was a three-stage process: the first stage was called “conversion”, or “turning about”. The technical term ἐπιστροφή (*epistrophé*; Latin: *conuersio*) already indicates that conversion implied a fundamental change in the convert’s life. Conversion denotes the turning away from a person’s old life and the adoption of a new moral code. Converts to Christianity were expected to control their sexual lives, display a certain self-control as regards food and drink, promote social cohesion and social justice through almsgiving, and, finally, avoid all acts and rites associated with their former gods and beliefs. Once the convert sought to enter the Christian community, he became a catechumen. At this stage, he was taught for a certain period about the central beliefs and tenets of Christianity. Finally, he or she was baptized and was thus, at last, fully incorporated into the Christian congregation.

Before they could be baptized, the catechumens had to undergo an examination and, if they passed it, were repeatedly exorcized so that they were cleansed of all evil spirits. The clergy had to make absolutely sure that no demons remained in the baptizands and that they were pure enough to receive baptism. These exorcisms were accompanied by the two rites of ἀπόταξις / ἀποταγή (*apótaxis* / *apotagé*, renunciation) and σύνταξις / συνταγή (*syntaxis* / *syntagé*, engagement) and / or *traditio* / *redditio symboli* (handing over and recitation of the creed). I will focus on these two rites in what follows. They symbolize or even enact the change of religious allegiance to which I referred in the title of my paper.

⁸ For what follows cf. Wolfram Kinzig and Martin Wallraff, “Das Christentum des dritten Jahrhunderts zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit,” in *Das Christentum I: Von den Anfängen bis zur Konstantinischen Wende*, ed. Dieter Zeller, *Die Religionen der Menschheit* 1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002): 339–52.

3 The Rite of apótaxis / apotagé and sýntaxis / syntagé

In order to explain what the rite of *apótaxis* (or *apotagé*) and *sýntaxis* (or *syntagé*) was about,⁹ I turn to one of the most influential theologians of the fifth century, Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia in Cilicia (bishop 392/3–428 CE).¹⁰ A series of *Catechetical Homilies* has come down to us in Syriac translation in which Theodore explains the creed, the Lord’s Prayer, baptism, and the Eucharist. In what follows, I will focus on the rites that precede baptism.

According to Theodore’s description (which is also found in the works of many other Christian authors of the period), the world is dominated by two competing systems of dependency, one headed by Christ (who is ultimately victorious) and the other by the devil. Satan had laid a claim on humankind ever since the Fall of Adam. In his sermon, Theodore stages a veritable courtroom drama: Satan’s ownership of humankind had been challenged by his slaves, i.e., humans. He takes his case to the divine court. In response, humankind defends itself against its devilish accuser as follows:

But it is necessary that a judgment should be given for us against the Tyrant, who is fighting the case against us, that is to say, Satan, who is always envious of our deliverance and salvation. He shows here also the same ill will towards us and tries and endeavours to file suit against us as if we had no right to be outside his ownership. He pleads that from ancient times and from our being in legal succession to the head of our race we belong to him by right.¹¹

⁹ Fundamental discussion in Hans Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage: Eine Untersuchung zu Gestalt und Geschichte der Taufe nach den altkirchlichen Taufliturgien* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1960): passim, esp. 76–81, 124–33; Alois Stenzel, *Die Taufe: Eine genetische Erklärung der Taufliturgie*, *Forschungen zur Geschichte der Theologie und des innerkirchlichen Lebens* 7–8 (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1958): 98–108; Henry A. Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). In addition, cf. Wolfram Kinzig, trans., *Asterius: Psalmenhomilien*, 2 vols., *Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur* 56–57 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2002): 465, n. 13.

¹⁰ For what follows, cf. also Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism*: 148–51; Nathan Witkamp, *Tradition and Innovation: Baptismal Rite and Mystagogy in Theodore of Mopsuestia and Narsai of Nisibis*, *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* 149 (Leiden: Brill, 2018): 182–216.

¹¹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica* 12: 18 (trans. Alphonse Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord’s Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, *Woodbrooke Studies* 6 [Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1933]: 27; altered). In what follows, the translations in Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia* were revised according to Raymond Tonneau and Robert Devresse, *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste: Reproduction phototypique du ms. Mingana syr. 561* (Selly Oak Colleges’ Library, Birmingham), *Studi e Testi* 145 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949) and Peter Bruns, *Theodor von Mopsuestia: Katechetische Homilien*, 2 vols., *Fontes Christiani* 17 (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1994).

Theodore then gives the floor to the accuser, who recapitulates the story of the Fall of Adam and God's pronouncement against Adam in Genesis 3:18–19, which entitled Satan to ownership of Adam and all his descendants. Satan concludes:

From the fact that by his own will he [Adam] chose my lordship you clearly belong to me, as I am the prince of the powers of the air and of the spirit, but now I work in the children of disobedience [cf. Ephesians 2:2]. How, then, is it possible that this man, who from the beginning and from the time of his forefathers belongs to me – as a just death sentence was passed against him in this mortal world, where he still is and where I hold sway over him – should be taken away from this world and from this way of life, and consequently from my lordship also, which he himself chose willingly? And should he now become immortal, a thing which is higher than his nature? And should he be seen in the life and occupations of the abode of heaven? This does not pertain to humans or to beings who have this (human) nature, who are different from those who are endowed with a higher nature.¹²

Humankind, therefore, is forced to show and establish the title it possesses:

[. . .] that originally we did not belong to Satan and to our forefathers, but to God who created us while we were not and made us in his own image [cf. Genesis 1:27], and that it was through the iniquity and the wickedness of the Tyrant and through our own negligence that we were driven towards evil. Therefore, we lost also the honour and greatness of the [divine] image, and because of our malice we further received the punishment of death.¹³

Finally, it was Christ who, through his death, came to humankind's rescue by abolishing human sin and transgressions.

In the end, after having listened to both sides, God issues a sentence:

He condemned the Tyrant for the ill will of which he had made use against him [Christ] and against all our race, and pronounced judgment against him. Therefore, he raised Christ our Lord from the dead and made him immortal and immutable, and took him to heaven. And he vouchsafed to all the [human] race the joy of [his] gifts so that no room might be left to the Slanderer from which to inflict injuries on us.¹⁴

The rite of *apótaxis* (renunciation) and *syntaxis* (engagement) encompassed the moment when the individual believer could transition from the tyranny of the devil to the merciful reign of Christ. Here, the candidates for baptism formally declared their change of ownership from Satan to Christ. The words of this rite varied in the Greek Church,¹⁵ but its basic formula looked like this:

¹² Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica* 12: 18 (trans. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*: 27–28; altered).

¹³ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica* 12: 19 (trans. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*: 28; altered).

¹⁴ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica* 12: 20 (trans. Mingana *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*: 29; altered).

¹⁵ Cf. Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage*: 39–51.

Αποτάσσομαί σοι, Σατανᾶ, καὶ τῆ πομπῆ σου καὶ τῆ λατρεία σου,
καὶ συντάσσομαί σοι, Χριστέ.

I abjure you (*apotássomai*), Satan, and all your pomp and your (worship) service,
and I engage myself (*syntássomai*), Christ, to you.¹⁶

The verb *apotássomai* is often translated into English as ‘I renounce’ and understood as an expression of abstention or even of asceticism.¹⁷ However, other semantic nuances were also attached to this term and, therefore, to the rite of that name. In papyri, *apotássomai* is used in a legal context to designate withdrawal from legal obligations proceeding from a contract.¹⁸ In contracts and other documents, the term was also used as part of a formula that indicated the renunciation of legal support.¹⁹ Finally,

16 John Chrysostom, *Catecheses baptismales (Taufkatechesen)*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Reiner Kaczynski, *Fontes Christiani* 6.1–6.2 (Freiburg: Herder 1992): 23.

17 This is, of course, correct and recalls Luke 14:33, where Christ tells the crowds travelling with him: ‘So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not renounce (*apotássetai*) all your possessions.’ Therefore, *apótaxis* was translated into Latin as *abrenuntiatio* and hence into English as “renunciation”. Regarding the history of the verb, cf. Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage*: 76–78; Gerhard Delling “τάσσω κτλ,” in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 8 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969): 33–34.

18 P. Oxy. 6 904 (fifth c.; Bernard Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, eds. and trans., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, part 6 [London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1908]: 242): A certain Flavius sends a petition to the governor (*praeses*) of the Thebaid. He has acted as a substitute for Philoxenus, who holds the post of police official (*riparius*) in Oxyrhynchus. However, Flavius feels unfairly treated by Philoxenus and asks the governor to be released from his duties. ll. 7–9: ‘Accordingly I make my entreaties to your highness that I should be released from so grievous an office, and that the original holder should be compelled to finish it either himself or through some other person, as I renounce (*ἀποταξαμένου / apotaxaménou*) it, being unable to endure any longer an office so severe and onerous [. . .]’ (trans. Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*: 242–43). As regards this papyrus, cf. also Alexander H. Macnaghten, “Local Administration in Egypt under Roman Rule, Fourth to Sixth Centuries AD: The Element of Corruption” (PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 1993): 185; <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;6;904> = TM 35311; <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/35311> [accessed 03.09.2021].

19 In several papyri, a formula like *ἀποτάττομαι πάση βοηθεία νόμων* (‘I renounce all legal help / support’) is used. Cf. (in roughly chronological order):

BGU 17 2685, l. 30 (585 CE), <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/bgu;17;2685> = TM 69756, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/69756> [accessed 03.09.2021];

P. Oxy. 83 5395, l. 6 (592/602 CE), <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;83;5395> = TM 786169, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/786169> [accessed 03.09.2021];

SB 18 13585, l. 4 (sixth/seventh c.), <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;18;13585> = TM 35167, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/35167> [accessed 03.09.2021];

SB 6 9151, l. 3 (c. 600 CE), <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;6;9151> = TM 17861, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/17861> [accessed 03.09.2021];

SPP 20 218, l. 36 (624 CE?), <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/stud.pal;20;218> = TM 18752, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/18752> [accessed 03.09.2021];

SB 18 13173, l. 96–7 (629/644 CE?), <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;18;13173> = TM 18404, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/18404> [accessed 03.09.2021];

apotássomai and *syntássomai* could indicate withdrawal from or submission to someone's command. It could also be employed upon leaving or joining either a group of troops or, more specifically, a commander's entourage (τάξις / *táxis*).²⁰ Hence the terminology used here could also evoke both juridical and military associations.

The idea of a change of allegiance and its legal consequences may also be indicated in the use of the much-discussed term πομπή / *pompa*.²¹ According to the explanations given by the Church Fathers from Tertullian onwards, the *pompa diaboli* (devil's pomp) is simply everything that early Christians considered sinful and associated with the devil. In particular, they used the term to denote the theatre and the circus, pagan cults and their festivals, inappropriate songs and music, and other licentious or cult-related behaviours. Nevertheless, πομπή / *pompa* originally designated a procession associated with a cult or an escort, such as that which followed the emperor, some other important magistrate, or parades conducted for other purposes.²² The candidates for baptism may always have associated this nuance with their act of abjuration. For them, leaving Satan also meant leaving his retinue and joining the cohort of Christ, who was superior to the prince of darkness.²³

A series of outward gestures and signs accompanied the recitation of the formula by the candidates. Theodore described the candidates when he wrote that they stood barefoot on sackcloth. They then removed their outer garments and thus ended up standing there in their underwear. Once stripped, they stretched out their hands towards God and looked towards heaven as if to pray. Finally, they genuflected while keeping the rest of their body erect and said the formula of *apótaxis* and *syntaxis*. In Theodore's congregation, the formula was recited in a comparatively extended version:

P. Paramone 18, l. 29 (incomplete) (641 CE?), <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.paramone;18> = TM 78713, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/78713> [accessed 03.09.2021];

SB 6 8988, ll. 46–7 (647 CE), <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/sb;6;8988> = TM 17841, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/17841> [accessed 03.09.2021];

P. Herm. 35, l. 9 (seventh c.), <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.herm;35> = TM 39260, <https://www.trismegistos.org/text/39260> [accessed 03.09.2021].

The use of ἀποτάττομαι in the papyri would require further investigation.

²⁰ Cf. Hugo Rahner, "Pompa diaboli: Ein Beitrag zur Bedeutungsgeschichte des Wortes πομπή – *pompa* in der urchristlichen Taufliturgie," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 55 (1931): 248–55, largely followed by Franz Bömer, "Pompa," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 21.2, ed. Georg Wissowa (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1952): col. 1992–93. For criticism, cf. Jan Waszink "Pompa Diaboli," *Vigiliae Christianae* 1 (1947); Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage*: 77, n. 11.

²¹ Cf., in general, esp. Bömer, "Pompa."

²² As regards the use of the lexeme cf. Bömer, "Pompa": col. 1879–92. In general, cf. John F. Baldwin and Susanne Heydasch-Lehmann, "Prozession," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 28 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2017).

²³ Cf. esp. Bömer, "Pompa": col. 1990–93.

I abjure Satan and all his angels and all his works and all his service and all his earthly deception; and I engage myself and believe and am baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Then the priest, clad in shining robes, signed the candidates on their forehead with chrism and said: ‘So-and-so is sealed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’. Finally, the godfathers spread an *orarium*, i.e., a linen stole, on the crown of their heads, raised them, and made them stand erect.²⁴

Theodore offered an extensive explanation for each element of this rite. In this context, his comments on the words of *apótaxis* and *syntaxis* are the most relevant:

This is the reason why you say: ‘I abjure Satan.’ Formerly, even if you wished it, you did not dare to make use of these words, because you were afraid of his servitude, but as you have, by a divine decree, received freedom from him through the exorcisms, you proclaim and abjure him with confidence and by your own words, and this is the reason why you say ‘I abjure Satan.’

Through the *apótaxis*, the converts renounced their association with Satan and withdrew from ‘that cruel and ancient contract, which resulted in the calamitous servitude to him’, under which they lived. The new Christians could do this because Christ had freed them from the yoke of the Tyrant, delivered them from his servitude, and granted them a share in his merciful gifts.²⁵

On the surface, Theodore’s explanations may look like a sort of freedom discourse. Indeed, in many baptismal homilies – building upon the New Testament²⁶ – liberation from the devil and sin was described as liberation from slavery.²⁷ However,

24 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica 13*: synopsis (tr. Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*: 34–35; altered).

25 Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica 13*: 5 (Mingana, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*: 37–38; altered).

26 Cf. e.g. Galatians 4:3–7; Hebrews 2:14–15.

27 Cf. e.g., Chrysostom, *Catecheses baptismales* 3.2: 27, 29; 3.3: 3; 3.4: 22. Cf. also Basil of Seleucia, *Homilia paschalis* 3. Sometimes the enslavement by the devil is seen as being replaced by adoption through Christ (cf. Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:1–7); cf., e.g., Pseudo-Hippolytus, *Sermo in sancta theophania* 10: ‘For he who comes down in faith to the laver of regeneration, renounces the devil, and joins himself to Christ; who denies the enemy and makes the confession that Christ is God; who puts off the slavery and puts on the adoption, – he comes up from the baptism brilliant as the sun [cf. Matthew 17:2], flashing forth the beams of righteousness, and, which is indeed the chief thing, he returns a son of God and joint-heir with Christ [cf. Romans 8:17]’ (trans. in Philip Schaff et al., eds. and trans., *Ante-Nicene Fathers. Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, vol. 5 [Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1885]: 237; altered). On this passage (which was pointed out to me by Dr Maria Munkholt Christensen), cf. also Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009): 334–35. As regards the liberation from Satanic debt bondage, cf. the examples in Kinzig, trans., *Asterius: Psalmen-homilien*, vol. 1: 118, n. 70; and Arkandiy Avdokhin, “(Il)Legal Freedom: Christ as Liberator from Satanic Debt Bondage in Greek Homilies and Hymns of Late Antiquity,” in *Slavery in the Late Antique*

this does not, in any way, imply that newly baptized Christians were thought to have thenceforth enjoyed some kind of legal, social, or moral autonomy. On the contrary, in all ancient Christian writings, freedom from the devil meant service to Christ, which consisted in adopting the moral conduct prescribed by the new Master and laid down in the New Testament.²⁸ Theodore concludes his section on the *apótaxis* and *sýntaxis* by asserting:

As when you say ‘I abjure [Satan]’ and keep entirely away from him you indicate never to revert to him nor to wish to associate yourself with him anymore, so also when you say ‘I engage myself’ you show that you will remain steadfastly with God, that you will henceforth be unshakably with him, that you will never separate yourself in any way from him. And you will consider it most precious to be and to live with him and to lead a life that is in harmony with his laws.²⁹

Both relationships, the old one with Satan and the new one with Christ, are regulated by contracts obliging one partner to serve the other. Through the *apótaxis*, one of these contracts is dissolved, and through the *sýntaxis*, a new one is established.³⁰ Neither of the contracts were believed to have been concluded between equal partners. Instead, both the old contract with Satan and the new with Christ are understood as contracts regulating a relationship of asymmetrical dependency in the strongest sense

World, 150–700 CE, eds. Chris L. de Wet, Maijastina Kahlos, and Ville Vuolanto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022): esp. 73–86.

²⁸ Cf. also Avdokhin, “(II)Legal Freedom”: 82.

²⁹ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Homilia catechetica 13*: 13 (Minganga, *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*: 44; altered).

³⁰ In a baptismal catechesis, John Chrysostom also emphasizes the legal aspect of the *apótaxis* / *sýntaxis* but phrases it slightly differently (*Catechesis baptismalis* 3.2: 17): ‘Now let me speak of the mysteries themselves and of the contracts (συνθηκῶν / *synthekôn*) which will be made between yourselves and the Master. In worldly affairs, whenever someone wishes to entrust his business to anyone, a written contract (γραμματαία / *grammateia*) must be completed between the trustee and his client. The same thing holds true now, when the Master is going to entrust to you not mortal things which are subject to destruction and death, but spiritual things which belong to eternity. Wherefore, this [contract] is also called faith, since it possesses nothing visible but all things which can be seen by the eyes of the spirit. Therefore, an agreement must be concluded between the contracting parties. However, it is not on paper nor written in ink; it is in God and written by the Spirit. The words which you utter here are registered in heaven, and the agreements (συνθήκας / *synthékas*) you make by your tongue abide indelibly with the Master.’ (trans. Paul W. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions*, Ancient Christian Writers 31 [New York: Newman Press, 1963]: 49–50, altered). For contract terminology cf. also Chrysostom, *Catecheses baptismales* 2.1: 5; 2.3: 4; 2.4: 20–23; 3.2: 17–22; 3.3: 31–32; Asterius, *Homilia in Psalmos* 27: 2. Sometimes baptism is also described as a marriage contract; cf. Chrysostom, *Catecheses baptismales* 2.3: 6; 3.1: 16. Further examples in Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage*: 78–80; Michel Aubineau, *Hésychius de Jérusalem, Basile de Séleucie, Jean de Béryte – Homélie pascales (cinq homélie inédites): Introduction, texte critique, traduction, commentaire et index*, Sources Chrésiennes 187 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1972): 262–64.

of the term.³¹ However, the new contract no longer leads to the perishment of humankind because of Adam’s and its own sins, but ultimately to its liberation from sin.

John Chrysostom, the most famous preacher of the ancient Greek Church (presbyter in Antioch 386–98 CE; patriarch of Constantinople 398–404/7 CE), expressed this change of dependency even more forcefully in one of his baptismal homilies. He declared:

And I ask you who are about to be initiated to learn these words [of renunciation]. They constitute a contract [συνθήκη / *synthéke*] with the Master. When we are buying slaves,³² we first ask those who are for sale if they are willing to serve us. Christ does the same. When he is about to take you into his service, he first asks [you] if you are willing to put away that cruel and harsh tyrant, and he accepts from you your contracts [συνθήκας / *synthékas*]. He does not force his mastership on you.

And consider God’s loving-kindness [φιλανθρωπίαν / *philanthropían*]. Before we pay out the price, we question the slaves who are for sale, and only when we learn that they are willing [to serve us] do we pay out the price. But Christ does not deal in this way; he paid the price for all of us, his precious blood. ‘You have been bought with a price’, says [Paul] [1 Corinthians 7:23]. And even so, he does not force those to serve him who are unwilling to do so. Unless you are grateful, he says, and are willing of yourself and of your own accord to be enrolled [ἐπιγράφασθαι / *epigraphásasthai*] under me as your Master, I do not force or compel you.

We ourselves would never choose to buy wicked slaves, and even if we ever should so choose, we buy and pay the price because of a bad choice. But when Christ buys reckless and lawless slaves, he pays the price of the first-class slave; rather, he pays a much greater price – so much greater that neither mind nor reason can grasp its greatness. For he has bought us, not by giving the heavens, the earth, and the sea, but what is more valuable than all of these, by paying down his own blood. And after all this, he does not demand witnesses of us nor written documents (ἔγγραφα / *éngrapha*), but he is satisfied with our bare statement; if you say from the heart: ‘I abjure you, Satan, and your pomp,’ he has received all that he asks.³³

31 Regarding the term, cf. Julia Winnebeck et al., “The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency,” *Journal of Global Slavery* 8 (2023): 1–59.

32 The following example is not easy to understand, as the slaves are asked for their willingness to serve and some kind of contract is involved. Perhaps in this case, the servants were, in principle, free and contracted their labour in return for a loan. Cf. *Codex Iustinianus* 8, 42, 20 and Harper, *Slavery in the Roman World*: 382. For the present passage, cf. Chris L. de Wet, *Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 16: ‘Chrysostom also says that possible buyers asked slaves if they wanted to be in their service – this may have happened in some cases, but it was perhaps more a courtesy; essentially slaves did not have any choice in the matter; they had to accept their fate after being sold.’ Furthermore, De Wet, *Preaching Bondage*: 57–58.

33 Chrysostom, *Catechesis baptismalis* 1: 19; trans. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom*: 188–89, altered). Cf. also (Pseudo)Serapion of Thmuis, *Euchologion* 9 (entitled: ‘prayer after the *apotáxis*’): ‘Almighty Lord, seal the assent which has now been made to you by this your slave and preserve unchangeably his character and manner of life in order that he may no longer serve worse things but be a servant [= give worship; λατρεύη / *latreúē*] to the God of truth and be a slave to you, the Maker of all things, so as to be declared perfect and genuinely yours.’ (trans. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*: 462; altered).

The new master does not act in the way we might expect. In economic terms, his behaviour is foolish: he pays the highest price for his new slaves. Christ's buying behaviour is thus out of conformity with the practice of slaves' markets in the Roman Empire. Therefore, Chrysostom describes servitude to Christ as transcending traditional structures of asymmetrical dependency because Christ acts out of loving-kindness for his slaves. In so doing, Christ subverts these structures.

4 The Creed as Contract

The second rite, which was closely connected to the change of religious allegiance through conversion to Christianity, was the 'handing over' and recitation of the creed (*traditio / redditio symboli*). As I mentioned above, instruction in the basics of Christianity was a central aspect of the catechumenate. This entry-level formation comprised an introduction to Christian worship along with the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. It also included an exposition of the Lord's Prayer (which was seen as the archetypal prayer) and of the fundamental tenets of doctrine as contained in the creed. The creed was primarily understood as a summary of the Christian faith, which the candidates had to memorize. Its purpose was not only didactic – it also served as a token of membership: the worshippers recited the creed at the beginning of the eucharistic service as proof that they were full-fledged members of the Christian congregation and were permitted to take part in Mass.

However, in explanations of the creed, especially by Latin authors, we find that it had yet another function. From the late fourth century onward, Latin explanations abound with legal terminology. The creed is often described as a contract or treatise, much like the *syntaxis* in the case of Theodore of Mopsuestia.³⁴ This interpretation rested upon the etymology of the word *symbolum*, which is the technical term for the creed. *Symbolum* was a Greek word, but strangely enough, the Greek Fathers did not use it as a designation for the creed until much later.³⁵ *Symbolon* had a great variety of meanings. Here we are only interested in those that concern the legal sphere. *Sým-*

³⁴ For what follows cf. also Wolfram Kinzig, "Symbolum," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, vol. 5, fasc. 3/4, eds. Robert Dodaro, Cornelius Mayer, and Christof Müller (Basel: Schwabe, 2021): 621–26; Wolfram Kinzig, "Symbolum," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 31, eds. Christian Hornung et al. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2021): 381–93. Apart from the references quoted in the following notes, cf. also Eucherius, *Instructiones ad Salonium* 2: 15 (FaFo § 20); Fulgentius, *Contra Fabianum fragmentum* 36: 2 (FaFo § 35); *Tractatus symboli* (CPL 1751): 6 (FaFo § 673); Pseudo-Facundus of Hermiane, *Epistula fidei catholicae in defensione trium capitulorum* 11–12 (FaFo § 37); Martin of Braga, *De correctione rusticorum* 15 (FaFo § 608); Eligius of Noyon, *De supremo iudicio* 2 (FaFo § 609); Pirminius, *Scarapsus* 12 (FaFo § 610); baptismal interrogations in FaFo § 764 and § 765; Elmenhorst Homily (FaFo § 772); medieval glossaries quoted in FaFo § 78b and h.

³⁵ Cf. Kinzig, "Symbolum," in *Reallexikon*: 387.

bolon designated ‘a tally or token serving as proof of identity and also as guarantee, warrant, official document, contract, or receipt in various contexts; the lexeme can also be used as term for “treaty” or “contract”’.³⁶

In their explanations of the creed, the Latin Fathers always felt obliged to explain the meaning of *symbolum* at some point in their work because the term was largely unknown in Latin outside of catechesis.³⁷ Many Fathers translated *symbolum* as “contract” or “pact”. In many cases, their translations are followed by a religious interpretation. Most often, they assert that *symbolum* is the contract the baptizands made with the Lord,³⁸ witnessed by angels and humans.³⁹

The Fathers use a variety of terms to describe this particular contract. For example, Peter Chrysologus (bishop of Ravenna 424/9–451 CE) repeatedly calls it a ‘contract of faith’ (*pactum fidei*),⁴⁰ a ‘contract of life’ (*vitae pactum*),⁴¹ a ‘contract of hope’ (*spei pactum*),⁴² and a ‘pledge of life’ (*vitae placitum*),⁴³ a ‘pledge of salvation’ (*salutis placitum*),⁴⁴ a ‘pledge of grace’ (*placitum gratiae*),⁴⁵ a ‘pledge of faith’ (*placitum fidei*),⁴⁶ and a ‘guarantee of faith’ (*fidei cautio*).⁴⁷ It is an ‘insoluble bond of faith’ (*fidei insolubile vinculum*) between the believer and God, which grants salvation to the person who professes it.⁴⁸ *Fides*, in these contexts, means “faith”, but it also means “reliability” in contracts made between business partners.

Therefore, in early Christian explanations of the creed, the spheres of business and religion overlap to a large degree. It is difficult to ascertain whether this terminol-

36 FaFo, vol. 1: 4.

37 Cf. Kinzig, “Symbolum,” in *Reallexikon*: 386–87.

38 Only rarely is it defined as a “collection” or “treaty” which the apostles made among each other in composing the creed; cf. Leidrad of Lyon (?), *Explanatio symboli* (FaFo § 49).

39 Cf. Nicetas of Remesiana, *Competentibus ad baptismum instructionis libelli* 5: 13 (FaFo § 14b).

40 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 59: 1–2 (FaFo § 22d1); *Sermo* 60: 18 (FaFo § 22e2).

41 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 57: 16 (FaFo § 22b); *Sermo* 58: 2 (FaFo § 22c); Jesse of Amiens, *Epistula de baptismo* (FaFo § 50).

42 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 59: 18 (FaFo § 22d2).

43 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 60: 18 (FaFo § 22e2).

44 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 59: 18 (FaFo § 22d2).

45 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 59: 1 (FaFo § 22d1).

46 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 60: 2 (FaFo § 22e1). Cf. also Maxentius of Aquileia, *Epistola ad Carolum Magnum Imperatorem de significatu rituum baptismi* (FaFo § 786): *pactum vel complacitum fidei*.

47 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 59: 18 (FaFo § 22d2).

48 Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 58 (FaFo § 22c). Cf. also *Sermo* 59: 1–2 (FaFo 22d1). Isidore of Seville even says that two treaties (*pactiones*) were made; *De origine officiorum (De ecclesiasticis officiis)* 2, 25, 5 (FaFo § 661a): ‘The first treaty is the one in which one renounces the devil, his pomp, and all association with him. The second treaty is the one in which one professes to believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.’ Similarly, Hrabanus Maurus, *Liber de ordine baptismi* 13 (FaFo § 787c).

ogy is used metaphorically or if the preachers thought an *actual* contractual engagement took place in baptism by way of performative utterances.⁴⁹

A good example of this kind of baptismal discourse is found in a sermon by Peter Chrysologus, who admonishes the candidates for baptism as follows:

We are taught that, even in a human pact, a pledge or a contract [*placitum vel pactum*] which contains hopes for immediate or future gain is called a ‘symbol’ [*symbolum*]; nevertheless, duplicate documents [*geminata conscriptio*] always confirm that agreement [*symbolum*] between the two parties, and human wariness is appropriate with respect to a debt obligation [*stipulationis cautum*] lest treachery, always the enemy of pacts [*contractus*], might creep in and deceive. But this is the case between human beings, among whom fraud damages either the one by whom it is done or the one to whom it is done.

But between God and human beings the agreement [*symbolum*] of faith is confirmed by faith alone; it is entrusted not to the letter, but to the spirit; it is entrusted and committed to the heart, not to a sheet of paper, since divine credit [*divinus creditus*] has no need of any human pledge [*humana cautio*]. God does not know how to commit fraud and is incapable of suffering it, since he is not hindered by time, nor restrained by age, nor deceived by concealment; he sees what is hidden, he retains what is stolen, and he possesses what is refused him. For God’s account is always solvent [*deo salva est ratio sua semper*] since there is nowhere for what he has entrusted [*crediderit*] [to another] to be lost. The following is the case for the human being, not for God: what is lost to the one who rejects it is not lost to the one who lends it.

But you say, ‘Why does someone who cannot be deceived demand a pledge [*placitum*]?’ Why does he want an agreement [*symbolum*]?’ He wants it for your sake, not for his; not because he has any doubts, but so that you might believe. He wants an agreement since the one who entered into your death does not disdain entering into a pact [*contractus*] with you. He wants an agreement because although he is always lending everything he wants to be in debt [himself]. He wants an agreement because now he is calling you, not to a [present] reality, but to faith; through the present pledge [*placitum*] he also entices and invites you to future gain.⁵⁰

In this excerpt of Chrysologus’ sermon, we again see that God’s behaviour is economically eccentric: unlike human actors, he demands no written agreement and grants us all the profit.

Explanations such as these were part of the *traditio symboli*, i.e., the ceremony in which the bishop disclosed the content of the creed. As I indicated above, following its disclosure, the creed was to be learnt by heart and recited in front of the congregation shortly before the actual baptismal service. The liturgical framing of the creed and the solemn setting of the *traditio* and *redditio symboli*, which was accompanied by the

⁴⁹ An analogous semantic field which poses a similar hermeneutical challenge is that of Christ as liberator from Satanic debt bondage, which is based on Colossians 2:14. Cf. the discussion in Claudia Rapp, “Safe-Conducts to Heaven: Holy Men, Mediation and the Role of Writing,” in *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown*, eds. Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis (London: Routledge, 2009): 191–95; Claudia Rapp, “Late Antique Metaphors for the Shaping of Christian Identity: Coins, Seals and Contracts,” in *Fuzzy Boundaries: Festschrift für Antonio Loprieno*, vol. 2, eds. Hans Amstutz et al. (Hamburg: Widmaier, 2015): 731–36; Avdokhin, “(Il)Legal Freedom”.

⁵⁰ Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 62: 3 (FaFo § 22g); cf. also Jesse of Amiens, *Epistula de baptismo* (FaFo § 50).

insistent admonitions of the preachers not to write it down lest it fell into the hands of non-believers,⁵¹ led to the sacralization of the credal text. I cannot address the historical complexity around this development in detail here. Suffice it to say that regardless of the bishops’ warnings, creeds *were* written down and used as charms. They were also recited as protective sayings by Christians on dangerous journeys and to enhance the efficacy of medicinal herbs.⁵²

5 The Combination of *apótaxis* and the Creed

Occasionally, the *redditio* seems to have replaced the *syntaxis* in the Eastern Church. This substitution appears, for example, to have been the case in Jerusalem.⁵³ We have a description of the rites in a series of *Mystagogical Catecheses*, which may, perhaps, be ascribed to Cyril of Jerusalem (bishop 348–386/7) and may have been preached in the 380s. Here the candidates entered the antechamber of the baptistery, faced towards the west, stretched out their hands and said: ‘I renounce you, Satan, and all your works and all your pomp and all your service.’ The preacher explained that the west was the region of darkness, the realm of the prince of night.⁵⁴ This act entailed the annulment of the covenant (*diathéke*, *synthéke*) humankind had concluded with Satan after the Fall:

Therefore, when you renounce Satan, trampling on your entire covenant with him, you break that ancient compact with the underworld [cf. Isaiah 28:15], God’s paradise is opened to you, [the paradise] which he planted in the East [cf. Genesis 2:8], whence our first father was banished because of [his] transgression [cf. Genesis 3:23]; a symbol of this was your turning from West to East, the place of lights. Thereafter you were told to say, ‘I believe in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, and in one baptism of repentance.’⁵⁵

Here it appears that the creed replaced the simple formula: ‘I engage myself, Christ, to you’. The candidates were then led into the baptistery itself, where they were asked, one by one, whether they believed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Following an affirmative answer, they were immersed in the water.⁵⁶ Thus the creed appears to have been doubled: once in declaratory form in lieu of the *syntaxis* and once in interrogatory form at the baptism proper.

51 Cf. numerous references in Wolfram Kinzig, *Neue Texte und Studien zu den antiken und frühmittelalterlichen Glaubensbekenntnissen*, Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 132 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017): 340, n. 54.

52 Cf. Wolfram Kinzig, *A History of Early Christian Creeds*, De Gruyter Textbook (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024): 540–542.

53 For what follows, cf. Juliette Day, *The Baptismal Liturgy of Jerusalem: Fourth- and Fifth Century Evidence from Palestine, Syria and Egypt*, Liturgy, Worship and Society (London: Routledge, 2007): 48–65.

54 Cf. (Pseudo-)Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogia 1*: 2, 4–5, 11.

55 (Pseudo-)Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogia 1*: 9 (FaFo § 631a).

56 Cf. (Pseudo-)Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogia 2*: 4 (FaFo § 631b).

By and large, however, the number of occurrences where the brief formula of *śyntaxis* was replaced by the much more elaborate creed or credal questions in the Eastern Church is limited.⁵⁷ There are also some cases where both the formula of *śyntaxis* and the creed (or some credal formula) were recited.⁵⁸

In the Latin West, however, we find no equivalent to the Greek formula of *śyntaxis* at all – it appears never to have been used: instead, here, the creed or credal questions followed upon the renunciation. Sometimes, the *redditio symboli* and the reply to the renunciation with either the entire creed or some briefer formula were two separate rites. In other places, the *redditio* and the *śyntaxis* may, in fact, have coincided.⁵⁹ As a result of this process, the two separate legal discourses about the meaning of baptism, that of the *apótaxis* and that of the creed as *symbolum*, were also amalgamated.

The combination of *apótaxis* and credal questions persisted in the Roman church over the centuries and is still found in the present Roman Missal. In its rite of baptism, the Missal contains the following dialogue:

Celebrant: Do you renounce Satan?

Parents and Godparents: I do.

Celebrant: And all his works?

Parents and Godparents: I do.

Celebrant: And all his empty show?

Parents and Godparents: I do.⁶⁰

These inquiries are followed by the credal questions.

⁵⁷ Cf., perhaps, also Narsai of Nisibis (discussion in Witkamp, *Tradition and Innovation*: 193–99).

⁵⁸ Cf., e.g., canon 19 of the *Canons of Hippolytus* (Northern Egypt?, 336–40 CE or later; FaFo § 606; sequence: *apótaxis* – anointing with the oil of exorcism – *śyntaxis* – credal questions and immersions); *Testamentum Domini* 2:18 (Syria, late fourth–fifth c. CE; cf. FaFo § 615; sequence: *apótaxis* – anointing with the oil of exorcism and final exorcism – *śyntaxis* – credal questions and immersions); *Apostolic Constitutions* 7, 41, 3–7 (Antioch, c. 380 CE; FaFo § 182c); the *Ordo of Constantinople* in the *Barberini Euchologion* (seventh c. or earlier; FaFo § 677a, b).

⁵⁹ This depended on the position of the *redditio* and of the renunciation in the liturgy. In many medieval Western sacramentaries, the *traditio* / *redditio* preceded the baptism as a separate rite. During baptism, the renunciation was followed by credal questions, which led to a doubling of the confession. For the various options, cf. Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage*: 94–119; Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism*: 201–54.

⁶⁰ International Commission on English in the Liturgy, ed., *The Roman Ritual: The Order of Baptism of Children. English Translation According to the Second Typical Edition (For Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America)* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020): 27. There is another dialogue as an alternative option.

6 Summary Remarks

In conclusion, allow me to summarize the results of our glimpse into the rites and interpretations of early Christian baptism:

1. Baptism in the Early Church constituted a change of religious allegiance. Conversion involved replacing one system of asymmetrical dependency (that of depending on the traditional gods) with another (that of dependency upon Christ).
2. In the Greek Church, the catechumens seeking to change allegiance were ritually prepared by exorcisms and performed through the rite of abjuration to Satan and his dominion and a pledge to Christ. Their change of allegiance was then sealed by baptism. In the Latin Church, the pledge to Christ consisted not in a separate pledge formula but in the recitation of the creed or in answering questions related to the creed.
3. In order to explain this exchange of religious dependency in baptism, the preachers in the late antique Church used two overlapping discourses of dependency: one was attached to the Greek rite of *apótaxis* and *syntaxis*; the other was attached to the creed.
4. Both the relationship between Satan and his followers (often identified with the old gods, which were now seen as demons) and that of Christ and his believers were described as patronage, slavery, or military service for which terms from contractual law were used.
5. Consequently, asymmetrical dependency characterized the old relationship with Satan, but the new relationship with Christ, established through baptism, was by no means symmetrical either. On the contrary, it required total obedience and trust by the believers, which they were to express via certain moral behaviours and through their faith in the salvific action of Christ as formulated in the creed. However, unlike the relationship between Satan and his followers, that between Christ as master and believers as his slaves was marked by Christ’s unconditional love for his servants.

This background may help explain the enormous significance that Dioscorus, the protagonist of our initial story, attached to this transition. It clarifies why he initially hesitated to fully embrace the creed, and why he eventually interpreted his paralysis as a punishment for not having recited the formula. Dioscorus ignored the fact that his divine owner had changed from Satan to Christ. As a result, he suffered divine retribution.

On the surface, the religious systems of dependency that I have described appear to have had no immediate bearing on late-antique social systems of dependency: free persons remained free, and slaves remained slaves. Nevertheless, the central commandment in the new moral code, the commandment to love one’s neighbour, also included slaves. For early Christians, slaves, just like all other marginalized and oppressed people, were welcome in the Church as full-fledged members and were in-

vited to share in its promises of salvation. John Chrysostom expressed this new state of affairs in his inimitable style:

Did you see the abundance of his goodness? Did you see the munificence of his invitation? ‘Come to me’, he says, ‘all you who labour and are burdened’ [Matthew 11:28]. His invitation is one of kindness, his goodness is beyond description. ‘Come to me all’, not only rulers but also their subjects, not only the rich but also the poor, not only the free but also slaves, not only men but also women, not only the young but also the old, not only those of sound body but also the maimed and those with mutilated limbs, ‘all of you’, he says, ‘come!’ For such are the Master’s gifts; he knows no distinction of slave and free, nor of rich and poor, but all such inequality is cast aside. ‘Come’, he says, ‘all you who labour and are burdened.’⁶¹

Thus, a new standard of ethical behaviour was established. Whether, in the wake of the Christianization of Europe, this did indeed lead to the formation of a more humane society would be the subject of another paper.⁶²

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⁶¹ John Chrysostom, *Catechesis baptismalis* 3.1: 27 (trans. Harkins, *St. John Chrysostom*: 33, altered). Similarly, *Catechesis baptismalis* 2.3: 4.

⁶² Cf. some reflections in Wolfram Kinzig, “Die Ausbreitung des Christentums als Humanisierungsprozess. Eusebios verteidigt die Neuheit seiner Religion,” in *Eusebius, Porphyry, and Augustine in the Struggle for Interpretational Sovereignty*, ed. Irmgard Männlein-Robert (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming).

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Interactions between Religion and Politics

Ludwig David Morenz

Can the Subaltern . . . Write? Rediscovering the “He”-tribe from Serabit el Khadim and the Invention of Alphabetic Writing 4000 years ago

When we leave our modern Post-Babel¹ behind, even the humanities gradually turn monoglot. This postmodern *evolution of simplicity* might seem inevitable, and on balance, it promises more gains than losses. In this paper I am going to discuss the origin of alphabetic writing – a great simplification of graphic communication we still benefit from today. This process happened in the cultural periphery of South-Western Sinai within a sphere of cross-cultural contacts, and here we'll pay special attention to socio-economic aspects in an early *evolution of simplicity*. Thus, my specific question will be: Can the “subaltern” (not only speak but) write?

1 While in Biblical tradition the mythological motive of a Babylonian language confusion is considered disastrous (esp. Genesis 11:1–9; Christoph Uehlinger, *Weltreich und “eine Rede”*: Eine neue Deutung der sogenannten Turmbauerzählung (Genesis 11, 1–9) [Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 1990], see also Christoph Uehlinger, “Babel, Pflingsten – und Rassentheorien: religiöse Bewertungen von Sprachenvielfalt und ihre Nachwirkungen,” in *Sprache(n) verstehen*, eds. Elvira Glaser, Agnes Kolmer, Martin Meyer, and Elisabeth Stark [Zurich: vdf Hochschulverlag, 2014]: 151–78), others point to the benefits of variety in languages, e.g., Georg Steiner, *After Babel*, 3rd ed. (1975; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). The motive of separation of languages can be traced back in Egypt to the time of Pharaoh Amen-hotep III (Jaroslav Černý, “Thot as Creator of Languages,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 34 [1948]: 121–22; Serge Sauneron, “La Différenciation des Langages d’après la Tradition Égyptienne,” *Le Bulletin de l’Institut français d’Archéologie Orientale* 60 [1960]: 31–41), probably reflecting the inter-nationalization in this period; see e.g., Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, eds., *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). In Ancient Mesopotamia the tradition of this mythological motive is older, more complex, and probably original (Manfred Krebernik, “Zur Entwicklung des Sprachbewusstseins im Alten Orient,” in *Das geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient*, ed. Claus Wilcke [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007]: 39–61; Catherine Mittermayer, *Enmer-kara und der Herr von Arata: Ein ungleicher Wettstreit* [Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2009]). It corresponds with a rather polyglot environment (Sumerian, Akkadian, various other Semitic languages, and Elamite as well as Huritic, while during the second millennium Indo-European Hittite and other languages also became relevant) from the fourth millennium onwards (Pascal Attinger and Markus Wäfler, eds., *Mesopotamien. Späturuk-Zeit und Frühdynastische Zeit*, vol. 1, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 160 [Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 1998]).

Note: Graphics and photographs by the Bonn Mission to Serabit, mostly by our epigraphist David Sabel. I am grateful to Roland Enmarch (University of Liverpool) for comments on an earlier draft.

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In this paper, I employ some new terms like “sacrotope”, with a meaning I consider self-evident. For clarity, however, the term sacrotope designates a sacral domain. In our context, it refers to the plateau of Serabit el Khadim, which was culturally formed as the sacral area of the Egyptian gods Hathor and Ptah and their Canaanite counterparts Ba^ʿalat and El. Within this interdisciplinary context, I avoid discussing chronological issues. For general understanding, it might be sufficient to state that the Egyptological term “Middle Kingdom” roughly equals the Near Eastern “middle bronze age”. We are dealing with the first half of the second millennium BCE which might be considered a beginning of a modernity, at least from a perspective of an archaeology of media.

Analyzing the origin of alphabetic writing from a perspective of an archaeology of media and an archaeology of mentality, I focus on the fertility of cross-cultural contacts between Egyptians and Canaanites 4.000 years ago. Contrary to expectation, this new way of writing was originally not just a logocentric *evolution of simplicity* but was also combined with *conspicuous communication* within the sphere of visual culture.² Accordingly, we can detect various cultural elements characteristic for its place of origin: the mining area of Serabit el Khadim in South-West Sinai around 1900 BCE (Fig. 1a–d).



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Fig. 1a–d: Mountainous landscape around Serabit el Khadim.

² Ludwig David Morenz, *Kultur-Poetik in der Mittelbronzezeit. Aspekte der frühesten Alphabetschrift im kulturellen Schnittfeld Ägypter-Kanaanäer*, Studia Sinaitica 5 (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2022).

Since it started in 2011, our Bonn Egyptological team has managed to record all the early alphabetic inscriptions in South-West Sinai and the Nile Valley anew.³ The genesis of alphabetic writing in the early second millennium BCE can be considered the most significant media development of the Near Eastern middle bronze age.⁴ It eventually brought sociocultural benefits highly relevant even today in our modern world: East and West, North and South.⁵ The connection between the ancient and modern worlds is shown here in a highly simplified graph concentrated on the letter Semitic Alef, which is equivalent to the Greek Alpha (Fig. 2).

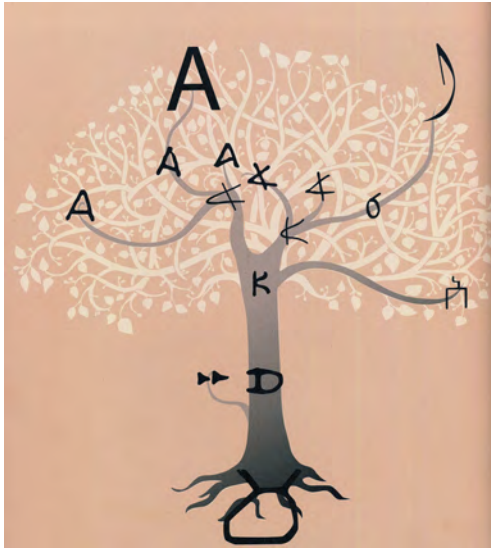


Fig. 2: Deep history of the letter A. Taken from Morenz, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift*: 6.

What turned out to be incredibly successful over a period of 4.000 years and is used today on all continents of the world might, however, have started simply as a dis-

³ Ludwig David Morenz, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift. Die frühesten Inschriften und ihr kanaänisch-ägyptischer Entstehungshorizont im Zweiten Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Studia Sinaitica 3 (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2019).

⁴ Herbert Donner called it ‘ein Jahrhundertproblem’; Herbert Donner, review of *The Protosinaitic Inscriptions and their Decipherment*, by ed. William Foxwell Albright, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 12, no. 2 (1967): 273.

⁵ For an overview see e.g., William Bright and Peter T. Daniels, eds. *The World’s Writing Systems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Still worth reading is Ignace Jay Gelb, *A Study of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), as well as Johannes Friedrich, *Geschichte der Schrift* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1966). For overviews on early alphabetic writing, see Joseph Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982); Reinhard G. Lehmann, “Alphabet,” *Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet*, 2006, <http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/10112/> [accessed 11.03.2024].

tinctly provincial simplification of the complex Egyptian phono-semantic hieroglyphic writing system. From a global perspective, this product of an *evolution of simplicity*⁶ (i.e., *Occam's razor*⁷ in social practice⁸) turned out to be highly attractive to users with varying cultural backgrounds. The detachment from its original sociocultural context in South-West Sinai eventually turned alphabetic writing into a technical tool (and medium) for simply encoding language phonetically.⁹ Nevertheless, here I will focus on its original sociocultural context and, thus, the combination of an *evolution of simplicity* with *conspicuous communication*.

In contrast to phono-semantic hieroglyphic writing,¹⁰ alphabetic writing is structurally new in the sense that its function is purely phonocentric. It is based on the simple gra-phonetic equation: one sign (graphic) represents one sound (phonetic), nothing more, nothing less.

This new type of writing was developed by Canaanites in South-West Sinai around 1900 BCE. The individual names of the inventors are lost to us, but we can pin down the place of origin with surprising precision: the sacrotope of the Egyptian goddess Hathor in the mountainous area of the South-West Sinai. Resuming “international” socio-economic activities after a break of some decades, Egyptian mining expeditions went to Serabit to bring back turquoise and copper from the early twelfth dynasty onwards.¹¹

6 For the concept of “evolution of simplicity” in archaeology, see David Wengrow, “The Evolution of Simplicity: Aesthetic Labour and Social Change in the Neolithic Near East,” *World Archaeology* 33, no. 2 (2001): 168–88; Norman Yoffee, “The Evolution of Simplicity,” review of *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, by ed. James C. Scott, *Current Anthropology* 42, no. 5 (2001): 765–67. It is also interesting to consider it in the context of an archaeology of media.

7 For the term and its history: Wolfgang Hübener, “Occam’s Razor not Mysterious,” *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 27 (1983): 73–92.

8 This aspect was rather important in the anthropologist’s Jack Goody’s *Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

9 However, there always remained a figurative dimension in written communication, see Josef Vachek, *Written Language: General Problems and Problems of English*, *Janua Linguarum. Series Critica* 14 (The Hague: Mouton, 1973); Josef Vachek and Philip A. Luelsdorff, eds., *Written Language Revisited* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 1989).

10 Wolfgang Schenkel, *Die hieroglyphische Schriftlehre und die Realität der hieroglyphischen Graphien*, vol. 5, *Sitzungsberichte der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-Historische Klasse* 138 (Leipzig: Verlag der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003); Pascal Vernus, “Idéogramme et Phonogramme à l’épreuve de la Figurativité: Les Intermittences de l’Homophonie,” in *Philosophers and Hieroglyphs*, eds. Carla Bazzanella and Lucia Morra (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2003); for the various types of signs used in the Egyptian hieroglyphic system, see Stéphane Polis and Serge Rosmorduc, “The Hieroglyphic Sign Functions. Suggestions for a Revised Taxonomy,” in *Fuzzy Boundaries. Festschrift für Antonio Loprieno*, vol. 1, eds. Hans Amstutz, Andreas Dorn, Matthias Müller, Miriam Ronsdorf, and Sami Uljas (Hamburg: Widmaier Verlag, 2015): 149–74.

11 Inscriptions in Ayn Soukhna prove the Egyptian expeditions for turquoise to have restarted already in the eleventh dynasty under Menhu-hotep II (Mahmud Abd el-Raziq, Georges Castel, Pierre Tallet, and Victor Ghica, eds., *Les Inscriptions d’Ayn Soukhna*, *Mémoires publiés par les membres de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale* 122 [Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 2002]).

That socio-economic process is documented by various lists containing titles and names of participants¹² monumentalized on stelae erected in front of the sanctuary of the goddess Hathor (Fig. 3a, b).¹³



Fig. 3a, b: Middle Kingdom stela S 112 and row of twelfth dynasty stelae in front of the sanctuary.

These stelae express a distinct corporate identity shared by these Egyptian expeditions to the mountains of Sinai. They also imply a certain sacralization in relation to the goddess Hathor beyond known levels of decorum seen in contemporary examples from the Nile Valley.¹⁴

¹² Karl-Joachim Seyfried, *Beiträge zu den Expeditionen des Mittleren Reiches in die Ostwüste*, Hildesheimer Ägyptologische Beiträge 15 (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981); Pierre Tallet, “D’Ayn Soukna à la péninsule du Sinaï: le mode opératoire des expéditions égyptiennes à la fin de la XIIe dynastie,” *Cahiers de Recherche de l’Institut de Papyrologie et d’Égyptologie de Lille* 31 (2016–2017): 179–98.

¹³ Dominique Valbelle and Charles Bonnet, *Le Sanctuaire d’Hathor, Maîtresse de la Turquoise. Sérabit El-Khadim au Moyen-Empire* (Paris: Édition A&J Picard, 1996).

¹⁴ The concept of decorum was introduced into Egyptology by John Baines, “Restricted Knowledge, Hierarchy and Decorum,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 27 (1990): 1–23.

South-West Sinai was a rather foreign area to the Egyptians, who generally left the Nile Valley only temporarily and for specific economic reasons.¹⁵ Thus, a rock picture of the twelfth dynasty in Rod el Air (Fig. 4) shows the Egyptian Gebu in a scene expressing sacralization (i.e., the offering of turquoise-“bread”¹⁶) and dominance (grabbing the horns of the gazelle combined with a hunting scene, which is evidenced by the depiction of dogs).¹⁷



Fig. 4: Rock picture of the Egyptian Gebu, Rod el Air (+ inscription to the left).

Through religious conceptualization and its monumentalization in visual culture, the Middle Kingdom Egyptians transformed what was not home, a place completely different from the Nile Valley, into some kind of Egyptianizing autotope.¹⁸ Thus, the cultural identity of the Egyptian expeditions was enforced by a new type of *religion of expeditions* focusing on “Hathor, mistress of turquoise”.¹⁹ For example, the mining area in Serabit, South-West Sinai, was sacralized by the Egyptians, who built the temple of Hathor there (Fig. 5).

¹⁵ In the words of Ptah-wer (hieroglyphic rock stela S 54, twelfth dynasty; Morenz, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift*: 58 and fig. 16) it reads: ‘who reaches the borders of the mountainous / foreign lands with his feet, who travels through the secret wadis, who reaches the back-end of the unknown.’

¹⁶ Discussion of this Serabitian iconographic motive in Morenz, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift*: 59.

¹⁷ Discussion in Morenz, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift*: 58–59, Figs. 17 and 18. According to Roland Enmarch (personal communication) this is vaguely reminiscent of Hatnub graffito 52 (Rudolf Anthes, *Die Felseninschriften von Hatnub: Nach den Aufnahmen Georg Möllers*, Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens 9 [Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1928]: 78–80), now apparently destroyed, which seems also to juxtapose hunting with sacral (mortuary) activity. The inscription was already badly damaged in the early twentieth century.

¹⁸ This is the opposite to a *heterotope* discussed by Michel Foucault and others.

¹⁹ Discussion in Ludwig David Morenz, “Der Türkis und seine Herrin. Die Schöpfung einer besonderen Expeditionsreligion im Mittleren Reich,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 38 (2009): 195–209.



Fig. 5: Temple of Hathor in Serabit.

This rather intensive building activity, although just a side-product of the Egyptian’s mining activity, was not only an intellectual effort but also an economic one. Egyptian expeditions invested a significant workforce and time in stabilizing Egyptian cultural identity in the distant mountains of South-West Sinai. Technically speaking, the Egyptians culturally transformed a foreign, exotic territory into an Egyptian autotope primarily by sacralizing the area.²⁰

This Hathoric “house of the sistrum” is the largest Egyptian temple outside the Nile Valley, with a building history spanning nearly 1.000 years – providing a kind of sacral monumentality, but one that was a work in progress and open to various additions.²¹ In architectural semantics, this temple was conceptualized as a mine of turquoise (Fig. 6) from which the goddess “Hathor, mistress of turquoise” appeared precisely as turquoise.²² This new Egyptian expedition theology of “Hathor, mistress of turquoise” was specifically designed for the socio-economic situation of the Egyptian expeditions to South-West Sinai.

²⁰ The archaeological literature on landscape is vast, for an overview see e.g., Barbara Bender, “Subverting the Western Gaze: Mapping Alternative Worlds,” in *The Archaeology and Anthropology of Landscape: Shaping Your Landscape*, eds. Robert Layton and Peter Ucko (London: Routledge, 1999): 31–46; Christopher Tilley and Kate Cameron-Daum, *An Anthropology of Landscape. The Extraordinary in the Ordinary* (London: UCL Press, 2017).

²¹ An overview is provided by Valbelle and Bonnet, *Le Sanctuaire d’Hathor*.

²² Ludwig David Morenz, *Das Hochplateau von Serabit el-Chadim. Landschaftsarchäologie und Kulturpoetik*, *Studia Sinaitica* 1 (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014): 84–140.

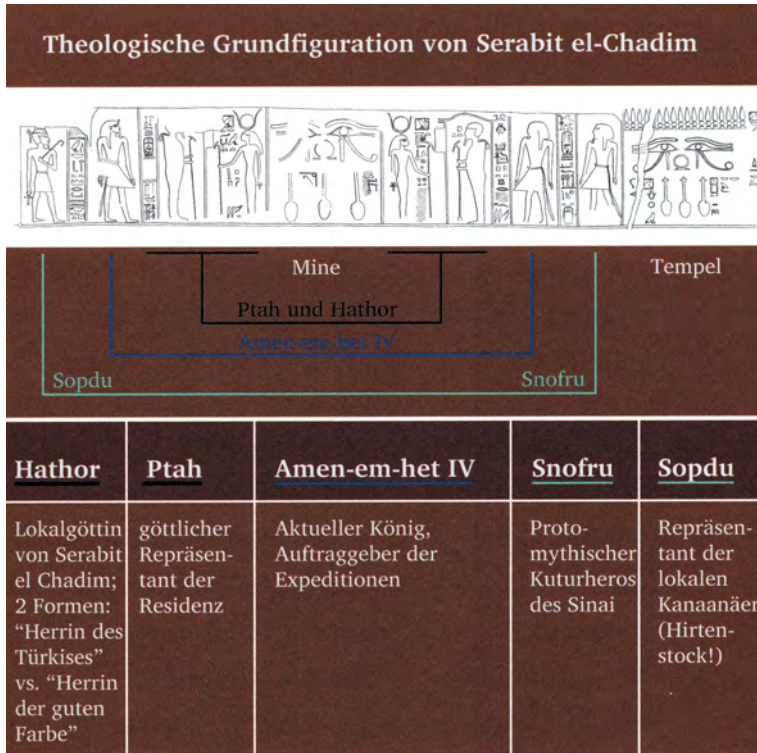


Fig. 6: Relief S 124 showing the Serabitian theology of turquoise.

Compared with the Early Dynastic Period or the Old Kingdom, we can detect a remarkable paradigm shift in Egyptian perceptions and depictions of the Canaanites in South-West Sinai, indicating a completely different scenario of socio-cultural interaction.²³ During the Middle Kingdom, Egyptian monumental representation shifted from the iconic scene of *Smiting the Enemy* to cooperation based on intercultural contacts and contracts (Fig. 7).²⁴

Within this context of changing political iconography, Canaanite leaders such as the 'brother of the ruler of Retjenu Khabi-dadum'²⁵ (Fig. 8) are shown riding the donkey.

²³ Ludwig David Morenz, *Die Genese der Alphabetschrift. Ein Markstein ägyptisch-kanaanäischer Kulturkontakte*, Kulturgeschichtliche Beiträge zur Ägyptologie 3 (Würzburg: Ergon, 2011): 75–78.

²⁴ Morenz, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift*: 121–23, 207–15, 249–63, 268–69.

²⁵ Jaroslav Černý, "Semites in Egyptian Mining Expeditions in Sinai," *Archiv Orientalni* 7, no. 3 (1935): 384–89.

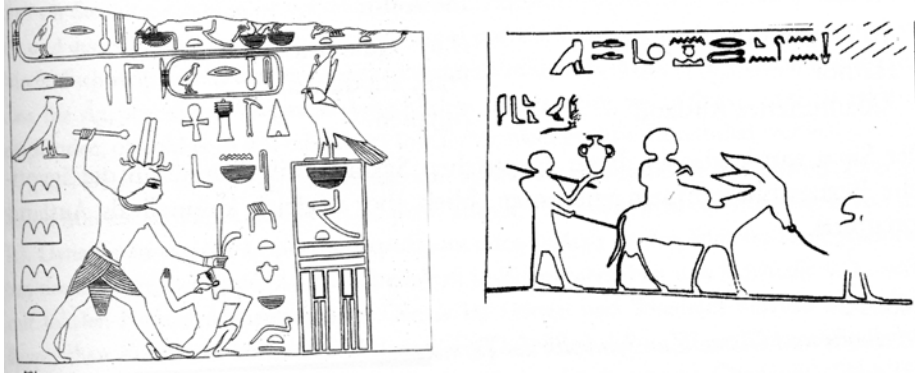


Fig. 7: From subjugation to cooperation, changes in Egyptian depictions of Canaanites in Serabit.



Fig. 8: Khabi-dadum; lower part from the stela S 112.

Within a Canaanite and, more broadly West Semitic context, the riding of a donkey, when depicted in iconography, implies high social status that was particularly respected by the Egyptians:²⁶ it points to a scenario of cooperation based on contracts. During our work, the Bonn Archeological Team discovered some of these contracts written on the rocks of Rod el Air.²⁷

Furthermore, the cooperation between the Egyptians and the Canaanites generated intercultural equations of gods, which is indeed a remarkable product of cross-cultural interaction during the early second millennium.²⁸ Figure 9 shows that some Canaanites

²⁶ Morenz, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift*: 60–62.

²⁷ Morenz, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift*: 248–63.

²⁸ Ludwig David Morenz, *Ein Trigger für “unsere” Alphabetschrift. Die kanaanäisch-ägyptischen Göttergleichungen El-Ptah und Bacalat-Hathor* (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2019).

living in South-West Sinai equated their god El with the Egyptian god Ptah.²⁹ A rock stela on the *Canaanite* mine L in the area of Serabit³⁰ depicts El in the Egyptian iconography of Ptah, while the alphabetic inscription labels him as El (S 351, Fig. 9).



Fig. 9: Rock stela S 351.

The image implies a remarkable knowledge of the Egyptian iconography of the god Ptah, while stylistic analysis shows some rather non-Egyptian features. At mine L and in its vicinity, there was no Egyptian representation of Ptah visible, so the figure of the god was probably drawn from memory. Thus, iconography in Canaanite practice on this stela indicates a remarkably high degree of familiarity with Egyptian visual culture by this anonymous Canaanite scribe. That assertion also holds for the Hathoric face on the stela S 355 (Fig. 10).³¹

²⁹ Ludwig David Morenz, *GOTT – Zum Ursprung von El im mittelbronzezeitlichen Serabit el Chadim*, Hans-Bonnet-Studien zur Ägyptischen Religion 1 (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2023).

³⁰ This mine is numbered as L = XIII. Here we find various Canaanite alphabetic inscriptions but no Egyptian ones. So, it seems likely that Canaanites worked here probably on their own.

³¹ Ludwig David Morenz, *Medienarchäologische Sondagen zum Ursprung "unseres" Alphabets vor 4000 Jahren. Auf den Spuren des sinaitischen 'He-Stammes', der levantinischen Kanaanäer und der Ägypter im SW-Sinai des Mittleren Reiches*, Studia Sinaitica 4 (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2021): 61–62. Here we

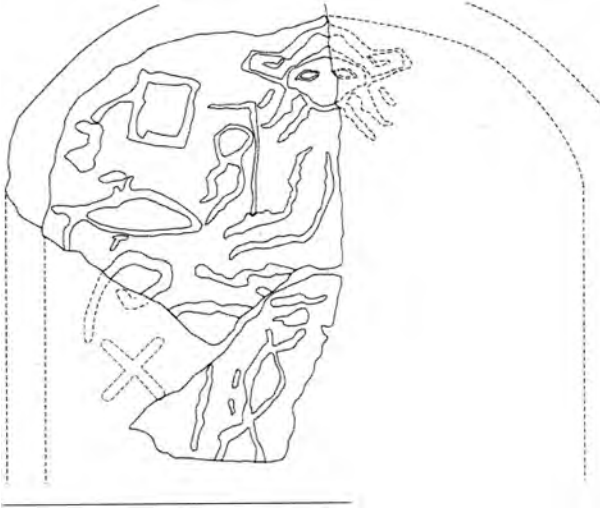


Fig. 10: Fragmentary rock stela S 355.

Based on the relationship between the Egyptian god Ptah and the Canaanite El, along with that between the Egyptian Hathor and the Canaanite Ba^calat, we can detect two Egypto-Canaanite equations of gods. Religion mattered. Such an intercultural sacral equation concerned the core of cultural identity. It implies significant dynamics in culture. However, these equations seem to have been of relevance only for the Canaanites, while the Egyptians seem to have paid no attention to them. The attraction of culture and media was in favour of the Egyptians. There might have also been a degree of dependency and imbalance in the socio-economic sphere, but the poetics of culture (Stephen Greenblatt) seem to indicate intensive dynamics in negotiating dependency.

Imagery, and the writing on the rock stela at the entrance to the *Canaanite* mine L, appear as a fascinating cultural hybrid between the Old Canaanite and the Egyptian culture in South-West Sinai. These Canaanites adopted Egyptian prototypes quite closely. However, they did so to express their own cultural identity. For modelling the underlying cultural negotiation process that may have taken place, we might adopt (post-)modern post-colonial models / theories such as Homi K. Bhabha's *Hybridity* or Édouard Glissant's *Creolization*.³²

The equation of the Canaanite goddess Ba^calat with the Egyptian Hathor was particularly important for the relations between the Egyptians and the Canaanites during

can interpret the two signs below the Hathoric head as alphabetic letters Pe + Naḥaš reading pn – “face” – which stands in close intermedial correspondence with the depicted Hathoric face.

³² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Édouard Glissant, *Philosophie de la Relation: Poésie en Étendue* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2009).

Middle Kingdom (middle bronze age in Levantine terminology) in Serabit. Thus, the bilingual sphinx from the temple of Hathor (Fig. 11a, b) mentions in Egyptian hieroglyphs “Hathor, mistress of turquoise” (*hw.t-hr nb.t mfkz.t*) while the Canaanite alphabetic inscriptions refer to Ba^calat.

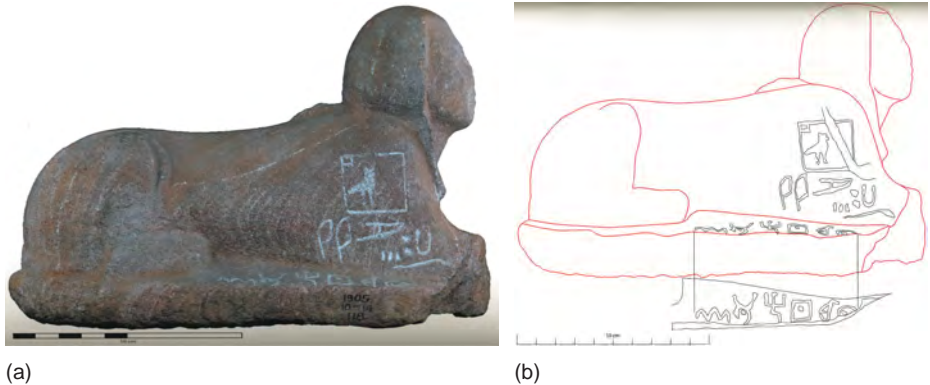


Fig. 11a, b: Canaanized Sphinx S 345, BM EA 41748.

We can assume that the Egyptian universe of media, especially its visual culture – hieroglyphic writing and images – was highly attractive to the middle bronze Canaanites, who lacked such sophisticated graphic tools of *High Culture*. Egyptian media might have been particularly attractive to the Bedouins in South-West Sinai. Yet, its influence is also apparent in the middle bronze Levantine city-states. In the middle bronze Levantine, various images were created,³³ and some examples are known of the use of hieroglyphic as well as hieratic writing.³⁴ This attraction to Egyptian media technology as well as the Egypto-Canaanite process of equating gods,³⁵ and especially the combination of both, triggered the genesis of alphabetic writing in South-West Sinai around 1900 BCE.

Based on less than 30 letters, alphabetic writing is an enormous simplification of Egyptian hieroglyphic writing. This functional simplification does not mean writing

33 For an overview, see Othmar Keel, Christoph Uehlinger and Florian Lippke, *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole. Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen*, 5th ed. (1992; repr., Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2010).

34 Nadav Na'aman, “Egyptian Centres and the Distribution of the Alphabet in the Levant,” *Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University* 47, no. 1 (2020): 29–54.

35 Morenz, *Ein Trigger für “unsere” Alphabetschrift*; for further reading, see Jan Assmann, “Translating Gods: Religion as a Factor of Cultural (Un)Translatability,” in *The Translatability of Cultures. Figurations of the Space Between*, eds. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1996): 25–36.

simply turned into a *cold*³⁶ media technology: it also generated and expressed cultural identity. The origin of alphabetic writing in the Hathoric sacrotope of Serabit el Khadim left its distinct cultural impression in the letter Alef – א, a cow head – which implies a reference to the Egypto-Canaanite goddess Hathor-Ba^calat. The goddess was depicted in various temple reliefs, on stelae, or at the entrance of mines with cow horns, which was typical of Egyptian iconography.³⁷ Thus, the first letter of Canaanite alphabetic writing in its original cultural context shows a strong sacral imprint with a distinct reference to the Egypto-Canaanite goddess Hathor-Ba^calat.

The figurativeness of some signs, especially the Alef, mattered for the Canaanite inventors and early users of alphabetic writing in the Serabit area around 1900 BCE. Not only the letters but sometimes even the layout of this early alphabetic writing generated meaning and fostered conspicuous communication. The early alphabetic dichotomy between the purely phonographic usage of letters and the figurative encoding of meaning might seem counterintuitive, but it demonstrates that the origin of alphabetic writing was not merely an economic simplification. It had an additional function. Through the contextualization of alphabetic development, we can detect two different trends: a) economic simplification, and b) the semiotic encoding of meaning. Consequently, there was indeed not only an administrative but also a distinctly sacral and commemorative usage of early alphabetic writing.

The scribe’s interest in expressing cultural meaning had an impact on the layout of these early alphabetic inscriptions. This interest in expressing cultural meaning led to the earliest *carmina figurata*: a textual format that did not arise either from Egyptian hieroglyphs or Mesopotamian cuneiform, at least not *stricto sensu*.³⁸ For instance, the layout of rock inscription S 358 inside mine L is formatted into the shape of a cow’s head (Fig. 12), which is thus reminiscent of the letter Alef as well as the Egypto-Canaanite goddess Hathor-Ba^calat.³⁹

Among the early alphabetic inscriptions, we find further examples in which sacro-graphic poetics generates supplementary meaning to the plain text (esp. Inscr. S 354).⁴⁰ In terms of historical sociology, we can describe the early Canaanite scribes

³⁶ For the dichotomy *cold* versus *hot* cultures, cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le Cuit*, Mythologiques 1 (Paris: Plon, 1964).

³⁷ Morenz, *Ein Trigger für “unsere” Alphabetschrift*; for the cow’s head representing esp. the letter Alef, see Stefan Jakob Wimmer, “Warum Alef?” in *Kultur-Poetik in der Mittelbronzezeit. Aspekte der frühesten Alphabetschrift im kulturellen Schnittfeld Ägypter-Kanaanäer*, ed. Ludwig David Morenz (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2022): 109–16.

³⁸ Ludwig David Morenz, *Sinn und Spiel der Zeichen. Visuelle Poesie im Alten Ägypten*, *Pictura et Poesis* 21 (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008).

³⁹ Discussion in Morenz, *Medienarchäologische Sondagen*: 48–49; and Ludwig David Morenz, *Kultur-Poetik in der Mittelbronzezeit. Aspekte der frühesten Alphabetschrift im kulturellen Schnittfeld Ägypter-Kanaanäer*, *Studia Sinaitica* 5 (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2022): 118–22. Here a discussion of the inscription S 377 and its layout in the shape of a cow’s head is included.

⁴⁰ Discussion in Morenz, *Kulturpoetik in der Mittelbronzezeit*: 94–98.



Fig. 12: Alphabetic inscription S 358.

who used alphabetic writing more as *priests* or *poets* than as *merchants*, but these terms are deliberate oversimplifications. These *carmina figurata* are intellectual products of graphic poetry. They seem to have a distinct affinity with alphabetic writing, probably because the figurative and iconic potential of signs is somehow too prominent in the hieroglyphic or the cuneiform scripts to allow for the preferred type of figurativeness that concentrates on the layout.⁴¹

In their original context of Serabit el Khadim, some early alphabetic letters incorporate and express various facets of cultural identity. This figurative explanation thus works not only for the Alef and its reference to the Egypto-Canaanite goddess Hathor-Ba^calat but, among others, also for the letter Resh. Acrophonically (acrophony means only the first letter counts) derived from the common “West Semitic” word Rash / Resh, the consonant *r* (+ an indistinct vowel⁴²) is represented by the image of a

⁴¹ An inscription of Gudea of Lagash (third millennium) compares the cuneiform signs on a tablet with the stars in the sky. This metaphor implies grapho-poetic thinking, and we know various examples of poetic elements in cuneiform writing (Eva-Christiane Cancik-Kirschbaum and Jochem Kahl, eds., *Erste Philologien. Archäologie einer Disziplin vom Tigris bis zum Nil* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017]) as well as in Egyptian hieroglyphs (Morenz, *Sinn und Spiel der Zeichen*).

⁴² These vowels might have been clear to the native speakers, or they might have been learned in an oral tradition combined with the written text. Thus, a specific Samaritan tradition of reading is quite well known for the Hebrew Bible (Stefan Schorch, “Die Vokale des Gesetzes: Die samaritanische Lesetradition als Textzeugin der Tora” [PhD diss., Kirchliche Hochschule Bethel, 2003]). Furthermore, we know of early attempts to encode vowels as in the Ugaritic cuneiform alphabet (Oswald Loretz, “Die prägriechische Vokalisierung des Alphabets in Ugarit,” in *Die Geschichte der hellenischen Sprache und*

human head.⁴³ One might think there is nothing special about a head, but our new epigraphic recordings show that it is rewarding to look at the hairstyle. For example, some early Resh-signs from the Old Canaanite inscriptions in Serabit show a mushroom-shaped head (Fig. 13a–c).⁴⁴

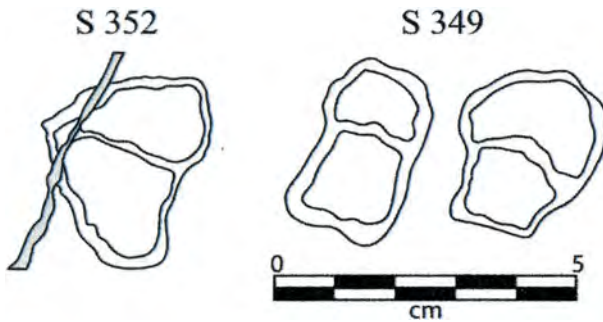


Fig. 13: Early forms of the letter Resh; from inscriptions S 349, 364, 385.

The Egyptian depiction of a Canaanite man from Maghara (inscription S 24A) also shows a mushroom-shaped head (Fig. 14a, b). Furthermore, he holds an aAm-stick in



Fig. 14a, b: Depiction of a Canaanite man from Maghara (rock inscription S 24A).

Schrift: *Vom 2. zum 1. Jahrtausend vor Chr.: Kontinuität oder Bruch?* 03.–06. Oktober 1996, ed. Verein zur Förderung der Aufarbeitung der Hellenischen Geschichte [Altenburg: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 1998]: 387–405.

43 Gordon James Hamilton, *The Origin of the West Semitic Alphabet in Egyptian Scripts* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 2006).

44 For a more detailed discussion, see Morenz, *Medienarchäologische Sondagen*: 98–102.

his hand. Viewed not just as an object but as a hieroglyph, he is thus characterized as an ‘*m*-“asiatic”’.⁴⁵

In middle bronze age iconography, the mushroom-shaped head is a rather distinct iconographic marker of the Canaanite elite. We know this from various pictorial representations, including monumental statues from Tell ed Daba in the Eastern Delta of the Nile.⁴⁶ Indeed, this conspicuous hairstyle is an iconographic marker of elite status in the middle bronze Levantine context.⁴⁷ Therefore, we can deduce that the iconographically marked mushroom-shaped head in the sign of the letter Resh expresses Levantine elite iconography of the middle bronze, much like the depiction of Khabadum shown in Fig. 8.

So far, I have written generally about Canaanites in the area of Middle Kingdom Serabit. However, it seems worthwhile to distinguish between Levantines like Khabadum (West Semitic personal name of a leader) and his people, who came from afar to cooperate with the Egyptians, and more or less local Bedouins. The following discussion attempts a media-archaeological rediscovery of the local Canaanite “He”-tribe of the early second millennium BCE.⁴⁸ In recovering this “lost tribe”, we can use Egyptian and Canaanite sources from the nineteenth century BCE. The Egyptian material consists of pictorial as well as written material: it allows us to distinguish between local Sinaitic Canaanites versus Levantine Canaanites in Middle Kingdom Serabit. Thus, the lower part of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom stela S 87 from the temple of Hathor shows a row of Canaanites iconographically differentiated by both dress and hairstyle (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15: Middle Kingdom stela S 87, lower part.


⁴⁵ Morenz, *Medienarchäologische Sondagen*: 98.

⁴⁶ Dorothea Arnold, “Image and Identity: Egypt’s Eastern Neighbours, East Delta People and the Hyksos,” in *The Second Intermediate Period (thirteenth–seventeenth Dynasties): Current Research, Future Prospects*, ed. Marcel Marée, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 192 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

⁴⁷ For an overview, see Aaron A. Burke, “Introduction to the Levant During the Middle Bronze Age,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant: c. 8000–332 BCE*, eds. Ann E. Killbrew and Margreet Steiner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 402–13.

⁴⁸ For a more extensive discussion, see Morenz, *Medienarchäologische Sondagen*: 31–43.

The last man in the figure bears the title “brother of the ruler of Retjenu”. For the damaged part, we might even consider reconstructing the name Khabi-dadum. As with the forms of the Resh sign, the man is characterized by his mushroom-shaped head. Each of the three men standing before this “brother of the ruler of Retjenu” is called *hrj pr* + semogram (= sign encoding meaning) STANDING MAN WITH RAISED ARMS. Here as well as in various other inscriptions from Serabit, this title refers to the local Bedouins.⁴⁹ Hence this stela shows local Canaanites (among them a man with the Egyptian name Khenti-khety-hetep) and a Levantine side by side. The same individual *hrj pr* + semogramm STANDING MAN WITH RAISED ARMS with the Egyptian name Khenti-khety-hetep is also shown on stela S 90.⁵⁰ Therefore, we can assume that he was a leader of the local Sinaitic Bedouins with whom the Egyptian expeditions were in regular contact.

The Egyptian hieroglyph  is used in these inscriptions as a semogram to designate the local Serabitian tribe, i.e., “the highlanders”. More specific information is provided by the stela S 114, which also dates from the time of King Amenemhet III (Fig. 16a, b).

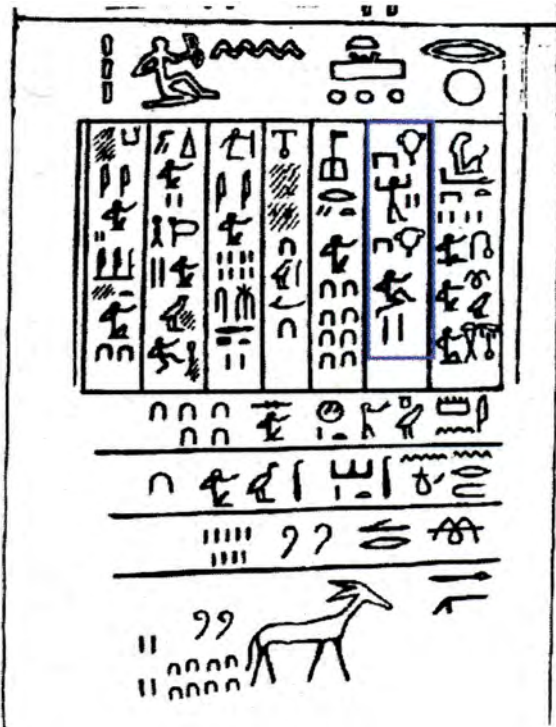










Fig. 16: Middle Kingdom stela S 114.

⁴⁹ Morenz, *Medienarchäologische Sondagen*: 35.

⁵⁰ Morenz, *Medienarchäologische Sondagen*: 33, Figs. 4 and 5.

This hieroglyphic inscription mentions two *hrj pr* + semogram STANDING MAN WITH RAISED ARMS: the lower portion also provides additional information. The micro text on the stela is formatted in imitation of an administrative list.⁵¹ In the second column, two different local tribes are graphically distinguished via the  versus the . The specific meaning of the distinction between the two forms STANDING MAN WITH RAISED ARMS versus KNEELING MAN, is difficult to pin down precisely. The hieroglyphic form  resembles the hieroglyph *sign-list* A7 (): this hieroglyph is used to determine words referring to weakness, subduing or settling down (*wrd, b3gj, nnj, hs, srf*). Thus, we can either consider it a designation of a group as “weak ones”, “subdued ones”, or “the ones who settled down”, i.e., locals. From its context and use parallel to  – “the highlanders” – I would suggest that it refers to locals inhabiting the lower areas of South-West Sinai, but this specific guess remains highly speculative.

The Egyptian hieroglyph  designating the local tribe of Serabit was adopted into alphabetic writing as  / . In this context, it encodes the sound *h* (+ *unmarked vowel*). Within the set of alphabetic letters, the *He* is the only sign depicting a full human figure.⁵³ Like the symbolic importance of letters such as the Alef or the Resh, we can assume that the letter *He* also implied symbolic significance in the sociocultural context of Middle Kingdom / middle bronze Serabit. It seems to indicate a reference to the Canaanite local tribe in South-West Sinai around 1900 BCE.

Let us now look at the Egyptian hieroglyphic stela S 100 from the time of King Amenemhet III. (Fig. 17). It was erected in front of the sanctuary of Hathor. In the lower part, we can recognize a kneeling figure and below it is another sign which is much smaller and closely resembles the Canaanite letter *He*. Some other Middle Kingdom stelae in Serabit, including S 112, depict a Canaanite leader and his followers. We can expect a structural analogy, but while the person riding the donkey on stela S 112 is a Levantine, the kneeling person on stela S 100 represents a local Canaanite.

By examining the layout of the stela, we can imagine a reference to a contract ceremony between the Egyptian expedition and the local Canaanites, represented by the kneeling man. The relationship between the Egyptian leader of the expedition on

51 Christopher Eyre, *The Use of Documents in Pharaonic Egypt*, Oxford Studies in Ancient Documents (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).



52 Already suggested in Alan H. Gardiner and T. Eric Peet, *Inscriptions of Sinai*, vol. 2, ed. and compl. by Jaroslav Černý (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955): 67, n. 1; furthermore: Orly Goldwasser, “Canaanites Reading Hieroglyphs: Horus is Hathor? – The Invention of the Alphabet in Sinai,” *Ägypten und Levante* 16 (2006): 121–60; Orly Goldwasser, “How the Alphabet Was Born from Hieroglyphs,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 36, no. 2 (2010): 36–50; most recent discussion in Morenz, *Medienarchäologische Sondagen*.

53 Most recent discussion of the inventory of alphabetic letters in Morenz, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift*: 87–90.



Fig. 17: Lower part of Middle Kingdom stela S 100: photo (Morenz, 2022).

the top of the stela and the Canaanite representative of the He-tribe at the bottom expresses this cross-cultural contact.⁵⁴

The small sign below the kneeling figure can be identified as the form of the letter *He*. Furthermore, it closely resembles the Egyptian hieroglyph , designating the local Canaanite tribe from Serabit. However, it depicts the seated rather than the standing man. Therefore, we can read it as the Canaanite letter *He*. The sign  certainly looks like an alphabetic letter. Nevertheless, it is not used here as alphabetic writing proper. Instead, it is employed more as a semogram or an icon. The sign thus specifies the depiction above it and refers to the local tribe of Serabit.

⁵⁴ Discussion of the evidence and plausibility of contracts between the Egyptians and the Canaanites in Middle Kingdom Serabit: Morenz, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift*: 121–23, 207–15, 248–63, 267–69.

Just as the goddess Ba^calat is represented in the letter Alef and the Levantine elite are depicted in the letter Resh, the local Beduin tribe of the Serabit area is represented in the letter He א / 𐤅. Originally, alphabetic writing in Serabit was full of cultural meaning. Strong symbolism combined with purely phonographic usage is exemplified by letters such as Alef, He, or Resh. The Canaanites who created this new writing system inscribed themselves into it, and their symbolic presence in the alphabet seems remarkable in light of scholarly understandings of their culture.

These sources problematize traditional assumptions. By visualizing the Canaanites, we can see they were more internally differentiated than we previously thought. Furthermore, we should consider that they were not just “slaves or uneducated workers” but people deliberately cooperating with the Egyptian expeditions and following their own agenda. They were exploring agency in the midst of cross-cultural contact. In doing so, they created a writing system from which we still benefit today. The “subaltern” did not only learn how to write but they invented their own writing system marked by a distinct *evolution of simplicity* and expressing their own cultural identity.

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Lewis Doney

Creating Dependency by Means of its Overcoming: A Case Study from the Rise of Tibetan Buddhism

1 Introduction

Tibet's imperial period (ca. 600–850 CE) holds a central position in many traditional Tibetan histories, especially those that include depictions of the establishment of Buddhism in that “land of snows” (*gangs can yul*) by emperors who invited Dharma practitioners from surrounding states to take on spiritual authority in society. These narratives emphasise the religious developments in the period while downplaying the comparatively mundane aspects of the empire, i.e., the conquests and the international diplomacy that made Tibet a dominant force in Central Asia from the seventh to the early ninth century. In these later religious histories, various forms of control operate simultaneously to ensure both the dependency and superior status of certain groups of imperial subjects. In this literature, certain religious masters are afforded the ability to control the Tibetan emperor. The result is the legitimization of a religious system in which many Tibetan subjects were dependent on the clergy. In many cases, this control also extended over the ownership of land that was passed down through generations and asymmetrically favoured the clergy, though it was not a *strongly* asymmetrical system of dependency.

This chapter will address the (earlier) historiographical and (later) biographical sources on one of the Tibetan emperors, Khri Srong lde brtsan (reigned 756–ca. 800). It will treat these texts as narratives and thus use theories from narratology in order to offer some insights into the changing values of Tibetan society from the imperial period into the time of the “second dissemination” (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism (tenth–twelfth century). When we delve more deeply into these sources, we can see the importance of odysseys and exile stories, particularly in the way they describe Buddhist masters at the court of Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan. This literature appears after the fall of the empire and matures up until the twelfth century. Early Tibetan Buddhist literature of

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this type often contains accounts of (almost exclusively male) characters either being abandoned in the wilderness as children or being exiled from a kingdom (or renouncing it) in youth or early adulthood.

By identifying similarities between the abandonment / exile / renunciation *topoi* (literary motifs) in early Tibetan historiography, it is possible to show how these literary markers signify the power of the person victimized by these acts over that of their perpetrator. Investigating the broader theme of exile and return to power in Central Eurasian state formation mythologies, and reflecting on Indic narratives about the renunciation of the throne in favour of the spiritual life, also help clarify the processes involved in introducing both of these important *topoi* into early Tibetan historiography. Furthermore, identifying the divergences between the Central Eurasian and Indic heritage of these Tibetan tales allows for a preliminary analysis of the changing relationship between religious and royal figures in early Tibetan biographical narratives. Finally, grounding these changes in theoretical discussions of types of fiction, mythology, and historiography can uncover some of the mechanisms that enabled a shift away from a model in which status was based on kinship, military prowess, and fealty to the emperor as the highest ranking member of Tibetan society to one that codified an expanded role for religious status and drew on idealized Indic social structures. Such a shift opened the possibility that a subject of the emperor could (at least rhetorically) outshine an instantiation of indigenous divine kingship. I hope thereby to show how Buddhist clerics could come to be seen as superior to the royalty on whom they were formerly dependent and so create a social situation that undergirded the dependency of the Tibetan people on their clergy (as the dominant class) for permission to use their land in exchange for taxation.

According to Matthew T. Kapstein, during the dGa' ldan Pho brang period of Tibetan history (mid-seventeenth to mid-twentieth century), 'the people were not the legal owners of the land upon which their livelihoods depended [which] was the property of the ruler, and in those regions under the sway of Lhasa, this meant the Dalai Lama.'¹ Land could also be held by a monastery or a noble, e.g., one of the three major classes of landlords (*mnga' bdag chen po gsum*). Revenue gained from those of lower status who worked the land (or made some other more specialized contribution to the economy) would, in part, be expended for the representatives of the religious establishment, i.e., monks, nuns, and various types of lama (*bla ma*).² Kapstein notes that this system was neither timeless nor immutable, though it was sometimes assumed to be. Moreover, although the relationship between these groups was not

1 Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, Peoples of Asia Series (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006): 176. Yet, on the same page Kapstein stresses that landowners 'had no recognized power [. . .] to expropriate the peasants who lived and worked on the estate, so long as the latter fulfilled their obligations, [and that] the entitlements of the tax-paying commoners, at least, were generally considered inalienable.'

2 Kapstein, *The Tibetans*: 176–78.

strongly asymmetrical, the ‘ecclesiastical hierarchy was clearly the dominant class’, which ‘amounted to a broad disenfranchisement of the lay aristocracy.’³

The gradual establishment of ecclesiastical power over the land of the Tibetan Plateau erased the memory of the complex power dynamics of the imperial period’s Yar lung Dynasty, which directly or indirectly ruled over an even greater territory than that which most scholars describe as “cultural Tibet” today. The dynasty’s rulers stood in a position of ultimate power and land ownership. Yet, this image of the emperor as the zenith of imperial Tibetan society (at least from the rhetorical perspective) largely disappeared. Although historiographic narratives continued to idealize them, the literature emphasized their religious rather than martial characteristics. For example, emperors such as Khri Srong lde brtsan and Khri gTsug lde brtsan AKA Ral pa can (reigned 815–841) were increasingly described as inferior in position to the religious masters at their courts.

Peter Schwieger has shown how Buddhism gradually became the dominant source of ethical values in Tibetan historiography by the fourteenth century.⁴ He states that Tibetan histories, which narrativize the remembered past, play a mythic role inasmuch as they confer constructed meaning on Tibetan culture, determine cultural self-interpretation to some extent and provide a source for normative claims concerning sociocultural interrelationships that hold true in the histories’ “present”.⁵ This chapter complements his analysis of the shift from a royal to a religious centre of society,⁶ by bringing theoretical insights from the field of narratology to bear on Tibetan historiography’s depiction of the emperors and their introduction of Buddhism to the Tibetan Plateau.

2 Dependency in the Eighth-Century Tibetan Empire

The geographical extent of what constituted “Tibet” (Bod) varied considerably as the Tibetan empire expanded and contracted at its various borders between the seventh and ninth centuries before ultimately collapsing and leaving a power vacuum and even more

3 Kapstein, *The Tibetans*: 180. The same is affirmed by Alice Travers, “How Should We Define Social Status? The Study of ‘Intermediate Groups’ in Central Tibet (1895–1959),” in *Tibetans that Escaped the Historian’s Net: Studies in the Social History of Tibetan Societies*, eds. Charles Ramble, Peter Schwieger, and Alice Travers (Kathmandu: Vajra Books, 2013): 142, n. 2.

4 See Peter Schwieger, “Geschichte als Mythos: Zur Aneignung von Vergangenheit in der tibetischen Kultur. Ein kulturwissenschaftlicher Essay,” *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asien-gesellschaft* 54, no. 4 (2000): 945–73; translated as Peter Schwieger, “History as Myth: On the Appropriation of the Past in Tibetan Culture,” in *The Tibetan History Reader*, eds. Gray Tuttle and Kurtis R. Schaeffer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013): 64–85.

5 Schwieger, “Geschichte als Mythos”: 947; Schwieger, “History as Myth”: 65–66.

6 Schwieger, “Geschichte als Mythos”: 947–49 and 962–64; Schwieger, “History as Myth”: 66–67 and 72–74.

uncertain borders in its wake. The empire of the Yar lung Dynasty, the hereditary rulership originating in and based around the Yar lung valley in the southern part of the Tibetan Plateau, expanded from its geographic power base in all directions (excluding the direct south, where the Himalayas prevented substantial expansion). The land to which Arabic sources of the period refer as “Tubbat” was situated west of China, north of India, south of the Uyghur Turks, and east of the eastern marches of the Khurasan.⁷

The expansion of the Tibetan empire meant the gradual takeover of other kingdoms, city-states, and regions either by alliance or force before ruling them as zones of an empire with an emperor (*btsan po*) at its head. Fealty to the emperor paid by regions incorporated into the empire appears, at least in a few cases, to have been mutually beneficial.⁸ Thus, in some regions, recognition of the superior status of the Tibetan emperor allowed certain vassal states meaningful autonomy. At the same time, it also created space in which the empire could continue to grow. The emperor thus sat at both the centre and zenith of imperial Tibetan society, at least according to the imperial self-representation of court documents and positive depictions in texts from regions incorporated into the empire (which are virtually our only source of written information for this period).⁹ From the official perspective of the court and its dependents, the Yar lung Dynasty held a position of ultimate power and land ownership across the Tibetan Plateau.

In contrast, on a local level, the emperors maintained a somewhat nomadic base of operations, travelling around Central Tibet. Each generation enthroned a male to act as head of the Yar lung Dynasty, and a *primus inter pares* emperor. Loyal ministers, drawn from the families who had first supported the Yar lung house and principalities newly encompassed by the empire, served these rulers and their sons. These ministers and their ennobled families benefited by receiving land taken from disloyal or rival kings. Kapstein’s description of land ownership in later centuries also seems to apply to the imperial period. He writes: ‘Though aristocratic estates were usually hereditary, the nobles held their estates as grants, not as personal property, and the government could and did resume them when circumstances were perceived to warrant this.’¹⁰

7 Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the Struggle for Great Power among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese During the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987): 163, n. 127; for more on this period from a foreign policy perspective, see most recently Lewis Doney, “Tibet,” in *A Companion to the Global Early Middle Ages*, ed. Erik Hermans (Leeds: Arc Humanities, 2020): 191–223.

8 See Doney, “Tibet”: 198–200.

9 Brandon Dotson, *The Old Tibetan Annals: An Annotated Translation of Tibet’s First History, With an Annotated Cartographical Documentation by Guntram Hazod*, Denkschriften der philosophisch-historischen Klasse 381; Veröffentlichungen zur Sozialanthropologie 12 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009): 11.

10 Kapstein, *The Tibetans*: 180.

As Max Weber has noted of the Indian social system: ‘the caste structure transforms the horizontal and unconnected coexistences of ethnically segregated groups into a vertical social system of super- and subordinative.’¹¹ Although it was not a caste society, something similar took place in imperial Tibet between ethnic groups like the Central Tibetans and the states they conquered. An increase in the verticalization of social relationships also took place between the Yar lung family, now a dynasty, and the other noble families in Central Tibet. Wherever the empire *directly* controlled an area, order was maintained not only through military and / or civilian administration but also via the implementation of law codes sent out from the centre. The legal system of compensation and punishment also provides evidence of a highly stratified society that privileged those of higher status and kept lower-status members dependent on the system.¹² Punishments could be both corporal and capital; they could also include banishment either alone or with one’s family to a nearby or distant region.¹³ It is this form of control, backed by a hierarchized society that, according to the prevailing rhetoric, has an emperor at its pinnacle, which is re-evaluated in later Tibetan histories to valorize the ones to whom this punishment is meted out (in part due to the influence of idealized Indic models of religiopolitical hierarchy).

The *primus inter pares* form of rulership appears to have been deeply unstable.¹⁴ It needed to be constantly reinforced as the emperor moved his mobile court of administrators, judiciary, priests, and guards in a semi-nomadic fashion around the lands of his loyal aristocracy.¹⁵ In fact, the entire duration of the imperial period, like its beginnings, was marked by internal power struggles, marital alliances, and territorial disputes among and within the Yar lung Dynasty and other local polities and eminent families of Central Tibet.¹⁶ The emperors did not always hold meaningful power, which sometimes resided with their queens, and the mGar family maintained a brief

11 Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and eds. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Classic Reprint Series (1948; repr., London: Routledge, 1991): 189.

12 See, for example, Brandon Dotson, “Introducing Early Tibetan Law: Codes and Cases,” in *Secular Law and Order in the Tibetan Highland: Contributions to a Workshop Organized by the Tibet Institute in Andiast (Switzerland) on the Occasion of the 65th Birthday of Christoph Cüppers*, ed. Dieter Schuh, Series Monumenta Tibetica Historica, Abteilung 3: Diplomata et Epistolae 13 (Andiast: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2015): 269–79.

13 Dotson, “Introducing Early Tibetan Law”: 276–78 and 283.

14 Charles Ramble, “Sacral Kings and Divine Sovereigns: Principles of Tibetan Monarchy in Theory and Practice,” in *States of Mind: Power, Place and the Subject in Inner Asia*, ed. David Sneath, Studies on East Asia 27 (Bellingham, WA: Western Washington University, 2006): 129–33.

15 Dotson, *The Old Tibetan Annals*: 43–46; Guntram Hazod, “Imperial Central Tibet: An Annotated Cartographical Survey of Its Territorial Divisions and Key Political Sites,” in *The Old Tibetan Annals: An Annotated Translation of Tibet’s First History*, ed. Brandon Dotson, Denkschriften der philosophisch-historischen Klasse 381; Veröffentlichungen zur Sozialanthropologie 12 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009): 161–232.

16 Guntram Hazod, “Tribal Mobility and Religious Fixation: Remarks on Territorial Transformation, Social Integration and Identity in Imperial and Early Post-Imperial Tibet,” in *Visions of Community in*

ministerial “shogunate” in the late seventh century.¹⁷ Yet, when the system was most stable, and acquiescence to it was ensured by the spoils of continued expansion of the empire, the Tibetan aristocracy, with the emperors at their head, benefitted from periods of great wealth and cosmopolitanism.

The Tibetan empire reached its greatest extent during the reign of Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan. In the northwest, it threatened the territory of the fourth and fifth Abbasid caliphs, Al-Mansur (714–775) and Harun al-Rashid (763 / 766–809), on the banks of the Oxus. In the east, the Tibetan army even briefly sacked the Chinese capital Chang’an in 763.¹⁸ Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan also presided over the growing institutionalization of Buddhism as a state religion in Tibet. His religious patronage was epitomized by his construction of bSam yas Monastery, a new institution in Tibet which shows signs of influence from the older Buddhist cultures that surrounded the empire at that time – most notably South Asia and China.

The emperor invited Buddhist masters to court during his reign, perhaps including the shadowy tantric master Padmasambhava, who will become a central figure in the latter half of this article. Michael Walter suggests that Khri Srong lde brtsan invited Padmasambhava from Oḍḍiyāna in today’s Swat Valley, at that time a part of the Tibetan Empire.¹⁹ However, other scholars have questioned the historicity of his traditionally-attributed presence at the Tibetan court.²⁰ Nevertheless, Walter’s observation is interesting because it most likely reflects the actual status of religious figures at the court of Khri Srong lde brtsan:

Assuming the historicity of this event, the political reality of the situation was that [. . .] Padmasambhava appeared before him as one of his subjects. If his fame was as great as later tradition maintains, he was likely commanded to appear, or physically brought to court, at the Btsan-po’s [i.e., emperor’s] order.²¹

We can thus add religious masters to the list of groups amenable to Weber’s analysis given above. The ‘vertical social system of super- and subordinative elements’ probably also included indigenous priests and augurs, as well as foreign Buddhist abbots and lay tantric adepts (along with their converts at the Tibetan court), who tended to lack land but offered services to society, the state, or the emperor himself.²² It is fair

the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1100, eds. Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner, and Richard Payne (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012): 49–55.

¹⁷ See Dotson, *The Old Tibetan Annals*: 18–19.

¹⁸ See Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire*: 143–57.

¹⁹ Michael L. Walter, *Buddhism and Empire: The Political and Religious Culture of Early Tibet*, Brill’s Tibetan Studies Library 22 (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 13 and 50–51, n. 26.

²⁰ See Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, “Representations of Padmasambhava in Early Post-Imperial Tibet,” *Zentralasiatische Studien* 45 (2016): 41–76.

²¹ Walter, *Buddhism and Empire*: 50–51, n. 26.

²² Weber, *From Max Weber*: 182.

to assume that such groups engaged in divergent discourses of superiority and inferiority that operated in tension with one another rather than as a synchronic fact accepted by all.²³ Indeed, it is most likely that these individuals and / or groups at court ferociously or subtly vied for the favour of the emperor though with various levels of success. We shall see below that the relationship between the religious and the royal figures in this social system is depicted very differently in later narratives.

The ascendancy of the empire allowed Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan to confer high status, patronage and support on the Buddhist order of monks.²⁴ The ministers that favoured this newly established state religion reciprocally pledged to protect not only Buddhism but also the Yar lung Dynasty. Additionally, they supported the imperially-sponsored construction of large temple structures (which were probably as much their financial burden as the emperors'), centralized the generally itinerant power base of the empire around the two "capitals", Ra sa (later to be named Lhasa) and Brag dmar (further southeast where bSam yas stands). The circular *maṇḍala* symbolism inherent in the design of bSam yas Monastery reflects the ideal empire, with the emperor identified with the powerful cosmic buddha (Vairocana) at its centre – as at other imperially sponsored Buddhist sites in East Asia more generally during this period.²⁵

The idea that the court had the power to spread Buddhism throughout the empire, whether rhetorical or real, was disseminated as much for the positive way it reflected the Yar lung Dynasty as for the sake of Buddhism itself. The court's embrace of Buddhism thus supported the dynasty's self-presentation of its position of ultimate power and land ownership across the Tibetan Plateau.

At the end of the imperial period, Yar lung dynastic power was briefly divided between two rival factions and eventually disintegrated into what later histories call the "time of fragmentation" (*sil bu'i dus*).²⁶ Although Tibet's glory days of empire were behind it, their wake was still felt, and some later kingdoms and Buddhist traditions continued to trace their lineage back to the golden age of the Yar lung Dynasty and its emperors – recast as emanations of wise and compassionate bodhisattvas, acting as kings (rather than emperors) in order to establish Buddhist laws in Tibet.²⁷

23 Weber, *From Max Weber*: 193.

24 See Doney, "Tibet": 209–11.

25 See Lewis Doney, "Emperor, Dharmaraja, Bodhisattva? Inscriptions from the Reign of Khri Srong lde brtsan," *Journal of Research Institute, Kobe City University of Foreign Studies* 51 (2013): here 71, on Ra sa and Brag dmar. On the identification of Vairocana with the Tibetan emperor, see Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation*: 60–65; Kapstein, *The Tibetans*: 71–72.

26 See Kapstein, *The Tibetans*: 81–85.

27 Doney, "Emperor, Dharmaraja": 44–47; Lewis Doney, "Early Bodhisattva-Kingship in Tibet: The Case of Tri Sondétsen," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 24 (2015): 29–47.

3 The Right to Rule in Tibetan Literature

The legitimacy of the Yar lung dynasty was presented in diverse ways in early Tibetan historiography. The authentically Old Tibetan (i.e. late imperial or early post-imperial) “texts” available to us use certain words and phrases specifically for the emperors and no one else (e.g., the term for emperor, *btsan po*, itself). The inscriptions describe the emperors as possessing divine power and wisdom corresponding to their pre-eminent status.²⁸ For example, in the ninth-century *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, Emperor Khri ’Dus srong (reigned 686–704) displays his mastery over wild animals as a child and goes on in later life to regain control over Central Tibet from the powerful mGar clan.²⁹ Jan C. Heesterman describes the importance of such a *topos* in South Asian *royal* narratives and rituals, wherein survival in the wilderness proves one’s right to rule.³⁰ Some documents also relate how the first rulers came down from heaven to rule over their “black-headed” subjects.³¹

These stories float in time within early Tibetan historiography, so the date of their “original” creation remains unclear. Importantly though, they all draw on either broader Central Eurasian narrative traditions of exile and return to power in state formation mythology, or Indic narratives of renouncing the throne in favour of the spiritual life. Christopher I. Beckwith identifies the general features of this ‘state formation’ mythology, which he also calls ‘state foundation’ mythology or the ‘First Story,’ as widespread in Central Eurasia.³² Of course, the goal here is not to claim that all older hero narratives necessarily concern kings. In fact, the application of some of the heroic *topoi* covered in this chapter to religious figures such as Moses and Jesus may be a fruitful source of comparison with specific processes for which I argue in this chapter.³³ Specifically, similarly mythic or legendary accounts from farther west in Eurasia depict these two great founders of Abrahamic religions suffering abandon-

28 Doney, “Emperor, Dharmaraja”: 72–78.

29 See Brandon Dotson, “The Princess and the Yak: The Hunt as Narrative Trope and Historical Reality,” in *Scribes, Texts, and Rituals in Early Tibet and Dunhuang: Proceedings of the Third Old Tibetan Studies Panel Held at the Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Vancouver 2010*, eds. Brandon Dotson, Kazushi Iwao, and Tsuguhito Takeuchi (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2013): 78–79.

30 Jan C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985): 29–44.

31 Nathan W. Hill, “‘Come as Lord of the Black-Headed’ – An Old Tibetan Mythic Formula,” *Zentralasiatische Studien* 45 (2016): 203–16. Hill argues that, in this context, “black-headed” approximates to ‘a poetic term for mankind as a totality, created by the gods and kept in safe pastures by the kings’ (Hill, “‘Come as Lord of the Black-Headed’”: 214).

32 Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009): 1–12.

33 See, for example, Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and Other Writings*, ed. Philip Freund (1932; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1959): 15–18 and 50–56 respectively; this is also suggested in Brandon Dotson, “Theorising the King: Implicit and Explicit Sources for the Study of Tibetan Sacred Kingship,” *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 21 (2011): 95–96, n. 43.

ment and exile, respectively, under the same threat of death by mass infanticide, but eventually proving themselves to be superior to their royal antagonists, the Pharaohs and Herod.

The heroes that Beckwith identifies are almost always male, although a Khotanese narrative containing similar *topoi* of exile and return but concerning a female protagonist is also found in the Tibetan canon, titled the *Enquiry of Vimalaprabhā*.³⁴ Khotan lay to the northwest of Tibet and was first conquered by the Tibetans around 670.³⁵ In the *Enquiry of Vimalaprabhā*, Vimalaprabhā is a bodhisattva who incarnates as the daughter of King Vijayakīrti of Khotan, named *Praniyata (*rab nges*), and later imperial Tibet is responsible for her exile. When the Tibetans and Supīya (*sum pa*) attack Khotan, the king is killed, and his daughter is forced to flee. She travels with her husband to Suvarṇagotra, a land of gold, where she faces many hardships in her attempt to raise the money to pay off the Tibetans. In this tale, Tibet is one of the aggressors causing the protagonist to flee from her homeland.

These protagonists' strange births and / or difficult childhoods give them a special status in society that strengthens their claims to re-join and rule the societies they left or found new societies of which they are the (sometimes spiritual) exemplars. A similar narrative *topos* will be seen when we turn to the twelfth-century *Zangs gling ma* account of Padmasambhava, whose dangerous personality and power are the very things that raise him above the status of mundane or secular figures, including kings.

The beginnings of the shift towards Buddhist values and norms can be identified even in imperial sources from the reign of Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan. For instance, some Old Tibetan inscriptions describe time and space according to Buddhist ideas rather than asserting that they are grounded in the body of the emperor (as in the *Old Tibetan Annals* mentioned above).³⁶ In early post-imperial sources, Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan remains a positive figure, even becoming idealized for his work on behalf of Buddhism. However, he *himself* is recast according to Buddhist values rather than being represented in purely imperial terms. For instance, his martial art, valorized in the inscriptions, is underplayed or ignored in these documents.³⁷ Thus, these descriptions of the emperor correspond to Schwieger's analysis of the growing emphasis on Buddhist ethics rather than imperial values.³⁸

34 *Dri ma med pa'i 'od kyis zhus pa* (e.g., Peking *bKa' 'gyur* text no. 835), catalogued as part of the "Resources for Kanjur & Tanjur Studies" project at the University of Vienna, n.d., <http://www.rkts.org/cat.php?id=168&typ=1> [accessed 10.08.2024], most recently studied by Sam van Schaik, "Red Faced Barbarians, Benign Despots and Drunken Masters: Khotan as a Mirror of Tibet," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 36 (2016): 48–52.

35 Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire*: 30–34; Dotson, *The Old Tibetan Annals*: 18.

36 See Doney, "Early Bodhisattva-Kingship in Tibet": 37–39.

37 Doney, "Early Bodhisattva-Kingship in Tibet": 39–46.

38 Schwieger, "Geschichte als Mythos"; Schwieger, "History as Myth."

At first, Khri Srong lde brtsan remains the primary focus of the documents that describe him, but religious masters gradually replace him at the centre of the stage. Eventually, religious masters upstage the emperor, who is increasingly called a king, *rgyal po*, perhaps due to the influence of Indic literature on Buddhist kingship. One of the mechanisms by which the superior spiritual status and later social status of the religious master was expressed in historical and biographical narratives (and partially thereby effected in society) is the renunciation of, or exile from, the centre of royal power.³⁹ The use of *topoi* of both exile and renunciation found in the wider and earlier set of narratives discussed above appear to have established a connection between a period of distance from the ruler's power centre and a hero's time in the wilderness before a return to claim his right to rule.

4 New Dependencies in a Twelfth-Century Hagiography

4.1 The Indic Master

Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's (1124–1192) *Zangs gling ma* hagiography, the earliest extant full-length life-story of Padmasambhava,⁴⁰ contains many narratives on the early contributors to the spread of the Dharma in Tibet.⁴¹ This (auto)biography purports to be authored by Padmasambhava himself. It thus claims to have been composed shortly after the eighth-century events it describes, then buried like treasure to be discovered by a reincarnation of a disciple of the "author". Nyang ral was one of the first and most famous "treasure discoverers" (*gter ston*), who retrieved not only ritual works, prayers, holy relics, and objects bestowed on him in his previous incarnation as Khri Srong lde brtsan, the royal disciple of Padmasambhava, but also the master's biogra-

³⁹ I go into much more detail on the stages of this process in Doney, "The Degraded Emperor": 25–39.

⁴⁰ See Lewis Doney, *The Zangs gling ma: The First Padmasambhava Biography. Two Exemplars of the Earliest Attested Recension*, Series Monumenta Tibetica Historica, Abteilung 2: Vitae 3 (Andiastr: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2014) on this work, and Cantwell and Mayer, "Representations of Padmasambhava" on the earlier Tibetan narratives concerning this Indic master. No Indic-language textual evidence for his life exists.

⁴¹ I quote here from the *Zangs gling ma* exemplar ZLh (Doney, *The Zangs gling ma*: 101–223) since it is one of the most complete and error-free exemplars of the earliest attested recension of the *Zangs gling ma*. The version of the *Zangs gling ma* contained in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* and translated in Erik P. Kunsang, *The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava Composed by Yeshe Tsogyal, Revealed by Nyang Ral Nyima Öser* (London: Shambhala, 1999) appears to represent a later recension, including a number of interpolated episodes. For more details, see Doney, *The Zangs gling ma*: 23–42. The basic narrative of the *Zangs gling ma* can still be followed in the Kunsang translation.

phy itself.⁴² He thus did not claim to have written the *Zangs gling ma* but to have been present at the events described in it.

This new form of revelation enabled Nyang ral to place himself into the history of Tibet at a pivotal moment in the introduction of Buddhism there. Furthermore, within the text, Padmasambhava lends his seal of authority to Nyang ral's credentials as a Buddhist master and legitimizes his twelfth-century ritual corpus by practising it in India and transmitting it to Tibet in the eighth century. The processes that this new form of revelation involved and the power it entailed in twelfth-century southern Tibetan society have yet to be fully unpacked, but its benefits should have been evident to Nyang ral.

Most of the religious figures in this hagiography are deferential to the Tibetan king, Khri Srong lde brtsan. In contrast, the Indic tantric master Padmasambhava sets fire to the king's robes, causing the ruler to prostrate to him. In narrative terms, Padmasambhava's life before coming to Tibet may act as a precedent that grants him the status needed to treat the Tibetan king with disdain. The Indic master is identified as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, bodhisattva of compassion and patron deity of Tibet, in this work and other contemporaneous Tibetan Buddhist literature. At a very young age, he spends time in the wilderness but is then brought up as part of a royal family (ZLh 5a3–4). Eventually, he renounces his role as prince and orchestrates his own exile in order to follow the Dharma. Specifically, he kills a minister's son in an "accident", and although the ministers ask the king to execute capital punishment, the king commutes the sentence to banishment (*spyug*; ZLh 7a5–8a3).

Padmasambhava goes on to practise higher tantric yoga in charnel grounds all over India. Padmasambhava thereby exiles himself from courtly social mores and has become a master of both spiritual and wrathful powers, rejecting and thus transcending social status. We may recall Weber's notion of the stratified society discussed above and note how he describes the tendency of new status groups to demonstrate their social rank through apparel, accoutrements, taking up certain activities, refraining from others, and paying for services related to the purification of sin.⁴³ Indeed, the narrative choice to have Padmasambhava (self-)exiled as punishment for killing a minister's son (rather than simply renouncing the court) also underscores his dangerous characteristics. This role is like that of the Hocartian dynamic of kingship in which rituals that act to segregate the king from society magically rejuvenate the kingdom he controls.⁴⁴ In this role, Padmasambhava becomes similar to a "magician-king", separate from society but possessing the power to control and unify it.

Furthermore, he also undergoes trials on the journey towards enlightenment and submits himself to discipline by other powerful religious masters. As he attains each

⁴² See Doney, *The Zangs gling ma*: 10–19.

⁴³ Weber, *From Max Weber*: 190–91.

⁴⁴ Lucien Scubla, "Sacred King, Sacrificial Victim, Surrogate Victim or Frazer, Hocart, Girard," in *The Character of Kingship*, ed. Declan Quigley (Oxford: Berg, 2005): 50.

new stage on this path, he is renamed – some of these forming the basis of the famous “eight names” (*mtshan brgyad*) by which he is worshipped in Tibet until today.⁴⁵ Though he is exiled from courtly society, these stages and the corresponding names bestowed upon him also mark a rise in his status within the social group of Indic religious adepts.

Padmasambhava’s status as a spiritual adept – both powerful and dangerous – also gives him power over three characters in the hagiography who are born kings, specifically, the king of Sahor named gTsug lag’ dzin (ZLh 13a2–14b4), his own father Indrabhūti in Uḍḍiyāṇa (ZLh 15a2–16b2), and Khri Srong lde brtsan in Tibet (ZLh 29a1–30b2). Padmasambhava is renamed several times in the early part of the *Zangs gling ma* at each momentous event. The reader should remember that renaming the hero is often an essential part of his return from exile and ascension to power at the end of a heroic narrative, coupled with *anagnorisis*.

The final demonstration of Padmasambhava’s power over kings takes place in central Tibet, where, drawing on earlier imperial motifs, King Khri Srong lde brtsan is represented as the personification of Tibet. Nevertheless, Tibet is no longer an empire; it is merely a kingdom. King Khri Srong lde brtsan is also an emanation of the bodhi-sattva of wisdom, Mañjuśrī, but he incarnates through his parents’ sexual union and is born naturally – albeit with signs that mark him out as a marvellous child. He is not abandoned or exiled. Rather, he ascends to power upon the death of his father (ZLh 19b3–21b3). Thus, he is not set up as the hero of this narrative. Instead, when Padmasambhava arrives in Tibet, he disparages the status of the Tibetan ruler before relegating him to the subordinate but important position of a disciple. Khri Srong lde brtsan’s conversion to tantric Buddhism is meant to symbolize the conversion of Tibet.

When Padmasambhava meets Khri Srong lde brtsan, he shows his disdain for the king’s worldly status as he had with the previous two kings.⁴⁶ Padmasambhava humorously humbles Khri Srong lde brtsan: he bows to his robes of office and sets them on fire. The king then prostrates contritely to his spiritual superior (ZLh 30b1–2). This work gives no hint that the ruler of Tibet may have a right to social superiority since religious values are paramount in this portrayal. Moreover, from this Buddhist perspective, the king is found wanting due to his perceived social status *itself*. Although he is an emanation of Mañjuśrī, in this incarnation, Khri Srong lde brtsan is deluded

45 Doney, *The Zangs gling ma*: 95, col. i. My thanks go to Brandon Dotson for suggesting the connections between Padmasambhava’s various names and the wider mythic importance of renaming.

46 For more on the context of this meeting, see Lewis Doney, “Narrative Transformations: The Spiritual Friends of Khri Srong lde brtsan,” in *Interaction in the Himalayas and Central Asia: Processes of Transfer, Translation and Transformation in Art, Archaeology, Religion and Polity*, eds. Eva Allinger, Frantz Grenet, Christian Jahoda, Maria-Katharina Lang, and Anne Vergati, *Denkschriften der philosophisch-historischen Klasse 495; Veröffentlichungen zur Sozialanthropologie 22* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017): 316–18.

by his position as ruler of Tibet. Padmasambhava, as fully enlightened, realizes this and upstages him by setting the symbol of his royalty aflame. The religious figure accomplishes his goal by using the magical abilities by which he proved his higher status to the other two kings, including his own father.

Such tales of overcoming mundane social hierarchies recall the literary analyst Northrop Frye's description of the "comic" narrative genre (as distinct from, say, the "tragic").⁴⁷ Frye states:

In the first place, the movement of comedy is usually a movement from one kind of society to another. At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognises that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallise around the hero, and the moment when this crystallisation occurs is the point of resolution in the act, the comic discovery, *anagnorisis* or *cognito*.⁴⁸

Frye goes on to note that, in general, "tragedy" refers to narratives in which the hero becomes isolated from their society. Alternatively, "comedy" describes those stories in which the hero is incorporated into it.⁴⁹ From this perspective, we can see this part of Padmasambhava's biography as one in which his search for tantric accomplishments (*vidyādhāras*) beyond his home and society leads him to return to both with a changed status. He has transformed from a boy into a man. Moreover, he has gained accomplishments through trials in the wilderness of India (each step marked by a new renaming as described above, a form of *anagnorisis*) and reached the heights of enlightenment.⁵⁰ These accomplishments give him the power to religiously overcome his society while also renewing and redirecting it towards tantric Buddhism. In this way, Padmasambhava takes on the role of a state founder, but his new state and status are religious in nature. Both episodes appear to borrow Indic Buddhist vignettes and apply them to

47 I say "comic" as distinct from "tragic" rather than as opposed to it. Although the tragic and the comic do tend to stand at two ends of a spectrum, it should be clear that there are many more types of narrative than these two. As actually pointed out by Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; 1st paperback ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971): 13: "The very word "genre" sticks out in an English sentence as the unpronounceable and alien thing it is. [. . .] Thanks to the Greeks, we can distinguish tragedy from comedy in drama, and so we still tend to assume that each is the half of drama that is not the other half. When we come to deal with such forms as the masque, opera, movie, ballet, puppet-play, mystery-play, morality, commedia dell'arte, and Zauberspiel, we find ourselves in the position of the Renaissance doctors who refused to treat syphilis because Galen said nothing about it."

48 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*: 163.

49 Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*: 35.

50 Among his five modes of comedy, Frye's mythic form (rather than the romantic, high mimetic, low mimetic, or ironic) appears most suitable to this narrative. He describes it as 'Apollonian, the story of how a hero is accepted by a society of gods. In Classical literature the theme of acceptance forms part of the stories of Hercules, Mercury, and other deities who had a probation to go through, and in Christian literature it is the theme of salvation.' (Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*: 43).

Padmasambhava, thereby partaking in a broader genre of the “comic” narrative to useful effect.

A kindred pattern is repeated concerning another foreign Buddhist master, Vimalamitra, whose biography is similar to that of Padmasambhava. Both figures spend their early life in Indic regions, have divine and royal parentage, are abandoned / exiled, and return to their home society. Despite his more established position as abbot of Vikramaśīla Monastery, Vimalamitra also bows to the king (against the latter’s wishes), causing Khri Srong lde brtsan’s robes to catch fire once again. Subsequently, the king prostrates before Vimalamitra and, during a lavish ceremony, places him on a high throne (ZLh 64a5–64b4).⁵¹ In this Buddhist context, the *topos* of the abandoned / exiled hero has also become mixed with that of renunciation, perhaps ultimately pointing to the emulation of the Buddha. This theme adds higher status to the Buddhist master, at once victimized by and renouncing the world, in contrast to the king, who symbolizes society and mundane power.

4.2 The Royal Disciple

The less-than-flattering portrayals of the king contained in the *Zangs gling ma* can be seen as a positive move within the soteriology of Tibetan Buddhism. Nevertheless, it has significant consequences for the emperor’s representation in later histories. It breaks with the trajectory of the growing aggrandizement of Khri Srong lde brtsan, evident from the imperial inscriptions and early post-imperial documents. In this twelfth-century narrative, Khri Srong lde brtsan is undoubtedly a representative of the Tibetan society that Padmasambhava is entering and hoping to convert to Buddhism. However, Khri Srong lde brtsan is not immediately obvious as one of Frye’s ‘obstructing characters’, whom the audience would recognize as ‘usurpers.’ Frye perceptively notes that all characters tend to be redeemed in the comic narrative.⁵² However, Khri Srong lde brtsan appears to play a more pivotal and positive role in the *Zangs gling ma* than Frye’s representation suggests, which points toward the problem of mixed messages in the narrative.

Padmasambhava temporarily wrestles control of Khri Srong lde brtsan’s power from him, but then returns it to the Tibetan ruler. The master-disciple relationship between Padmasambhava and Khri Srong lde brtsan is long and fruitful in the *Zangs*

⁵¹ Far more detail on these parallels is found in Doney, “The Degraded Emperor”: 46–51.

⁵² Frye’s statement on the resolution of the newly transformed, comic “society” runs as follows: ‘The tendency of comedy is to include as many people as possible in its final society: the blocking [i.e., obstructing] characters are more often reconciled or converted than simply repudiated. Comedy often includes a scapegoat ritual of expulsion which gets rid of some irreconcilable character, but exposure and disgrace make for pathos, or even tragedy.’ (Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*: 166; square brackets are mine).

gling ma. Padmasambhava's arrival in Tibet is followed by a long round of textual translations and journeys by translators to transmit the Dharma from its homeland in the Indian subcontinent. The king's continued power over Tibet is shown by the fact that, after being upstaged by Padmasambhava, he brings the four horns of Tibet under his control and instigates a Buddhist law throughout the country (albeit one that privileges religious practitioners; ZLh 55b4–60b4). From this perspective, Khri Srong lde brtsan is not the antagonist but is somehow a protagonist who undergoes degradation at the hand of Buddhist masters acting as helpers. The king's abasement was part of his own heroic journey and the conversion and purification of Tibet into a Buddhist land. Frye himself has noted the use of ritual humiliation in Central Eurasian royal ceremonies:

Even when those kings were strong and successful, they would have to go through certain ritual ceremonies in which they assumed the opposite role. We are told that in Babylon, at the time of the New Year festival, a king, such as Nebuchadnezzar, would go through a ceremony of ritual humiliation, have his face slapped by the priest and that sort of thing, and then his title would be renewed for another year. Nebuchadnezzar was a strong and successful monarch; but if this ceremony were omitted, it might provoke the jealousy of his tutelary deity.⁵³

In the *Zangs gling ma*, the ruler is a secondary type of hero rather than merely the antagonist of the main hero. The degradation of Khri Srong lde brtsan (in a similar way to Nebuchadnezzar), and his relegation in mundane status from the supreme ruler into a tantric disciple, transform Tibet into a Buddhist country and rejuvenates both the kingdom and Khri Srong lde brtsan himself.

Nonetheless, his depiction as an inferior ruler of Tibet upstaged by religious masters stands in contrast to early descriptions of the Tibetan emperors. The documents surviving from the eighth to tenth centuries depict Khri Srong lde brtsan as the pinnacle of imperial and religious greatness.⁵⁴ In the *Zangs gling ma*, Khri Srong lde brtsan is shown up. His royal status is made comic by the burning of his official robes. Padmasambhava does not become king of Tibet but instead displaces the king as the central protagonist or hero, worthy of being given a birth story that retains the formal elements of older mythic hero narratives from Central Eurasia and elsewhere.

The act of upstaging, degrading, and humiliating Khri Srong lde brtsan aligns the king with a new Buddhist trajectory, allowing him to construct bSam yas Monastery,

⁵³ Northrup Frye, "A Personal View by Northrup Frye: The Bible and Literature. Program 13, the Metaphor of Kingship," originally published 1982, available online 2013, <https://collections.library.utoronto.ca/explore/northrup-frye/frye-program-introduction/program-13> [accessed 10.08.2024]. Frye goes on to talk of King David's necessary humiliation at his greatest moment, the time when he was brought the Ark of the Covenant.

⁵⁴ See Sam van Schaik and Lewis Doney, "The Prayer, the Priest and the Tsenpo: An Early Buddhist Narrative from Dunhuang," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 30, no. 1–2 (2007): 175–218 on these early documents and their varied but wholly positive images of Khri Srong lde brtsan.

pass Buddhist laws, invite other masters, find his tantric tutelary deity, take initiation in it, and eventually be reborn and enlightened as Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer.⁵⁵ Thus, within the narrative, the humiliation is real, the superior position of Padmasambhava is real, and the consequent reduction in the importance of Khri Srong lde brtsan is real. However, in the *Zangs gling ma*, at the moment of his degradation, Khri Srong lde brtsan is not the antagonist or unjust king but takes on some of that role as a necessary aspect of his conversion. Despite the internal logic of this narrative turn, in the wider history of representing kings in Tibetan biographical literature, Emperor Khri Srong lde brtsan of the Yar lung Dynasty has been relegated to a status below Padmasambhava ever since.

5 Conclusion

During the Tibetan imperial period, towards the end of the first millennium, the court maintained a self-representation in which the emperor rightfully occupied the highest position in society, as well as power and land ownership over his dependents throughout the empire. The growing popularity of Buddhism among Tibetans by the second dissemination period a few centuries later seems to have necessitated a literary overthrow of this old order (which had already collapsed in reality). The idealized emperor at this point appears to have become subtly tinged with pre-Buddhist impurity, which required symbolic destruction. The twelfth-century *Zangs gling ma* explicitly narrates Padmasambhava (and Vimalamitra) as bringing “comic” transformation to Tibetan society. As a semi-royal emanation who gives up his kingdom in order to become a wandering *siddha*, Padmasambhava eventually acts as a spiritual goad for King Khri Srong lde brtsan. The above process marks the rise in status of Buddhist masters more generally in Tibetan literature, a process that Schwieger has already described well in society at large.⁵⁶

As indicated above, the Indic rhetorical practice of identifying some religious groups as naturally superior, which Weber sees as belied by reality,⁵⁷ became something else in Tibet. Tibetans may have taken up the Indic rhetoric of the superiority of Brahmins and yogic adepts, which might not have been a historical reality, and put it into practice as a literary motif that then allowed new forms of asymmetrical dependency on tantric adepts to take root in actual Tibetan societies. In doing so, they supplanted the imperial hierarchy that placed the emperor at the top with a new social structure that gave religious figures pre-eminence. They were no doubt supported in their efforts by the fact that the fall of the empire had led to a power vacuum in cen-

55 For more on twelfth-century context of this text, see Doney, *The Zangs gling ma*: 8–22.

56 See Schwieger, “Geschichte als Mythos”; Schwieger, “History as Myth.”

57 Weber, *From Max Weber*: 193.

tral Tibet. This transformation was expressed, or perhaps even brought about, by narratives of separate, special, otherworldly religious adepts who disregarded social mores, criticized society, and as a result, showed their superiority to kings and, by extension, also attested to their usefulness as instigators of the rejuvenation of the power of kings. These religious masters, their lineages, and institutions attained high status in Tibet; gradually, they also gained property that, although rhetorically disparaged, acted as proof of their status and the stability of the system that privileged them – think of Weber’s remark: ‘Property as such is not always recognized as a status qualification, but in the long run it is, and with extraordinary regularity.’⁵⁸ However, this process was not to be a leading factor in the changes that large-scale monasticism wrought in Tibetan society. In the introduction to this chapter, I quoted Kapstein’s remarks on the dominance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the consequential disenfranchisement of the lay aristocracy. He goes on:

At the same time the subjection of the nobles to church rule was mitigated to the extent that the sons of aristocratic families became ranking hierarchs or monk-officials, and thus shared in church power. [. . .] Within the broader ruling class, therefore, there was a marked degree of concurrence among its lay and monastic facets. The church, however, was generally chary of lay interference and so more or less systematically limited the opportunities of noble households to exercise any appreciable degree of control over it.⁵⁹

The limitation of lay power probably began during the lifetime of Nyang ral Nyi ma ’od zer, the creator of the *Zangs gling ma*, entailing the overreach of monastic power, which he evidently considered a threat to his position.⁶⁰ That being said, Schwieger rightly points out that Tibetan culture was not in general plagued by social upheaval or a wider threat to the Buddhist worldview – what Weber calls ‘[the] technological repercussion and economic transformation [that] threatens stratification by status and pushes the class situation into the foreground.’⁶¹ Therefore, although different religious groups held power, the status of religious figures, in general, did not change significantly from their establishment until the twentieth century. This status allowed for a religious system in which many Tibetan subjects were dependent on the clergy or lay tantric adepts – sometimes in both religious and economic terms.

Perhaps this overthrow of the previous value and status of the emperor had already been forgotten in the sixteenth century.⁶² To borrow the terminology of Weber, the pre-eminent status of the Tibetan emperor, which was conveyed in the Old Tibetan manuscripts and imperial inscriptions, is no longer ‘distinctly recognisable’. In contrast, the superior status of religious masters is taken as ‘an absolutely given fact to be ac-

58 Weber, *From Max Weber*: 187.

59 Kapstein, *The Tibetans*: 181.

60 See Doney, *The Zangs gling ma*: 8–15.

61 Weber, *From Max Weber*: 194.

62 See Doney, “The Degraded Emperor”: 57.

cepted' within his society.⁶³ This reversal of earlier historical representations of Khri Srong lde brtsan and Padmasambhava also influenced interactions between living religious adepts and those in mundane authority in Tibet.⁶⁴ Consequently, it was not merely confined to the pages of Tibetan literature. These are just some of the effects on Tibetan notions of social status brought about by the growing power of Buddhism and Buddhist masters, whose narratives drew so successfully on older state formation mythology and the *topoi* of exile and abandonment to valorize their protagonists.

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⁶³ Weber, *From Max Weber*: 184.

⁶⁴ See Doney, "Narrative Transformations": 318.

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Marion Gymnich

‘There is a Great Difference between Christianity and Religion at the South’: References to Religion in Harriet Jacobs’s Slave Narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

1 Introduction

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, texts in which formerly enslaved people described their experience of enslavement were used as an instrument, as ‘evidentiary testimony’,¹ in the fight for the abolition of slavery in Great Britain and the United States. Their ‘immediate purpose [. . .] was to expose slavery’s horrors and persuade readers to join the abolitionist cause.’² Since they present the experience of being enslaved from the perspective of dependent people, slave narratives, as this type of testimonial life writing has traditionally been called, are an important resource for research on strong asymmetrical dependency.³ These texts document suffering and resilience alike. Moreover, they provide a wealth of information on the everyday life, thoughts, and emotions of dependent people who were cruelly exploited, abused, and sold. Given that the authors often addressed the ‘human causes [of slavery] in an attempt to understand why white people chose to victimize them’,⁴ these narratives at times also offer remarkable insights into social and psychological processes that shaped interactions in the context of transatlantic slavery. In terms of content, the depiction of extreme violence is a central feature of this type of writing.

The ‘graphic accounts of [. . .] physical and emotional abuses sadistically inflicted for centuries on African descendants by American nation builders’⁵ are often coupled with comments on religious beliefs and practices, as Sally Ann H. Ferguson stresses.⁶ In this way, the authors of slave narratives positioned themselves towards Christian-

1 Anna Stewart, “Revising ‘Harriet Jacobs’ for 1865,” *American Literature* 82, no. 4 (2010): 714.

2 Mitch Kachun, “Slave Narratives and Historical Memory,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. John Ernest (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020): 25.

3 For an overview of the genre of the slave narrative, see for example Audrey Fisch, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and John Ernest, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

4 Sally Ann H. Ferguson, “Christian Violence and the Slave Narrative,” *American Literature* 68, no. 2 (1996): 298.

5 Ferguson, “Christian Violence and the Slave Narrative”: 297.

6 Ferguson, “Christian Violence and the Slave Narrative”: 297.

ity in a country whose identity had been shaped by its close relation to Christian – and specifically Protestant – beliefs since the early colonial period. In the following, I will argue that references to religion were, on the one hand, a tool for criticizing both individuals and a society that claimed to be Christian. On the other hand, authors of slave narratives described religious beliefs and practices as an important individual and communal resource for resilience. In other words, religion may play a complex and ambivalent role in life writing by formerly enslaved people.

Any analysis of Anglophone slave narratives from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries must consider that these texts were typically edited by white abolitionists and possibly changed in the process. Often, we can only guess the extent of the editors' impact on the texts as we know them today. In this context, the potential for significant editorial intervention also means that we cannot rule out the possibility that certain views and beliefs expressed in a text might reflect the opinion of an editor rather than that of the individual whose life is portrayed.⁷ Editorial intervention may, of course, have also influenced the way religion is presented in a specific text. The decision to portray a formerly enslaved person as a devout Christian may have been a strategic choice on the part of the editor and / or the author seeking to appeal to Christian readers.⁸ Still, references to religion in life writing by formerly enslaved people often turn out to be both too frequent and too variable to be accounted for solely as the result of attempts to gain the favour of a Christian readership. Explanations that fail to consider the complex picture of what religion may have meant for an enslaved person in the antebellum South do not do justice to the texts. Religious doubts and criticism of the Church in the South are juxtaposed with expressions of faith that ring sincere.

The most famous slave narratives tend to portray the life of one enslaved person from childhood to the time when they were manumitted or escaped. Despite their focus on a single person, slave narratives typically include at least glimpses of the lives of other enslaved people. Moreover, the fate of the individual whose life is at the centre of the text is meant to exemplify the suffering of enslaved people in the South in general.⁹ The collective dimension that is thus inherent in the genre sets slave nar-

7 For a discussion of the ethical implications of collaborative life writing, see G. Thomas Couser, "Making, Taking, and Faking Lives: The Ethics of Collaborative Life Writing," *Style* 32, no. 2 (1998): 334–50.

8 Thomas Peyser, for instance, argues along these lines. He questions the sincerity of expressions of faith in Frederick Douglass' life writing and sees them as an instrument to appeal to readers. Peyser assumes that Douglass sought to strike a balance between 'mollify[ing] the Christian audience whose support he needed and rais[ing] fundamental suspicions about Christianity itself' (Thomas Peyser, "The Attack on Christianity in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*," *The Explicator* 69, no. 2 [2011]: 86).

9 Cf. Michael Basseler, *Kulturelle Erinnerung und Trauma im zeitgenössischen afroamerikanischen Roman: Theoretische Grundlegung, Ausprägungsformen, Entwicklungstendenzen* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008): 119.

ratives apart from many other types of life writing, especially from traditional autobiography. Yet, while stressing shared experience, narratives by formerly enslaved people also highlight the heterogeneity of dependent people and their lives. By depicting a range of enslaved people, the texts draw attention to the fact that the situation of an enslaved person was shaped by various social factors, including race and gender, as well as age, literacy / education, and religion. Due to these insights into the heterogeneity of enslaved people’s experience, James Olney’s conclusion that slave narratives produce ‘a sense not of uniqueness but of overwhelming *sameness*’¹⁰ seems at least debatable. While there are recognizable templates as far as the plot is concerned, as Olney shows in his influential article, the situation of individuals was still often portrayed in considerable detail and thus should not be reduced to a simple formula.¹¹

In the following, I will take a closer look at references to religion in one of the most well-known slave narratives: Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). The text was edited by well-known abolitionist Lydia Maria Child. We cannot be entirely sure how much Child’s revisions inform the text and, consequently, the way we perceive Harriet Jacobs. In her preface to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Child claimed that she had not made any significant changes: ‘[w]ith trifling exceptions, both the ideas and the language’¹² can be ascribed to Harriet Jacobs. Yet, what is meant by ‘trifling exceptions’ is not detailed. There appears to be a widespread consensus that ‘Jacobs, not Child, was the primary author’¹³ of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,¹⁴ but we also know that Child’s influence led, for instance, to radical changes regarding the ending.¹⁵ Jacobs had intended to end her narrative with a chapter on the abolitionist leader John Brown, who is primarily remembered for the rebellion at Harpers Ferry. This chapter ‘was apparently suppressed by Lydia Maria

10 James Olney, “‘I Was Born’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature,” *Callaloo* 20 (1984): 46, original emphasis.

11 Cf. also Lucas McCarthy, “Between the Sublime and the Traumatic: Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *Papers on Language and Literature* 57, no. 2 (2021): 180. McCarthy implicitly confirms the uniqueness of Harriet Jacobs’s narrative when he argues that the text ‘reveals aspects of an enslaved woman’s experience that had previously received little attention, constructs a portrait of a southern African American home rarely presented, and advances the use of dialogue and dialect in slave narratives’.

12 Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015): 5.

13 Stewart, “Revising ‘Harriet Jacobs’ for 1865”: 702.

14 Cf. for example NaTosha Briscoe, “The Struggle for Survival in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century African American Women’s Autobiography: Black Women’s Narrative of Incarceration and Freedom,” *Journal of African American Studies* 26 (2022): 103, 108.

15 Cf. Bruce Mills, “Lydia Maria Child and the Endings to Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,” *American Literature* 64, no. 2 (1992): 255–72.

Child¹⁶ and was replaced by an ending that focused on the death of Jacobs's grandmother – a chapter that was significantly less political and, at the same time, more religious.

2 Religion in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

Today, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, originally published under the pseudonym Linda Brent, is among the most famous examples of life writing by an enslaved person.¹⁷ Thus, it is no surprise that the text has already been discussed from various angles.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the role of religion in this narrative has, on the whole, received comparatively little attention, even though Jacobs's account of her life as an enslaved woman is replete with references to Christianity. Robert J. Patterson notes a 'trend in criticism not to explore the religious [. . .] aspects of Jacobs's text.'¹⁹ In a similar vein, Alyssa Bellows observes that 'intertextual scholarship on *Incidents* prioritizes sentimental and popular literature rather than religious texts.'²⁰ Patterson is among the few scholars who read Jacobs's narrative with an emphasis on religion, arguing that the author anticipates ideas of feminist African American theology and thus can be placed 'within a womanist theological genealogy.'²¹ In her life writing, Jacobs offers a multifaceted picture of the significance Christianity could have for enslaved individuals as well as for white and Black American communities in the antebellum South.

One of the main functions of references to religion in Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is undoubtedly a critique of people who claim to be Christians (and

16 Caleb Smith, "Harriet Jacobs among the Militants: Transformations in Abolition's Public Sphere, 1859–61," *American Literature* 84, no. 4 (2012): 743.

17 Robert J. Patterson refers to Jacobs's description of her life as an enslaved person as 'the most well-known, frequently taught, oft-written-about nineteenth-century black woman's narrative' (Robert J. Patterson, "A Triple-Twined Re-Appropriation: Womanist Theology and Gendered-Racial Protest in the Writings of Jarena Lee, Frances E.W. Harper and Harriet Jacobs," *Religion and Literature* 45, no. 2 [2013]: 71.).

18 The themes of Jacobs's text that have been explored in detail include trauma (cf. Lucas McCarthy, "Between the Sublime and the Traumatic: Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 57, no. 2 [2021]: 165–202.) as well as the body and female agency (cf. Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus, "Civil Resistance and Procreative Agency in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *Women's Studies* 48, no. 5 [2019]: 498–509; Ingrid Diran, "Scenes of Speculation: Harriet Jacobs and the Biopolitics of Human Capital," *American Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2019): 697–718).

19 Patterson, "A Triple-Twined Re-Appropriation": 72.

20 Alyssa Bellows, "Evangelicalism, Adultery, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 62, no. 3 (2020): 255.

21 Patterson, "A Triple-Twined Re-Appropriation": 56.

reap social benefits from this status) while displaying behaviour at odds with core Christian values. Criticism of white Christians who ignore the principle of loving one’s neighbour is a recurring theme in North American narratives by formerly enslaved persons. In his article on the slave narrative as a genre, Olney even lists criticism of Christian enslavers among the typical features of this type of text: ‘description of a “Christian” slaveholder (often of one such dying in terror) and the accompanying claim that “Christian” slaveholders are invariably worse than those professing no religion.’²² According to Jacobs, a callous attitude towards enslaved people could be observed among white Southern men and women alike, irrespective of their claim to be Christians. The author, for instance, describes the callousness of Mrs Flint, the wife of Jacobs’s chief tormenter, Dr Flint, who attended church regularly but did not mind watching ‘a woman whipped, till the blood trickled from every stroke of the lash’.²³ Jacobs concludes that ‘partaking of the Lord’s supper did not seem to put her in a Christian frame of mind.’²⁴ The author claims in no uncertain terms that persons who treat enslaved people with the utmost cruelty forfeit the right to be called Christians:

If a slave resisted being whipped, the bloodhounds were unpacked, and set upon him, to tear his flesh from his bones. The master who did these things was highly educated, and styled a perfect gentleman. He also boasted *the name and standing of a Christian, though Satan never had a truer follower.*²⁵

The way Jacobs expresses her critique implies that she does not reject Christianity as such. Instead, she critiques people who do not follow the gospel’s teachings despite supposedly being Christians. She thus claims the authority to distinguish between a genuinely Christian person and someone who merely pretends to be a Christian.

In a confident tone, Jacobs also rejects one of the most common religious arguments employed to legitimize slavery: ‘They seem to satisfy their consciences with the doctrine that God created the Africans to be slaves. What a libel upon the heavenly Father, who “made of one blood all nations of men!”’²⁶ Here, Jacobs quotes a passage from the Acts of the Apostles (17:26) to discredit the notorious interpretation of Ham’s curse (Genesis 9:24–27). The idea that enslaving Africans was justified because they

²² Olney, “‘I Was Born’”: 50. In his analysis of the structure of slave narratives and their recurring features, Olney does not mention any other functions references to religion in slave narratives might have had.

²³ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 15.

²⁴ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 15. In a similar vein, Frederick Douglass tends to use the adjectives “Christian” and “pious” sarcastically in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, recalling for instance the ‘pious mistress’ who did not care if the enslaved people in her household were starving, yet ‘would kneel every morning’ to ask for God’s blessing (Frederick Douglass, “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself (1845),” in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Nina Baym [New York: W.W. Norton, 2008]: 953–54).

²⁵ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 49; emphasis added.

²⁶ Jacobs: 45.

were descendants of Noah's son Ham, who had been cursed, was widely propagated in proslavery discourse.²⁷ Thus, it is not surprising that Jacobs was aware of this line of argumentation; she was also bound to be familiar with abolitionist counterarguments that were also based on a reading of the Bible. Jacobs's argumentation reflects the fact that passages from the Bible were 'co-opted for proslavery as well as antislavery arguments.'²⁸

Despite the prevailing criticism of people who called themselves Christians while failing to act in accordance with the values propagated in the New Testament, Jacobs's narrative also mentions a few white persons in the South who were inspired by Christian principles to some extent. The following description of a young woman is a case in point: 'The young lady was very pious, and there was some reality in her religion. She taught her slaves to lead pure lives and wished them to enjoy the fruit of their own industry. *Her* religion was not a garb put on for Sunday and laid aside till Sunday returned again.'²⁹ The metaphor of the 'garb put on for Sunday' captures well what Christianity seems to have meant for many white people in the antebellum South. According to Jacobs, being a Christian was primarily a social role and a public persona constructed and upheld by customary, ritualized performances while having little impact on the individual's values. Jacobs's observation of the young woman that 'there was some reality in her religion' raises the fundamental question of whether being complicit with slavery is compatible with being a Christian at all.

The question of compatibility also seems to inform Jacobs's memory of her first mistress, which turns out to be highly ambivalent. The woman, who treated Jacobs with some kindness and made her familiar with the teachings of the Bible, failed to see the young Black girl as an individual who deserves to be treated as a neighbour, as Jacobs puts it, drawing upon the New Testament:

My mistress had taught me the precepts of God's Word: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." "Whosoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor. I would give much to blot out from my memory that one great wrong. As a child, I loved my mistress; and, looking back on the happy days I spent with her, I try to think with less bitterness of this act of injustice. While I was with her, she taught me to read and spell; and for this privilege, which so rarely falls to the lot of a slave, I bless her memory.³⁰

The 'one great wrong' Jacobs refers to is the white woman's refusal to manumit her. This decision caused extreme suffering for the enslaved woman, which reminds readers to what extent enslaved people were at the mercy of enslavers' whims.

²⁷ Cf. Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁸ Bellows, "Evangelicalism, Adultery, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*": 256.

²⁹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 50; original emphasis.

³⁰ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 12.

In addition to uttering explicit, bitter criticism of the discrepancy between the enslavers' claim to be Christians and an attitude that was incompatible with Christ's teachings, Jacobs also uses satire to decry hypocrisy among Christians in the South. This strategy is most obvious in the chapter 'The Church and Slavery', where Jacobs provides a satirical account of the kind of sermon enslaved people were likely to hear from white clergymen (if they were deemed worthy of being addressed at all). Already the way in which Jacobs describes the Reverend Pike's process of getting ready to deliver a sermon establishes a distinctly satirical tone: 'Pious Mr. Pike brushed up his hair till it stood upright, and, in deep, solemn tones, began.'³¹ Both the Reverend's body language and his pompous manner of speaking are indicative of vanity and self-importance; they turn him into a ridiculous figure.³² The content and style of his sermon, which is subsequently presented in direct speech, complete the satire.

The essence of Mr Pike's sermon is the idea that enslaved persons please God by serving their enslavers, whereas a refusal to be obedient or to work hard is a sin. To justify his position, the clergyman establishes a parallel between the enslavers and God, i.e., the 'earthly master' and the 'heavenly Master',³³ both of whom, according to Mr Pike, are entitled to expect obedience. The clergyman also draws upon a further strategy for instilling fear in his listeners by stressing God's omniscience: 'Your masters may not find you out, but God sees you, and will punish you.'³⁴ To hammer this warning home, he repeats the phrase 'God sees you' several times.³⁵ Through his sermon, Mr Pike means to intimidate the enslaved people, but according to Jacobs, his message has the opposite effect. Rather than responding to his pronouncements in fear, the listeners are 'highly amused'³⁶ by the preacher's exhortations. They do not see the Reverend as a moral authority.

Jacobs contrasts the hypocrisy and conceit displayed by Mr Pike and other privileged white people with the more genuine Christianity she observed among enslaved persons: 'Many of them are sincere, and nearer to the gate of heaven than sanctimonious Mr. Pike, and other long-faced Christians, who see wounded Samaritans, and pass by on the other side.'³⁷ In this statement, Jacobs leaves no doubt regarding whom

³¹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 67.

³² Bellows aptly describes Jacobs's attitude towards Mr Pike as 'condescending amusement' (Bellows, "Evangelicalism, Adultery, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*": 259).

³³ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 68.

³⁴ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 67.

³⁵ Jacobs creates a caricature of the clergyman with a few brushstrokes, relying primarily on the technique of implicit self-characterization in a manner that is reminiscent of similar portraits of ridiculous, conceited characters occurring in works by nineteenth-century novelists like Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Mark Twain.

³⁶ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 68.

³⁷ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 68.

she considers true Christians and draws upon the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10: 25–37 to support her point.³⁸

Both free and enslaved Black Americans are portrayed as participating in Christian rituals that probably also offered some release for pent-up emotions. At least, this is what might be concluded from Jacobs's observation that Black Americans like 'a Methodist shout' and 'never seem so happy as when shouting and singing at religious meetings.'³⁹ The enslaved people also created 'their own songs and hymns',⁴⁰ which means they displayed a certain agency regarding how they practised Christianity. For a while, they attended a 'little church in the woods',⁴¹ which they themselves had built. According to Jacobs, 'they had no higher happiness than to meet there and sing hymns together, and pour out their hearts in spontaneous prayer.'⁴² However, this autonomy to conduct religious meetings did not last long; their church was destroyed, and they were deprived of their meeting place, which suggests that religious meetings of enslaved people were deemed a threat that had to be quashed.⁴³

Instead of gathering in their own place of worship and praying in the ways they considered appropriate, Black Americans were eventually 'permitted to attend the white churches, a certain portion of the galleries being appropriated to their use.'⁴⁴ Moreover, they were allowed to participate in communion, though only after the white people. In order to minimize contact between white and Black Christians, separate times for Black people were offered by the Episcopal church, and '[t]he Methodist and Baptist churches admitted them in the afternoon.'⁴⁵ Jacobs alludes to the contrast between this segregation in the Church and the teachings of Jesus when she mentions that the white people 'partook of the bread and wine, in commemoration of the meek

38 Though Jacobs's use of the parable of the Good Samaritan is somewhat at odds with the particulars of the biblical text since the Samaritan was the person who helped the wounded man in need, not the one being helped, the parable embodies core ideas of Evangelical Abolitionism: 'In the nineteenth century, Evangelicalism emphasized the necessity to verify one's faith through one's actions [. . .]. in a sermon about the Good Samaritan published in 1885, entitled "Who is My Neighbor?" Reverend A. M'miel argues that acts of kindness reveal a person's true state of heart.' (Kasey J. Waite, "The Spark of Kindness: The Rhetoric of Abolitionist Action in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *Rocky Mountain Review* 73, no. 2 [2019]: 175).

39 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 68.

40 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 68.

41 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 66.

42 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 66.

43 A similar event is mentioned in Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), which is set primarily in the Caribbean. The author recalls that 'the poor slaves had built up a place with boughs and leaves, where they might meet for prayers, but the white people pulled it down twice, and would not allow them even a shed for prayers' (Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* [1831, repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004]: 19).

44 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 66.

45 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 67.

and lowly Jesus, who said, "God is your Father, and all ye are brethren."⁴⁶ There is certainly nothing 'meek and lowly' about the Southern Christians as portrayed by Jacobs. The presence of enslaved people in church was tolerated to some extent because religion was seen as an instrument of control and coercion. As Jacobs reflects sarcastically, the rationale was apparently 'to give the slaves enough of religious instruction to keep them from murdering their masters.'⁴⁷ While white people utilized Christianity to justify and maintain the institution of slavery, enslaved people often interpreted the Bible differently, as exemplified by the arguments brought forth in Jacobs's text.⁴⁸

Southern clergymen are not exempt from being portrayed in a negative light by Jacobs, though there are rare exceptions to her generally negative appraisal of religious leaders. She, for instance, recalls an Episcopal clergyman who was a positive counterexample to the likes of Mr Pike.⁴⁹ This Episcopal clergyman, whose name is not provided in the text, was genuinely interested in the enslaved people. In fact, as Jacobs asserts, when this clergyman preached, 'it was the first time they had ever been addressed as human beings'.⁵⁰ His attitude is encompassed by his statement that "God judges men by their hearts, not by the color of their skins" – a position that Jacobs characterizes as 'offensive to slaveholders'.⁵¹ The wife of this clergyman is likewise described as a positive example, as a 'truly Christian woman'⁵² who taught enslaved people to read and write: most importantly, she also eventually manumitted them. This kind of behaviour, however, does not seem to have served as a model for the white community at large. Instead, the clergyman encountered significant opposition to his ministry, which might have been why he departed from the area soon after the death of his wife.

Notwithstanding such exceptions, Jacobs leaves no doubt that the Church in the South was generally an institution that contributed to the maintenance of slavery, as the following succinct analysis reveals:

There is a great difference between Christianity and religion at the south. If a man goes to the communion table, and pays money into the treasury of the church, no matter if it be the price of blood, he is called religious. If a pastor has offspring by a woman not his wife, the church dismiss [sic] him, if she is a white woman; but if she is colored, it does not hinder his continuing to be their good shepherd.⁵³

⁴⁶ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 66.

⁴⁷ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 66.

⁴⁸ On Christian legitimizations of enslavement, see for instance Katherine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

⁴⁹ In this context, it seems noteworthy that Jacobs was baptised as an Episcopalian.

⁵⁰ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 70.

⁵¹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 71.

⁵² Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 70.

⁵³ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 73.

Jacobs denounces the Church in the South on account of its double moral standards. Nevertheless, the Episcopal clergyman mentioned above, as well as Jacobs's encounter with another Episcopal clergyman during her stay in England, whom she describes as 'a true disciple of Jesus',⁵⁴ arguably serve to disentangle Christianity and religion as *such* from the hypocrisy of most Southern clergymen. In other words, Jacobs argues that Christianity ought to inspire an attitude unlike the one that is predominant among members of the Church in the South.

Another facet of the criticism against the Church is its complicity in preventing enslaved people from learning to read and write. To support her argument that enslaved people should be allowed to become literate, Jacobs uses the example of an old man 'whose piety and childlike trust in God were beautiful to witness'.⁵⁵ This man asked Jacobs to teach him how to read because he believed reading scripture would bring him 'nearer to God'.⁵⁶ Jacobs draws upon biblical language (from John and the Psalms) to emphasize that the old man and others like him ought to have the right to read the Bible: 'There are thousands, who, like good uncle Fred, are thirsting for the water of life; but the law forbids it, and the churches withhold it. [. . .] Tell them they are answerable to God for sealing up the Fountain of Life from souls that are thirsting for it.'⁵⁷

Jacobs also deplores the fact that Christian missionaries teach people in Africa how to read while such knowledge is withheld from enslaved people at home in the United States. Education is a recurring topic in narratives by formerly enslaved people and played a significant role in their struggle for freedom, both symbolically and in a very pragmatic sense. The advantages of literacy are illustrated in Jacobs's narrative. While hiding in her grandmother's house, Jacobs wrote letters to deceive the enslaver Dr Flint, making him believe she had escaped to the North instead of remaining in the vicinity.

Throughout Jacobs's narrative, religion means, first and foremost, Christianity. Only at one point in the text does a brief reference seem to evoke syncretic religious practices. This reference occurs in the aforementioned sermon by Reverend Pike and is meant to illustrate the supposed sinfulness of Black Americans. The clergyman accuses them of 'quarrelling, and tying up little bags of roots to bury under the doorsteps to poison each other with'.⁵⁸ Jacobs does not comment on this allegation, which leaves open whether it refers to an actual practice or is merely a product of Mr Pike's imagination. Given that there is no other evidence of a practice like the one alluded to by Mr Pike in the entire text, his allegation may very well be read as groundless suspicion.

⁵⁴ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 71.

⁵⁵ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 71.

⁵⁶ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 71.

⁵⁷ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 72.

⁵⁸ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 67.

Alternatively, the half-sentence may indicate actual religious practices that departed from and challenged the Christianity preached by white clergymen. In the latter case, the question of whether the intention behind the practice is indeed an evil one, i.e., 'poison[ing] each other', remains open. Even if we assume that the practice existed in the community, its meaning may have been misinterpreted by Mr Pike. In any case, the fact that Jacobs picks up Mr Pike's allegation and refrains from commenting on it is intriguing. It is tempting to read this passage as Jacobs's acknowledgement of the existence of religious practices that challenge the authority of the Christian Church. By not commenting on this matter, she may have tried to uphold the image of herself as a Christian woman, which was important for her reputation among Northern abolitionists.⁵⁹

Throughout her narrative, Jacobs seeks to present herself as a good Christian; she repeatedly refers to and quotes from the Bible. She also portrays herself as praying or thanking God⁶⁰ and kneeling during prayer to stress her devotion. Moreover, adverbs like 'earnestly'⁶¹ or phrases like 'from the heart'⁶² are used to communicate the intensity of her prayer. When Jacobs talks about her son having been born prematurely, she explains his survival as a consequence of God's will: 'God let it live.'⁶³ Statements such as '[t]he heavenly Father had been most merciful to me in leading me to this place',⁶⁴ along with expressions like 'through God's providence',⁶⁵ 'God being my

59 John Ernest observes a tendency to be cautious in terms of their self-representation among Black Americans involved in the abolitionist movement: 'almost all African American public figures of the time demonstrate a keen understanding of what it means to live in a white supremacist culture. African American narrators accordingly were cautious about the prospect of revealing the details of their lives even to benevolent white readers who were simultaneously being influenced by a culture bent on trivializing, eliminating, and otherwise controlling the African American presence in the North.' (John Ernest, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. John Ernest [New York: Oxford University Press, 2020]: 8.) When Frederick Douglass refers to a practice that evokes non-Christian religious practices in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, he also appears to be cautious. At one point, another enslaved man advised Douglass to make use of 'a certain root' that 'would render it impossible for Mr. Covey, or any other white man, to whip' him (Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass": 962, original emphasis). The name of this supposedly powerful root is not mentioned, and the author describes its effects in a rather non-committal fashion. While not commending its use and categorizing the other man's trust in its power as 'superstition' (Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass": 966, n. 3), he refrains from ruling out completely that the root might have worked as a source of protection.

60 Cf. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 76, 87, 91, 92, 96, 103, 116, 117, 126, 130, 172.

61 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 116.

62 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 117.

63 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 60.

64 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 157.

65 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 27.

helper',⁶⁶ and 'God in his mercy',⁶⁷ evoke a Christian worldview. They also affirm the author's trust in God.

Notwithstanding such utterances, Jacobs openly admits that she, at times, struggled with her faith. For instance, she recalls having sometimes thought that 'there was no justice or mercy in the divine government. I asked why the curse of slavery was permitted to exist, and why I had been so persecuted and wronged from youth upward. These things took the shape of mystery, which is to this day not so clear to my soul as I trust it will be hereafter.'⁶⁸ In retrospect, Jacobs associates her struggles around faith primarily with the experiences and tendencies of youth.

The idea of a correlation between the age of an enslaved or formerly enslaved person and their faith is reinforced by a striking contrast between Jacobs and her grandmother. Furthermore, there is an equally clear resemblance between Jacobs and her youngest uncle as far as trust in divine providence is concerned. Jacobs remembers being comforted by her grandmother when struggling with her faith as a young girl: 'My heart rebelled against God, who had taken from me mother, father, mistress, and friend. The good grandmother tried to comfort me. "Who knows the ways of God?" said she. "Perhaps they have been kindly taken from the evil days to come."⁶⁹ The grandmother is consistently portrayed as a woman who draws enormous strength from her faith,⁷⁰ but her faith also makes her inclined to accept the status quo: 'Most earnestly did she strive to make us feel that it was the will of God: that He had seen fit to place us under such circumstances; and though it seemed hard, we ought to pray for contentment.'⁷¹ This stance is apt to stabilize slavery as an institution. Jacobs, by contrast, refuses to be content with her situation – a sentiment that is shared by her young uncle: 'It was a beautiful faith, coming from a mother who could not call her children her own. But I, and Benjamin, her youngest boy, condemned it.'⁷² While Jacobs never fails to express the highest respect and admiration for her grandmother, who was manumitted, she disagrees with the older woman's reasoning, which supports the existing system.

The grandmother repeatedly admonished both her son and granddaughter first to consider God's will. When her son Benjamin told her that only the thought of his mother's pain had prevented him from committing suicide, she asked him 'if he did not also think of God.'⁷³ The son replied, "No, I did not think of him. When a man is hunted like a wild beast he forgets there is a God, a heaven", whereupon his mother

66 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 77.

67 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 94.

68 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 115.

69 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 13.

70 Cf. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 138.

71 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 19.

72 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 19.

73 Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 24.

scolded him: “Don’t talk so, Benjamin,” said she. “Put your trust in God. Be humble, my child, and your master will forgive you.”⁷⁴

Despite her insistence on trust in divine providence, the older woman understood and supported the young people’s desire to escape from slavery. She was overjoyed when she heard that her son had escaped. Her happiness was translated immediately into gratitude for God’s help. She ‘raised her hands, and exclaimed, “God be praised! Let us thank him.” She dropped on her knees, and poured forth her heart in prayer.’⁷⁵ The woman also helped her granddaughter Harriet when the latter was trying to escape from slavery by hiding the young woman for several years in a secret space inside her house, thus exposing both women to considerable danger.

In the last chapter of Jacobs’s narrative, the author once more evokes the figure of the pious grandmother by quoting extensively from a letter, which is the older woman’s farewell message. The wording of her letter is again informed by a trust in God and a belief in an afterlife that promises a reunion with loved ones:

I cannot hope to see you again on earth; but I pray to God to unite us above, where pain will no more rack this feeble body of mine; where sorrow and parting from my children will be no more. God has promised these things if we are faithful unto the end. My age and feeble health deprive me of going to church now; but God is with me here at home. [. . .] Strive, my child, to train them [Jacobs’s son and daughter] for God’s children. May he protect and provide for you, is the prayer of your loving old mother.⁷⁶

The tenor of this letter rounds off the picture of a woman whose outlook on life and death was shaped entirely by a faith which sustained her.

Jacobs’s pious grandmother is doubtlessly an important person in her narrative, both as a motherly figure and a helper. However, she was arguably given inordinate attention, which is granted at the expense of Harriet’s voice. The suppression of Harriet’s voice is evidenced in an anthology called *The Freedmen’s Book*, compiled by Jacobs’s editor Lydia Maria Child immediately after the U.S. Civil War. The anthology features excerpts from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in a section titled ‘The Good Grandmother’.⁷⁷ The title itself suggests that the focus in the section dedicated to Jacobs was shifted from the young woman, whose voice and decisions were at times rebellious and irreverent, to the pious grandmother, who was surely a much less controversial figure for white readers at the time. Thus, although Harriet Jacobs is listed as the author of ‘The Good Grandmother’, it is not her life that is presented here. As Stewart stresses: ‘No longer the protagonist of her own narrative, this Jacobs has become an almost disembodied voice, a presence ultimately remarkable for her ab-

⁷⁴ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 24.

⁷⁵ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 28.

⁷⁶ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: 180.

⁷⁷ Stewart, “Revising ‘Harriet Jacobs’ for 1865”: 709–10.

sence.⁷⁸ *The Freedmen's Book* comprises texts written by Child and various other authors:⁷⁹ it was 'produced to educate and assimilate African Americans after the war' as well as 'to commemorate the achievement of this particular community'.⁸⁰ Bruce Mills claims that Child had convinced Jacobs to end the narrative of her life with a recollection of her grandmother to stress 'domestic values'.⁸¹ In addition to further emphasizing domesticity, the prominence of the grandmother in *The Freedmen's Book* highlights a belief in divine providence rather than criticism of white Christians in the South, let alone allusions to non-Christian religious practices.

3 Conclusion

This analysis of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* has shown that the picture of religion and its meaning for enslaved people in the antebellum South can be complex when portrayed in slave narratives. The use of references to religion can go significantly beyond the single function highlighted by Olney, i.e., criticism of the hypocrisy of white Christians in the South. A comparison of Jacobs's work with other slave narratives promises to reveal even more diverse representations of religious beliefs and practices in slave narratives from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789), for instance, includes comments on African religious beliefs and practices as well as references to specific theological texts.⁸²

Neo-slave narratives, i.e., historical novels written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that respond to life writing by Jacobs, Douglass, Prince, Equiano and many others, at times also feature references to religion, even though these might not be as prominent as they are in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and some other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts.⁸³ The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved*

78 Stewart, "Revising 'Harriet Jacobs' for 1865": 714.

79 Mills describes the contents of *The Freedmen's Book* as follows: 'This anthology contains biographies of famous black men and women – many written by Child herself – as well as poems, stories, and essays by black authors and other white abolitionists.' (Bruce Mills, "Lydia Maria Child and the Endings to Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*": 265)

80 Stewart, "Revising 'Harriet Jacobs' for 1865": 703.

81 Mills, "Lydia Maria Child and the Endings to Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*": 256.

82 Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018): 25–29.

83 Ashraf H.A. Rushdy defines this genre as 'contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the ante-bellum slave narrative' (Ashraf H.A. Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999]: 3). The genre of the neo-slave narrative responds to slave narratives in manifold ways: 'Since the last decades of the twentieth century, writers across the Black Atlantic have attempted to recover elements of the narrative structure and thematic configuration of slave narratives. The main reasons for

(1987) by Black American Nobel laureate Toni Morrison illustrates this point. *Beloved* is set in Ohio and features characters who have been manumitted or escaped from slavery but continue to be haunted by the memory of their enslavement. As Emily Griesinger points out, *Beloved* does not advocate the ‘wholesale rejection of Christianity’.⁸⁴ Though the language of *Beloved* is not as steeped in religious rhetoric as are some texts from the nineteenth century, references to religion are occasionally inserted into the characters’ speech. The casual tone with which these insertions are frequently made is exemplified by the following comment on preparations for a feast: “Such a cooking you never see no more. We baked, fried and stewed everything *God put down here*.”⁸⁵

In contrast to life writing by formerly enslaved people, Morrison’s *Beloved* leaves significantly more room for syncretic religious beliefs and practices than Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.⁸⁶ An elderly woman called Baby Suggs, whose freedom was paid for by one of her sons, is arguably the central figure in *Beloved* as far as the depiction of religion is concerned. Due primarily to her role as an unofficial spiritual leader, Baby Suggs is highly respected within the Black community. This role is marked by the epithet ‘holy’ accompanying her name. The narrator explains the meaning of this epithet as follows:

Accepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it [i.e., the epithet holy], she became an unchurched preacher, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it. In winter and fall she carried it to AME’s [African Methodist Episcopal] and Baptists, Holinesses and Sanctifieds, the Church of the Redeemer and the Redeemed.⁸⁷

This description of Baby Suggs suggests that her approach to ministry is ecumenical and seeks to bridge differences between denominations – something made possible by her ‘great heart’, i.e., her love. She has developed ‘her own brand of preaching’,⁸⁸ which apparently offers something to the Black community that the churches do not provide. Baby Suggs’s sermons do not focus on moral instruction: ‘She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more.’⁸⁹ She is the centre of meetings

this seemingly widespread desire to rewrite a genre that officially lost its usefulness with the abolition of slavery are the will to re-affirm the historical value of the original slave narrative and to reclaim the humanity of the enslaved by (re)imagining their subjectivity.’ (Joan Anim-Addo and Maria Helena Lima, “The Power of the Neo-Slave Narrative Genre,” *Callaloo* 40, no. 4 [2017]: 3).

⁸⁴ Emily Griesinger, “Why Baby Suggs, Holy, Quit Preaching the Word: Redemption and Holiness in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *Christianity and Literature* 50, no. 4 (2001): 692.

⁸⁵ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987; repr., London: Picador, 1988): 156, emphasis added.

⁸⁶ Robert Yeates, for instance, discusses representations of ‘syncretism of religious and cultural practices’ in *Beloved* (Robert Yeates, “‘The Unshriven Dead, Zombies on the Loose’: African and Caribbean Religious Heritage in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 61, no. 3 [2015]: 515).

⁸⁷ Morrison, *Beloved*: 87.

⁸⁸ Morrison, *Beloved*: 147.

⁸⁹ Morrison, *Beloved*: 88.

that take place outside, in ‘the Clearing’, i.e., ‘a wide-open place cut deep in the woods’.⁹⁰ These meetings allow people to release pent-up emotions by laughing, dancing, and crying.⁹¹ The laughing, dancing, and crying that is encouraged during the meeting have a therapeutic effect on a community whose lives have been scarred by slavery. It is tempting to see these meetings in the Clearing as a response to the ‘little church in the woods’⁹² mentioned by Jacobs or the place of prayer referred to by Mary Prince – places that were destroyed by enslavers. Morrison’s historical novel *Beloved* suggests that some neo-slave narratives continue to explore the ambivalent meaning of religion in the history of transatlantic slavery – an ambivalence that can also be gleaned from slave narratives like Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

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⁹⁰ Morrison, *Beloved*: 87.

⁹¹ Morrison, *Beloved*: 87–88.

⁹² Morrison, *Beloved*: 66.

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Sabine Feist

Relics as Resource: Dependency from Holy Remains

This paper examines the function of relics in creating, maintaining, and changing political and religious dependencies in late antiquity and the early middle ages.¹ Understanding the function of relics in this context requires two initial steps: firstly, the resource itself, the relics, is presented in their essential features. Secondly, the most important gatekeepers who could come into possession of these holy remains are introduced.² The handling of relics by various gatekeepers in the eighth century is then, as a third step, examined more closely. This period is particularly important for understanding how relics functioned as a resource of power, both religious and political, as the triadic relation between Rome, Constantinople, and the Frankish Empire was completely reconstituted during this time. To analyze this re-adjustment, including the abandonment and re-creation of alliances in the eighth century, this paper uses relics as a *tertium comparationis* at different levels. This focus on relics is justified, as there was apparently a permanent agreement in late antiquity and the early middle ages to use this resource to express such alliances. In the fourth and final step, it is then summarized, that although the religious and political dependency relationships shifted constantly, especially in the eighth century, all actors acted inside the traditional continuum and sometimes exhibited more, sometimes less flexibility within it.

1 Since the focus of this paper lies on dependencies, it must be emphasized that the theological role of relics will only be marginally addressed, and their liturgical function will not be discussed.

2 Resources and gatekeepers are considered to have decisive functions in asymmetric dependency relationships, following Julia Winnebeck, Ove Sutter, Adrian Hermann, Christoph Antweiler and Stephan Conermann, "On Asymmetrical Dependency," *Concept Paper 1*, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (2021): 2–3, https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/images/pdf-files/concept-papers/bcdss_cp_1_on-asymmetrical-dependency.pdf [accessed 25.03.2024]; Christoph Antweiler, "On Dependence, Dependency, and a Dependency Turn," *Discussion Paper 1*, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (2022), <https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/images/pdf-files/discussion-papers/dp-1-antweiler.pdf> [accessed 25.03.2024].

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1 Resource

Strictly speaking, there should not be any body relics at all.³ The body of the deceased was considered sacrosanct in antiquity and thus also in late antiquity.⁴ Adherence to the idea of sacrosanct graves can be observed in Rome. There, even after the legalization of Christianity, the martyrs were venerated at their tombs. For example, under Constantine, the tomb of St Peter was monumentalized as a place of veneration⁵ and Christians also continued to visit the graves in the catacombs.⁶ Damasus I, Roman bishop in the fourth century (366–384),⁷ is known for developing and expanding the veneration of martyrs. For instance, his measures can be seen in the more than fifty funerary poems from his time that were placed at the burial locations of the martyrs.⁸

3 On the definition of resource used here in the context of dependency, see fn. 2.

4 On the few examples of relics before Christianity, see Andreas Hartmann, *Zwischen Relikt und Reliquie. Ortsbezogene Erinnerungspraktiken in antiken Gesellschaften*, Studien zur Alten Geschichte 11 (Berlin: Verlag Antike, 2010); Andreas Hartmann, “Reliquie,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 28, eds. Georg Schöllgen et al. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 2018): 1170–205. On the *topos* of the *corpus incorruptum*, i.e., the sanctity of the saints’ bodies, and the practical realities associated with it, see Arnold Angenendt, “Corpus incorruptum. Eine Leitidee der mittelalterlichen Reliquienverehrung,” *Saeculum* 42 (1991): 320–48 and Ursula Swinarski, “Der ganze und der zerteilte Körper. Zu zwei gegensätzlichen Vorstellungen im mittelalterlichen Reliquienkult,” in *Hagiographie im Kontext. Wirkungsweisen und Möglichkeiten historischer Auswertung*, eds. Dieter R. Bauer and Klaus Herbers (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2000): 58–68.

5 Recently Hugo Brandenburg, *Die konstantinische Petersbasilika am Vatikan in Rom. Anmerkungen zu ihrer Chronologie, Architektur und Ausstattung* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2017).

6 Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai, Fabrizio Bisconti and Danilo Mazzoleni, *Roms christliche Katakomben. Geschichte – Bilderwelt – Inschriften* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 1998).

7 For the biography of Damasus, see Ursula Reutter, *Damasus, Bischof von Rom (366–384). Leben und Werk* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). A summary is offered by Markus Löx, *Monumenta Sanctorum. Rom und Mailand als Zentren des frühen Christentums: Märtyrerkult und Kirchenbau unter den Bischöfen Damasus und Ambrosius*, Spätantike – Frühes Christentum – Byzanz. Kunst im ersten Jahrtausend. Studien und Perspektiven 39 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2013): 25–32 (with additional literature).

8 For the *Epigrammata damasiana* see Ernst Schäfer, *Die Bedeutung der Epigramme des Papstes Damasus I. für die Geschichte der Heiligenverehrung* (Rome: Ephemerides Liturgicae, 1932); Antonio Ferrua, *Epigrammata damasiana* (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1942); Jacques Fontaine, “Damase poète théodosien: L’imaginaire poétique des Epigrammata,” in *Saecularia damasiana. Atti del convegno internazionale per il XVI centenario della morte di papa Damaso I*, Studi di Antichità Cristiana 39 (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1986): 113–45; Paul-Albert Février, “Un plaidoyer pour Damase: Les inscriptions des nécropoles romaines,” in *Institutions, Société et Vie Politique dans l’Empire Romain au IVe Siècle ap. J.-C.*, eds. Michel Christol et al. (Rome: Publications de l’École française de Rome, 1992): 497–506; Lucrezia Spera, “Interventi di papa Damaso nei santuari delle catacombe romane: Il ruolo della committenza private,” *Bessarione* 11 (1994): 111–27; Marianne Sághy, “Prayer at the Tomb of the Martyrs? The Damasian Epigrams,” in *La preghiera nel tardo antico. Dalle origini ad Agostino*, ed. Incontro di studiosi dell’antichità cristiana (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1999): 519–37; Marianne Sághy, “Scinditur in partes populus: Pope Damasus and the Martyrs of Rome,” *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000): 273–87; Gabriel Wesch-Klein, “Damasus I., der

The funerary poems were part of an architectural setting of the venerated tombs, which were also decorated with images and specially illuminated by a particular lighting arrangement.⁹ What is striking about Damasus' known measures is that, although he gave the saints' tombs an architectural and decorative framework, he left the burials themselves untouched. Even where elaborate interventions were necessary, no manipulation of the burials can be observed: Damasus quite obviously respected the sanctity of the tombs and limited his architectural interventions to the catacombs themselves. Damasus' actions suggest that an essential aspect of the Roman concept of saints was their connection to the original place of their burial.

Accounts of the subsequent centuries show that Rome continued its adherence to the sanctity of graves, which becomes evident upon reference to three examples.¹⁰

- In 519, Justinian (527–565), not yet Emperor but nephew of the one then-reigning, was a high dignitary and the likely successor to the throne. He asked Pope Hormisdas (514–523) to send him relics of the apostles Peter and Paul for the church he had built in his palace in Constantinople. We learn what kind of relics Justi-

Vater der päpstlichen Epigraphik," in *Quellen, Kritik, Interpretation. Festgabe zum 60. Geburtstag von Hubert Mordeck*, ed. Thomas Martin Buck (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1999): 1–30; Reutter, *Damasus, Bischof von Rom*. The frequently encountered number of 59 preserved or surviving epigrams goes back to Ferrua's edition of the *Epigramma damasiana*, although not all the epigrams listed there were once attached to Roman saints' graves (see Steffen Diefenbach, *Römische Erinnerungsräume. Heiligenmemoria und kollektive Identitäten im Rom des 3. bis 5. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007]: 289 [252]). The inscriptions always name Pope Damasus, mention his deep veneration for the Roman martyrs, whose martyrdom is recounted in most cases, often describe the decorative measures, and frequently remark that the Pope himself discovered the tombs of the martyrs in remote areas of the catacombs.

9 Francesco Tolotti, "Il problema dell'altare e della tomba del martire in alcune opere di papa Damaso," in *Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst. Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann gewidmet*, vol. 2, eds. Otto Feld and Urs Peschlow (Bonn: Habelt, 1986): 51–71; Spera, "Interventi di papa Damaso nei santuari delle catacombe romane"; Albrecht Weiland, "Conposuit tumulum sanctorum limina adornans. Die Ausgestaltung des Grabes der Hl. Felix und Adauctus durch Papst Damasus in der Commodillakatakombe in Rom," in *Historiam pictura refert. Miscellanea in onore di Alejandro Recio Veganzones O.F.M.*, ed. Alejandro Recio Veganzones (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1994): 625–45; Jean Guyon, "Damase et l'illustration des martyrs: Les accents de la dévotion et l'enjeu d'une pastorale," in *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective. Memorial Louis Reekmans*, eds. Mathijs Lamberigts and Peter van Deun (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995): 157–77; Norbert Zimmermann, "Inhalte und Intentionen bildlicher Kunst in Sakralräumen zwischen Damasus und Sixtus III.," in *Die Päpste und Rom zwischen Spätantike und Mittelalter. Formen päpstlicher Machtentfaltung*, eds. Norbert Zimmermann, Tanja Michalsky, Alfried Wiczorek, and Stefan Weinfurter (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2017): 115–42.

10 These examples are frequently cited, e.g., by Franz Alto Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter. Papststiftungen im Spiegel des Liber Pontificalis von Gregor dem Dritten bis zu Leo dem Dritten* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004): 121; Gia Toussaint, "Reliquienverehrung in Rom. Von ruhenden und reisenden Leibern," in *Wunder Roms im Blick des Nordens. Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Ausstellungskatalog Paderborn*, ed. Christoph Stiegemann (Paderborn: Michael Imhof, 2017): 154–61, here: 157; Martina Hartl, *Leichen, Asche und Gebeine. Der frühchristliche Umgang mit dem toten Körper und die Anfänge des Reliquienkultes* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2018): 119–21, 168–69.

nian sought from an accompanying letter from the papal legate in Constantinople. The letter specifies that Justinian wanted to receive body relics *secundum morem Graecorum* but that it had already been explained to him that this was against Roman custom.¹¹

- Empress Constantina (ca. 560–605), the wife of Emperor Maurice (582–602), experienced something similar. In 594, she had made a request to Gregory I (590–604), then reigning as the Roman pontiff, that he send her the head or another part of the body of St Paul. The occasion for this request was the erection of a church dedicated to the apostle in the imperial palace in Constantinople. Although Gregory, as he writes, longed to take orders from the Empress, he had to refuse her wish. Instead of body relics, the Pope offered the Empress a modest compensation: splinters of the miracle-working chains with which Paul was bound.¹²
- The Queen of the Lombards, Theodelinda (565–627), also saw her requests for the body relics of Roman saints rebuffed. She also sent a priest to Rome during the reign of Gregory I (590–604) to bring the saints' relics to Monza. When the priest recognized the impossibility of fulfilling the queen's order, he collected the oil from the lamps that burned before the martyrs' tombs and offered them as an alternative to the body relics.¹³

These three examples clearly show that as late as the sixth century, Rome did not give away its saints in the form of body relics, even if the highest dignitaries requested this valuable and scarce resource. Nevertheless, as the letters also clearly show, there was no reason to prevent the distribution of contact relics.¹⁴ Rome was, therefore, quite open to promoting the cult of Roman saints elsewhere, but this was not supposed to be done on the basis of body relics, which had to remain in the city as an

11 *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum 35.2: Epistulae Imperatorum Pontificum* 218, ed. Kaiserl. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1898): 679–80. For the church of St Peter and Paul, that was nevertheless built by Justinian, see Sabine Feist, “Längs- und Zentralbau in justinianischer Zeit. Die Doppelkirchenanlage der Heiligen Petrus und Paulus und Sergios und Bacchus in Istanbul,” in *Anekdoten Byzantina. Studien zur byzantinischen Geschichte und Kultur. Festschrift für Albrecht Berger*, eds. Isabel Grimm-Stadelmann, Alexander Riehle, Raimondo Tocci, and Martin Marko Vučetić (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023): 117–26.

12 Gregory the Great, *Registrum epistularum* IV, 30.

13 An index of these oil relics is kept in the treasury of the cathedral in Monza (Alessandro Sepulcri, “I papyri della basilica di Monza e le reliquie inviate da Roma,” *Archivio storico lombardo* 30 [1903]: 241–62).

14 Petrine contact relics were probably created already in the time of Pope Symmachus (498–514) (Thomas F.X. Noble, “Michele Maccarrone on the Medieval Papacy,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 80 [1994]: 518–33, here: 527); see also Franz Alto Bauer, “Saint Peter's as a Place of Collective Memory in Late Antiquity,” in *Rom in der Spätantike. Historische Erinnerung im städtischen Raum*, eds. Ralf Behrwald and Christian Witschel, *Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien* 51 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2012): 155–70, here: 160–61.

exclusive resource. However, even the contact relics, which could be multiplied more or less limitlessly, were not available to everyone. It is known, for example, that the church of St Peter in Spoleto had to manage without relics. In their place, the location referred to the presence of the Apostle through its *patrocinium*.¹⁵

With this strict adherence to the sanctity of the graves, Rome was a rather exceptional case, as there are numerous examples where the bodies of the saints were no longer *corpora integra*, where graves were changed or relocated. An early example – even if the dating of the text is disputed – is the account of the martyrdom of Polycarp.¹⁶ We know from this written source about the life and death of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, who was supposed to be burnt for his faith but was finally killed by a knife because the flames could not touch him.¹⁷ Interestingly, the report does not end with Polycarp's death but continues and asserts that the bishop's body should not be given to the Christian community.

Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he put the body in front of everyone, as was their custom, and burnt it. And thus, we later collected his remains which were more valuable to us than precious stones and finer than gold proved in fire, and we buried them in a fitting spot.¹⁸

The importance of bodily remains is clear, even in this early source: they are more valuable than precious stones and more esteemed than gold.¹⁹

15 Franz Alto Bauer, "Sankt Peter – Erinnerungsort in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter," in *Erinnerungsorte der Antike die römische Welt*, eds. Elke Stein-Hölkeskamp and Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2006): 626–41, here: 638; Bauer, "Saint Peter's as a Place of Collective Memory in Late Antiquity": 161–62.

16 It is possible that the text was written shortly after the event (ca. 160 AD) or that it was not written down until the third or fourth century (Boudewijn Dehandschutter, "The Martyrium Polycarpi: A Century of Research," in *Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, vol. 2, ed. Wolfgang Haase [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993]: 485–522; Candida R. Moss, "On the Dating of Polycarp: Rethinking the Place of the Martyrdom of Polycarp in the History of Christianity," *Early Christianity* 1 [2010]: 539–74; Otto Zwierlein, *Die Urfassung der Martyria Polycarpi et Pionii und das Corpus Polycarpianum*, vol. 1, Editiones criticae [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014]).

17 Edition and commentary are provided by Zwierlein, *Die Urfassung*, vol. 1.

18 Martyrium Polycarpi 18 (translation after Zwierlein, *Die Urfassung*, vol. 1: 11).

19 A very similar significance of the burial of the bodies of the martyrs or at least their remains as in Polycarp's account of martyrdom is also expressed in the letter of the Christian communities of Lyon and Vienne to communities in Asia and Phrygia (Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca: 1537) (see Hans Reinhard Seeliger and Wolfgang Wischmeyer, *Martyrerliteratur* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015]: 47–86; Boudewijn Dehandschutter, "A Community of Martyrs: Religious Identity and the Case of the Martyrs of Lyon and Vienne," in *More than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity*, eds. Johan Leemans and Jürgen Mettepenning [Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2005]: 3–22; Johann Evangelist Hafner, "Religiöser Alltag der Christen in Lyon und seine Unterbrechung," in *Religiöser Alltag in der Spätantike*, eds. Peter Eich and Eike Faber, Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 44 [Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2013]: 225–42).

The expectations that were associated with relics and their veneration – why the aforementioned requests were even made by members of the imperial house – can be seen in the statements of Church fathers and Church historians²⁰:

- Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390), for example, wrote in the fourth century: ‘[. . .] of whom even the drops of the blood and little relics of their passion produce equal effect with their bodies.’²¹
- Theodoret of Cyrus (393–460) emphasized in the fifth century: ‘Although the body has been severed, grace has remained undivided, and this tiny piece of a relic has a power equal to that which the martyr would have had if he had never been carved up.’²²

According to these passages, the bodily remains, the relics, and even the smallest particles of their bodies were understood as expressions of the saint’s power, who had now moved close to God. The relics formed a bridge between the people who remained on earth and heaven. Although the saint was in God’s heavenly kingdom, he was also present on earth through his relics: he could be contacted. Consequently, the relics of the saint, like the saint himself, could have wonder-working effects. The cult of the martyrs in late antiquity, this is what Peter Brown has decisively identified, was based on this idea.²³

20 Already early Christian exegetes such as Origen and Lactantius emphasize the respectful treatment of the dead body (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 8, 30; Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones*, 6, 12, 25–26, 3). This view is also shared by Augustine (Augustine, *De civitate dei* 1, 12–13; *De cura cura pro mortuis gerenda* 3, 5), but he also stresses sometimes how unimportant it actually is how or whether martyrs are buried (Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* 6, 8) (see also Hartl, *Leichen, Asche und Gebeine*: 15–18). Despite this theological interpretation of the cult of relics, the question of its existence is also disputed in research: Cyril Mango, for example, states: ‘The cult of saint’s relics, i.e. their bodily parts, is – to me at least – one of the most puzzling manifestations of Early Christianity’ (Cyril Mango, “Preface,” in *Studies in the Cult of Relics in Byzantium up to 1204*, ed. John Wortley [Farnham: Routledge, 2009]: IX–X, here: IX).

21 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 4, 69 (translation in Julian the Emperor, *Containing Gregory Nazianzen’s two Invectives and Libanius’ Monody. With Julian’s Extant Theosophical Works*, trans. Charles William King [London: George Bell and Sons, 1888]: 39).

22 Theodoret of Cyrus, *Graecarum affectionum curatio* 8, 10–11 (translation in Theodoretus, *Graecarum affectionum curatio*, trans. Thomas P. Halton [New York: Newman Press, 2013]).

23 Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). In addition to the theological interpretation, there are, of course, other aspects to consider. From a socio-historical perspective, for example, the function of the saints as intercessors for the faithful before God is discussed as an analogy to late antique and early medieval social structures (Stefan Rebenich, “Wohltäter und Heilige. Von der heidnischen zur christlichen Patronage,” in *Epochenwandel? Kunst und Kultur zwischen Antike und Mittelalter*, eds. Franz Alto Bauer and Norbert Zimmermann, Sonderband der Antiken Welt [Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2011]: 27–35). Furthermore, the question of ownership and prestige of relics is comprehensively examined (e.g., by Holger A. Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz. Die Geschichte einer Reliquie und ihrer künstlerischen Fassung in Byzanz und im Abendland* [Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004]), as well as the importance

However, it was by no means the case that divided bodies or relics only played a role when the bodies of the saints were destroyed by martyrdom. There were also intentional divisions of what were actually *corpora integra* of saints. Ambrose, bishop of Milan (374–397) and contemporary of Damasus I is one of the best-known protagonists of distributing saints' bodies.²⁴ The various ways Ambrose found to distribute such relics can be traced in the church of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan.²⁵

- For the consecration of the church in 386 / 387, Ambrose translocated the bones of the two Milanese city saints, Gervasius and Protasius, from their nearby original burial place to the church.²⁶
- The bishop of Milan went one step further and ordered himself to be buried with the two saints – a breaking of taboos for that time.²⁷
- The bodies of the martyrs were by no means left intact when transported into the church, but Ambrose divided them and sent them throughout the late antique world.²⁸

and function of relics for late antique cities (Michel Kaplan, "Le saint, le village et la cité," in *Les saints et leur sanctuaire à Byzance. Textes, images et monuments*, eds. Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, Michel Kaplan, and Jean-Pierre Sodini [Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 1993]: 81–94; Dennis Trout, "Saints, Identity, and the City," in *Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Virginia Burrus [Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2005]: 165–87). Recently, the relationship of the faithful to their own object culture and sacred practices has also been examined in greater detail (Karl-Heinz Kohl, *Die Macht der Dinge. Geschichte und Theorie sakraler Objekte* [Munich: C.H. Beck, 2003]; Torsten Cress, *Sakrotope – Studien zur materiellen Dimension religiöser Praktiken* [Bielefeld: transcript, 2019]).

²⁴ Essential to the biography of the Bishop of Milan are still Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan. Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1994); Ernst Dassmann, *Ambrosius von Mailand. Leben und Werk* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2004). A summary is given by Löx, *Monumenta Sanctorum*: 32–42. Relic translations existed already before Ambrose. One of the earliest known examples occurred in Antioch, where Caesar Gallus had the relics of the martyr and former bishop Babylas brought from a cemetery outside the city to a martyrdom built for him in Daphne around the middle of the fourth century (the translation of the relics of St Babylas is reported by Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 39, 4 and Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 19, 13–14. See also Hartl, *Leichen, Asche und Gebeine*: 142–47 with a summary of the events and additional literature).

²⁵ Recently Ivan Foletti, *Oggetti, Reliquie, Migranti. La Basilica Ambrosiana e il Culto dei suoi Santi (386–972)* (Rome: Viella, 2018).

²⁶ Ambrose reports in a letter that the people had asked for martyrs' bones on the occasion of the consecration of the basilica (Ambrose, *Epistula* 77, 1–13). A paragraph of the Codex Theodosianus (CTh.9.17.7), which was written shortly before (386), actually forbade such translations.

²⁷ Löx, *Monumenta Sanctorum*: 109–11. Ambrose comments in his letters that the place beneath the altar would actually belong to him (Ambrose, *Epistula* 77, 13). For a critical review of previous research on the original burials of Ambrose, Gervasius and Protasius and a new reconstruction, see Jacob Alois Knechtel, "Porphyry, Heilige und ein Bischof? Die spätantike Grablege des Ambrosius zwischen Heiligen- und Forschungsmythen," in *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 66 (2023): 46–75.

²⁸ E.g., to Florence, Nola, Fundi, Rouen, Brescia, Concordia, Aquileia (Diefenbach, *Römische Erinnerungsräume*: 361 (131); Hartl, *Leichen, Asche und Gebeine*: 75–77).

Ambrose's systematic and excessive division of the saints' bodies not only aimed to spread the cult of Gervasius and Protasius; it also created ties between different communities and cities – the Milanese relics henceforth served as altar relics at their places of destination. Interestingly, relics of the Milanese city patrons were also sent to Rome and served there as altar relics of the church with the *titulus Vestinae*.²⁹ The presence of these artefacts in Rome shows that although the eternal city did not share any of its own body relics, it was generous enough to import foreign ones.³⁰

This overview of relics as a resource in the late antique and early medieval world shows that relics were accepted as wonder-working and that they were thought to be able to establish a connection between the earthly and heavenly spheres. The resource of relics was handled in very different ways across contexts: in Rome, for example, body relics were not distributed at all. Instead, they were kept as valuable resources or currency. In Milan, however, the bodies of the saints were divided and distributed extensively.

2 Gatekeepers

Some groups and persons who could or wanted to possess relics have already been introduced.³¹ In what is probably the oldest surviving account of relics – the martyrdom of Polycarp – the community comes into possession of the physical remains of their bishop. The text mentions that the relics were buried in an appropriate place and, in a passage added slightly later, that people gathered there every year on the anniversary of his martyrdom.³² What exactly these early Christian gatherings looked like is not known.³³ However, some sources indicate that the official annual meetings

²⁹ Emile Donckel, *Außerrömische Heilige in Rom. Von den Anfängen unter Liberius bis Leo IV. (847). Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung des stadtrömischen Festkalenders* (Eschweiler, LUX: Charles Hermann, 1938): 51–54.

³⁰ Donckel *Außerrömische Heilige in Rom*; Adrian Bremenkamp, Tanja Michalsky and Norbert Zimmermann, eds., *Importreliquien in Rom von Damasus I. bis Paschalis I. Akten der internationalen Konferenz, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom Institut Rom – Biblioteca Hertziana, Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte, 12.–14. Oktober 2020*, Palilia 36 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2024).

³¹ On the definition of gatekeepers used here in the context of dependency, see fn. 2. In the following, only those gatekeepers are presented who were, more or less, legally in possession of relics. On the theft of relics, see Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra. Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

³² For the later passage, see Zwierlein, *Die Urfassung*, vol. 2: 208–9.

³³ It is *communis opinio* that the commemorations at the graves of martyrs were initially still part of the tradition of the pre-Christian cult of the dead (for an overview of the Roman cult of the dead, see Stefan Schrupf, *Bestattung und Bestattungswesen im Römischen Reich. Ablauf, soziale Dimension und ökonomische Bedeutung der Totenfürsorge im lateinischen Westen*, Bonner Jahrbücher 206 [Göttingen: v+r unipress, 2006]). Essential to this understanding are Franz Joseph Dölger, *Ichthys: Der heilige Fisch*

quickly proved insufficient to satisfy the community's desire to memorialize their fallen bishop. The record shows that people also met at the tombs on other days to hold private commemorative ceremonies.³⁴ We learn from Bishop Augustine of Hippo (354–430) that people danced, drank, and argued during the memorial feasts.³⁵ Basil of Caesarea (330–379) reports about what he considered the shameless behaviour of women at these memorial feasts.³⁶ Along the same line, Jerome (347–420) argues that consecrated virgins should not be allowed to participate in such events.³⁷ Therefore, it is unsurprising that, though the frequency and truth of such reports paint an abstract picture, the Church soon intervened.³⁸ The consequence of this development for the access of the local communities to relics was that, from then on, the Church primarily controlled access to the relics.³⁹ Interestingly, the Milanese bishop Ambrose joined other Church leaders in banning private gatherings at the saints' tombs.⁴⁰ How Am-

in den antiken Religionen und im Christentum, vol. 2, Religionen und Kulturen der Antike 2 (Münster: Peter W. Metzler, 1922): 562–63 and Theodor Klauser, *Die Cathedra im Totenkult der heidnischen und christlichen Antike*, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 21 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1927): 133–36. Their opinion is followed by, e.g., Elisabeth Jastrzebowska, *Untersuchungen zum christlichen Totenmahl aufgrund der Monumente des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts unter der Basilika des heiligen Sebastian in Rom* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1981); Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Mahl und Spende im mittelalterlichen Totenkult," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 18 (1984): 401–20, here: 404–09. A comprehensive collection of archaeological as well as epigraphic evidence is offered by Paul-Albert Février, "Le culte des morts dans les communautés chrétiennes durant le IIIe siècle," in *Atti del IX Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia Cristiana*, vol. 1, ed. International Congress of Christian Archaeology (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1978): 211–74; for a summary of the previous research, see Diefenbach, *Römische Erinnerungsräume*: 55–62.

34 See Diefenbach, *Römische Erinnerungsräume*: 168 (331) with contemporary sources and additional literature; see also Hartl, *Leichen, Asche und Gebeine*: 48.

35 Augustine, *Sermo* 326,1 (Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologia cursus completus. Series Latina* 38 [Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1884–1855]: 1449).

36 Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia*, 14, 1 (Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologia cursus completus. Series graeca* 31 [Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–1866]: 445C).

37 Jerome, *Epistula* 107, 9, 2 (Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum 55: 300).

38 On the corresponding synodal decrees, see Johannes Quasten, *Musik und Gesang in den Kulturen der heidnischen Antike und christlichen Frühzeit* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1973): 238–47. One reason for the Church's appropriation was probably also the increasing competition from the private veneration of saints. Through the promise of salvation that the martyrs offered via their dual presence on earth and before God, the cult of the saints was much more immediate than the worship in the parish churches (on this see also, Diefenbach, *Römische Erinnerungsräume*: 63–77, who mainly comments on the aspect of the forgiveness of sins through the Church or saints and in his argumentation partly follows Jochen Martin, "Die Macht der Heiligen," in *Christentum und antike Gesellschaft*, eds. Jochen Martin and Barbara Quint, *Wege der Forschung* 649 [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990]: 440–74, here: 459–62.

39 Relics in private possession were an exception (Hartl, *Leichen, Asche und Gebeine*: 77–79; for aristocratic circles, see Diefenbach, *Römische Erinnerungsräume*: 359–400; Hartl, *Leichen, Asche und Gebeine*: 75–77).

40 This is reported by Augustine, *Confessiones* 6, 2 (Augustine, *Confessiones*, 13 books, ed. Luc Verheijen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 27 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1981]: 74).

brose himself dealt with the bodies of the saints has already been explained. He removed them from their original burial locations, placed them in churches, had himself buried with them, and before that, divided the bodies and sent relics throughout the entire late antique world. In his role as gatekeeper, we can thus conclude that for Ambrose, his approach to this specific resource is heterogeneous: on the one hand, he strictly limits relics in terms of accessibility to the community; on the other, he is generous when it concerns his own purposes.

Another gatekeeper was the Emperor, who also joined in the game for relics. The different requests for body relics of Roman apostles and saints in the sixth century, which were all refused or were instead answered with contact relics, have already been mentioned. These requests clearly show that relics became increasingly important, even and especially for Constantinople, a city whose local saints were only constructed by later legends.⁴¹ Thus, body relics were frequently imported into Constantinople, even if they were not from Roman saints or apostles. For example, from a passage of John Chrysostom (ca. 344/349–407) from the late fourth / early fifth centuries, we know about the translation of Phocas from Pontus to Constantinople:

Yesterday our city was magnificent, magnificent and renowned not because it has columns, but because a martyr was in our midst, ceremoniously conveyed to us from Pontus. [. . .] Did you keep away yesterday? At least come today, so that you might see him escorted off to his own location. [. . .] Let no one keep away from this holy festival. Let no virgin remain at home, let no married woman stick to the house. Let's empty the city, and set course for the martyr's tomb. After all, the imperial couple, too, are joining with us in the festivities. What excuse, then, does the private person have, when the imperial couple are quitting the palace and taking a seat at the martyr's tomb?⁴²

Such a procession of venerated relics is depicted on the so-called Trier ivory (Fig. 1).⁴³ Similar to the descriptions offered by John Chrysostom, the ivory panel shows a pro-

41 Kaplan, "Le saint, le village et la cité"; Franz Alto Bauer, "Urban Space and Ritual. Constantinople in Late Antiquity," *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 15 (2001): 27–61; Trout, "Saints, Identity, and the City"; Franz Alto Bauer, "Stadtverkehr in Konstantinopel. Die Zeremonialisierung des Alltags," in *Stadtverkehr in der antiken Welt*, ed. Dieter Mertens (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2008): 193–211.

42 John Chrysostom, *De S. Hieromartyre Phoca* (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 50: 699; translation after Wendy Mayer and Bronwen Neil, eds., *St. John Chrysostom. The Cult of Saints. Selected Homilies and Letters* [Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006]: 77–78).

43 For the Trier ivory, see Kenneth G. Holum and Gary Vikan, "The Trier Ivory. 'Adventus' Ceremonial, and the Relics of St. Stephen," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 33 (1979): 115–33; John Wortley, "The Trier Ivory Reconsidered," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 21 (1980): 381–94; Paul Speck, "Das Trierer Elfenbein und andere Unklarheiten," *Poikila Byzantina* 6 (1987): 253–83; Leslie Brubaker, "The Chalke Gate, the Construction of the Past, and the Trier Ivory," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 23 (1999): 258–85; Paroma Chatterjee, "Iconoclasm's Legacy: Interpreting the Trier Ivory," *The Art Bulletin* 100, no. 3 (2018): 28–47; Sabine Feist, "The Material Culture of Byzantine Iconoclasm," in *A Companion to Byzantine Iconoclasm*, ed. Mike Humphreys (Leiden: Brill, 2021): 261–321, here: 275–77.

cession in which the entire city seems to have participated. The architectural setting indicates that the event took place in Constantinople, with the building in the background as the hippodrome or part of the palace or the *Mese* and the archway on the left as the Chalke – the main gate of the imperial palace – with the famous icon of Christ in the lunette. Two clerics on a horse-drawn chariot hold a reliquary, accompanied by the Emperor and others. The destination of the procession is a church that has just been completed; roofers are still carrying out the final work. In front of the church, the Empress awaits the procession with the relics. On the Trier ivory, it is not the Emperor or Empress at the centre of the procession but the saint or saints in the relics. The relics are honoured in the same way as the Emperor.⁴⁴ The celebration of the *adventus* ceremonial, which was reserved for the Emperor, upon the arrival of relics underlines the extremely high significance of their possession – equally for the imperial house and the entire city.⁴⁵



Fig. 1: Trier ivory (Hohe Domkirche Trier, Photo: Ann Münchow).

Even though the Trier ivory was probably only made between 700 and 900, the historical context for its interpretation is usually assumed to be the translation of the arm

⁴⁴ Steffen Diefenbach, “Zwischen Liturgie und civitas: Konstantinopel im 5. Jahrhundert und die Etablierung eines städtischen Kaisertums,” in *Bildlichkeit und Bildorte von Liturgie. Schauplätze in Spätantike, Byzanz und Mittelalter*, ed. Rainer Warland (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2002): 21–49, here: 25–26.

⁴⁵ The importance of relics for entire cities becomes evident, for example, by Paulinus of Nola (*Carmen* 19, 329–42), who states that the relics of Andrew and Luke in Constantinople strengthened the walls of the city as double towers (as did Peter and Paul in Rome) (Diefenbach, *Römische Erinnerungsräume*: 315–16 [351] with further examples of the protective function of relics).

relic of the protomartyr Stephen in 421⁴⁶; the first church within the Great Palace was also built for this occasion.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, relics do not seem to have been brought to the Palace of Constantinople on a large scale until the reign of Emperor Heraclius (610–641). The critical event during Heraclius' reign was the securing of the relics of the Cross and their transfer to Constantinople, which led to the development of the liturgical veneration of the Cross and made Constantinople, at least during that time, a centre for the cult of the Cross.⁴⁸ Although a part of the Holy Cross had probably already come to Constantinople in Constantinian times, the presence of the relic was not used to establish a centre of its cult until later.⁴⁹ There is likely a two-fold reason for this delay. First, at that time, the cult of the Holy Cross was still concentrated in Jerusalem. Second, it could be that the Roman system that was mainly based upon body relics was still being closely followed in the new capital.⁵⁰ Together with other relics associated with Christ, this “original relic” of the Holy Cross was kept in the church of the Virgin of the Pharos in the imperial palace.⁵¹ Thus the veneration and the Cross itself – which more and more guaranteed the protection and continuity of the empire – were kept by the Emperor in Constantinople, who could control (and distribute) this vital resource according to his own ideas.⁵²

As previously mentioned, in the sixth century, not long before the accumulation of relics associated with Christ in Constantinople began to increase, Pope Hormisdas had to teach Justinian and Constantina that it was not the tradition in Rome to disturb

46 The legend of the translation was written only in the post-iconoclastic period, which would fit well with the later dating of the ivory (Feist, “The Material Culture of Byzantine Iconoclasm”: 275–76).

47 Albrecht Berger, “Der Kaiserpalast von Konstantinopel,” in *Otto der Große und das Römische Reich. Kaisertum von der Antike zum Mittelalter. Ausstellungskatalog Magdeburg*, eds. Matthias Puhle and Gabriele Köster (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2012): 346–49, here: 346.

48 Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*: 28–47. In 574, during the reign of Justin II, another piece of the Holy Cross was brought to Constantinople. It is possible that Constantinople had already become a place of worship for the Cross as a result of this transfer (on the origin and development of the cult of the Holy Cross, see Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*: 19–91).

49 The early relic was probably not kept in a church, but in Constantine's column and in the palace; among other things, the silence of the early sources about a corresponding cult practice speaks for a non-public display or veneration of the Cross (Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*: 26–27, 32–33).

50 For the international success of the Roman veneration of St Peter, which significantly influenced the cult of relics, see Bauer, “Sankt Peter”: 639–41; Bauer, “Saint Peter's as a Place of Collective Memory in Late Antiquity”: esp. 163–65.

51 Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*: 38–40; Holger A. Klein, “Sacred Relics and Imperial Ceremonies at the Great Palace of Constantinople,” in *Visualisierung von Herrschaft. Frühmittelalterliche Residenzen – Gestalt und Zeremoniell*, ed. Franz Alto Bauer (Istanbul: Ege Yayınlar, 2006): 79–99, here: 91–92. Other relics associated with Christ included the Holy Lance and the Holy Sponge, which also came to the imperial palace under Heraclius. The Crown of Thorns was another relic associated with Christ from an early stage. Later additions included among others, the Mandylion, the Holy Keramidion, and the sandals of Christ.

52 Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das “wahre” Kreuz*: 89–91.

the tombs of saints. He also informed them that it was against Roman tradition to move saints' bodies or distribute parts of them. Consequently, he made clear that it was impossible to send the desired relics of the apostles to the new capital. In addition to violating the customary expectations around saints' bodies, moving the relics could also have increased the sacred status of the new capital while diminishing that of Rome. However, since the time of Heraclius, Constantinople had allegedly possessed relics that were even more important than those kept in the old capital.⁵³ These were not relics of mere apostles, these were relics associated with Christ. Constantinople thus continued to operate within the traditional system based on relics even as it expanded that system by including a currency that it could access more easily.

By contrast, in Rome, as already stated, one could trust that the Roman saints, especially the Apostles Peter and Paul (and to a certain extent Laurence), would remain an eternal source of relics for the city. At the same time, there was also interest in the Holy Cross. It is therefore unsurprising that in the (retrospective) vita of Pope Sylvester I (314–335), the *Liber Pontificalis* already mentions a relic of the Cross in association with the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme.⁵⁴ The next well-attested reference to the Holy Cross occurs in connection with the construction of three oratorios at the Lateran baptistry under Pope Hilarius (461–468), one of the structures is said to have been dedicated to the Holy Cross and to have contained a corresponding relic.⁵⁵ The same is assumed for one of the three oratorios at St Peter's built under Pope Symmachus (498–514).⁵⁶ Furthermore, while we have already established that Rome did not send its most valuable relics, i.e., bodily remains of the city's saints, to Constantinople, the Emperor at the Bosphorus was more generous in dispensing these resources. The cruciform reli-

53 On the difficult categorization of relics in late antique and early medieval times, see Julia M.H. Smith, "Relics. An Evolving Tradition in Latin Christianity," in *Saints and Sacred Matter. The Cult of Relic in Byzantium and Beyond*, eds. Cynthia Hahn and Holger A. Klein (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Press, 2015): 41–60; Hartmann, "Reliquie": 1170.

54 Louis Duchesne and Cyrille Vogel, eds., *Le Liber Pontificalis*, vol. 1 (1957; repr., Paris: E. de Boccard, 1981): 179. Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*: 69. The next mention of the Holy Cross is the controversially discussed letter of the Jerusalem bishop Juvenal to Pope Leo I, in which he expresses his gratitude for receiving a relic of the Cross (Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*: 70).

55 Duchesne and Vogel, *Liber Pontificalis*: 242–43. Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*: 70.

56 Duchesne and Vogel, *Liber Pontificalis*: 261. Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*: 70. Pope Sergius I (678–701) is supposed to have recovered a relic of the Cross in St Peter's (Duchesne and Vogel, *Liber Pontificalis*: 374). It is unclear whether the relic was the one from the time of Symmachus. Nevertheless, Sergius transferred it to the Lateran Basilica. Since this Cross relic was taken to the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme during a Good Friday procession, there was probably no longer a Cross relic in the latter at that time. Indeed, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme seems to have been replaced by the Lateran Basilica as the centre of Roman veneration of the Cross between the fifth and seventh centuries (Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*: 70–72).

quary kept in the Tesoro of St Peter's today, which is supposed to contain a particle of the Holy Cross, was a gift from Emperor Justin II (585–578) and his wife, Sophia.⁵⁷

The competition for relics between the Pope in Rome and the Emperor in Constantinople, especially over those associated with Christ, is evidenced by the accumulation of these resources in their respective palace chapels. In Constantinople, relics were kept in the church of the Virgin of the Pharos. In Rome, they were preserved in the Laurentius Chapel, known today as the Sancta Sanctorum.⁵⁸ However, though the cult of the Holy Cross had been available to the Roman Popes since at least the first half of the seventh century, it never developed into anything comparable to the one present in Constantinople.⁵⁹ Instead, the Apostle Peter stood for the eternal city's protection and continuity.⁶⁰

This overview to the key gatekeepers of relics in the late antique and early medieval world shows that at different times, to different degrees, and in divergent ways, relics were alternately possessed by the community, the Church, the Pope, the Emperor, and by entire cities. Each of these groups used this resource in different, but by no means exclusive, ways. Whether employed as talismans to contact martyrs or to increase the prestige of entire cities, relics were wielded as political instruments by the Church, the Pope, and the Emperor. Perhaps due to the lack of local saints and their corresponding graves, which could have been venerated, and possibly because of the obstacles (both customary and power-political) to moving the bodies of Roman saints to the new capital, Constantinople eventually concentrated on acquiring and displaying relics of the Holy Cross. From the seventh century onwards, the eastern capital employed such relics as a religious and political resource. Though relics associated with the crucifixion of Christ were already present in the new capital in earlier periods, it was not until this later date that Constantinople emerged as a superregional centre for the cult of the Holy Cross. In the early medieval period, the Eastern empire continued to operate within the traditional continuum of veneration but expanded the reliquary system into a form of currency that was at the disposal of the Constantinopolitan Emperor.

57 Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*: 70. Justin II and his wife donated another relic of the Cross to Poitiers (Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*: 77).

58 For Constantinople, see Klein, "Sacred Relics": 91–92; for the extension of the Lateran Palace, see Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 61–80, esp. 75–80 for Sancta Sanctorum. The Chapel of Laurentius is first mentioned in the Vita of Pope Stephen III (768–772) (Duchesne and Vogel, *Liber Pontificalis*: 469).

59 Klein, *Byzanz, der Westen und das "wahre" Kreuz*: 89–92.

60 Despite the unchallenged supremacy of the Petrine relics in Rome, the Pope nevertheless seems to have joined the general race for relics in the early middle ages. In order to establish Rome as the centre of all the saints, Gregory III (731–741) built an oratory in St Peter's, which was consecrated to all the saints (Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 53–58). The subsequent discovery of the head relic of St George, a truly eastern saint, under Pope Zachary (741–752) in the Lateran Palace must have been interpreted as a measure that was clearly directed against Constantinople (Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 58–59).

3 Resource and Gatekeepers in New Contexts

When considering relics and the differences between their availability in Rome and Constantinople, one thing must not be forgotten: in late antiquity and the early middle ages, Rome continued to be dependent on the Emperor in Constantinople, at least for a certain time.⁶¹ As the early middle ages progressed, however, support from the Bosphorus gradually became less certain. Rome and Constantinople thus became increasingly distant from each other.⁶² Over the years, the Pope began to rely more upon the Franks than upon the eastern empire. It was Pope Gregory III (731–741) who first instrumentalized his most important resource, the Apostle Peter himself, in the pontificate's relationship with the Franks. In his letters, he attempts to convince his new interlocutors of the significance and scope of his authority and the foundation of his desire for cordial relations by referring to Charles Martel as the son of the Apostle, and he also is said to have given Charles the keys to St Peter's tomb.⁶³ Gregory's immediate successor, Zachary (741–752), maintained close ties with the Franks and also con-

61 Florian Hartmann, "Die Cathedra Petri zwischen östlichem und westlichem Imperium. Legitimationsformen und Widerstände der Emanzipation im 8. Jh.," in *Die Päpste und die Einheit der lateinischen Welt*, eds. Bernd Schneidmüller, Stefan Weinfurter, Michael Matheus, and Alfried Wiczorek (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2016): 165–84; Hartmut Leppin, "Der Patriarch im Westen und der Kaiser im Osten – Einige Bemerkungen zur Dialektik von Schwäche und Stärke," in *Die Päpste und die Einheit der lateinischen Welt*, eds. Bernd Schneidmüller, Stefan Weinfurter, Michael Matheus, and Alfried Wiczorek (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2016): 139–64.

62 Thomas F.X. Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter: The Birth of the Papal State, 680–825* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984) is still foundational for the triadic relationship between Rome, Constantinople, and the Frankish Empire. Wolfram Brandes, "Das Schweigen des Liber Pontificalis. Die 'Enteignung' der päpstlichen Patrimonien Siziliens und Unteritaliens in den 50er Jahren des 8. Jahrhunderts," *Fontes Minores* 12, (2014): 97–203 (repeated in Wolfram Brandes, "Byzantinischer Bilderstreit, das Papsttum und die Pippinische Schenkung. Neue Forschungen zum Ost-West-Verhältnis im 8. Jahrhundert in *Menschen, Bilder Sprache, Dinge: Wege der Kommunikation zwischen Byzanz und dem Westen*, eds. Falko Daim, Christian Gastgeber, Dominik Heher, and Claudia Rapp, Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident 9.2 [Mainz: Propylaeum, 2018]: 63–79) outlines the problematic nature of the sources for this period by reference to several examples. Theologically, Rome and Constantinople were already far apart from as early as the Quinisext Council in 692. For a summary of the conflict between the Pope and the Emperor, see Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*: 15–23. The beginning of the political disputes is usually seen in increased tax demands at the time of Gregory II (715–731) (Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*: 28–29). However, Brandes, "Das Schweigen des Liber Pontificalis": esp. 111–24, shows in detail how a misinterpretation of a source gives too much importance to this supposed event and permanently influences research and the perception of the relation between Rome and Constantinople in the eighth century.

63 Codex Carolinus, no. I: 497; Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*: 44–47; Roald Dijkstra and Dorine van Espelo, "Anchoring Authority in Saint Peter's Grave. Imperial and Ecclesiastical Politics at the Confession from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages," in *Die Päpste und Rom zwischen Spätantike und Mittelalter. Formen päpstlicher Machtentfaltung*, eds. Norbert Zimmermann, Tanja Michalsky, Alfried Wiczorek, and Stefan Weinfurter (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2017): 237–50, here: 245. Nevertheless, the Franks henceforth did not always stand by the Pope and Charles Martel, for example, refused

tinued to act in the name of Peter.⁶⁴ However, it is worth noting, that the relationship with Constantinople must not have been particularly bad during that time. The Emperor was simply unable to provide help because of his own conflicts and thus rejected, for example, a request by Pope Stephen II (752–757) that he act against the Lombards in 752.⁶⁵

In the face of this existential threat by the Lombards, Pope Stephen II travelled to St Denis in 753 / 754 to ask the Frankish king Pepin (751–768) for help.⁶⁶ In order to make his request as appealing as possible, Stephen again made rhetorical use of the Apostle Peter.⁶⁷ He asserted that it was not the Pope who formulated the request to Pepin but the Roman Apostle himself. Thus, it was not the Pope who was to be protected but Peter himself. Pursuant to this argument, Pepin was convinced and assured Stephen of his support. The result was the so-called Donation of Pepin, which is intensely debated.⁶⁸

The alliance between Rome and the Franks continued to exist even following the succession of the Roman papal and the Frankish royal thrones. In the early 770s, Rome was again confronted with Lombard attacks. The Pope, now Hadrian I (772–795), asked the Frankish king, now Charlemagne (768–814), for help, which the latter granted. The renewal of the so-called Donation of Pepin by his son Charlemagne was preserved in St Peter's Confessio.⁶⁹ Upon Charlemagne's defeat of the Lombards in 774, the Pope finally broke with the Emperor in Constantinople and thenceforth relied exclusively on Frankish protection.⁷⁰

help against the Lombards in 739 / 740 (Matthias Becher, *Karl der Große* [Munich: C.H. Beck, 2008]: 35; Dijkstra and van Espelo, "Anchoring Authority in Saint Peter's Grave": 245).

64 Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*: 51–52.

65 Brandes, "Das Schweigen des Liber Pontificalis": 163–77; Hartmann, "Die Cathedra Petri": 177.

66 Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*: 71–81.

67 Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*: 81. Additionally, the Pope anointed Pepin and his sons, officially recognizing them as the Frankish royal dynasty. Thenceforth, Pepin was *patricius Romanourum* (Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*: 87).

68 On the so-called Donation of Pepin, see Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*: 83–86; a critical overview of the history of its research is given by Sebastian Scholz, "Pippinische Schenkung," in *Germanische Altertumskunde Online. Kulturgeschichte bis ins Frühmittelalter – Archäologie, Geschichte, Philologie*, eds. Sebastian Brather, Wilhelm Heizmann, and Steffen Patzold (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), https://www.degruyter.com/database/GAO/entry/GAO_87/html [accessed 26.10.2023].

69 Dijkstra and van Espelo, "Anchoring Authority in Saint Peter's Grave": 246. The Confessio was also used for other important and official events, such as making oaths (Dijkstra and van Espelo, "Anchoring Authority in Saint Peter's Grave": 243–45).

70 The distancing between Rome and the Emperor in Constantinople becomes evident in different coinage and the dating of official documents with the indication of the Pope's pontificate. Furthermore, under Frankish protection Hadrian's successor Leo III (795–816), still had to fear the intrigues of his predecessor's supporters in Rome itself. Leo III extended the dating of official documents by including an indication of Charlemagne's years of rule in Italy. The coronation of Charlemagne by Leo III was the culmination of this development (Hartmann, "Die Cathedra Petri": 178–83).

But the Frankish protection came at a price. While the relationship between Rome and the Franks was initially not one of unilateral but of bilateral dependency – Pepin came to the royal throne in 751 only with the support of the Pope⁷¹ –, in the second half of the eighth century the balance of power clearly shifted in the direction of the Franks, who were politically and militarily far superior to Rome. Inferior to Rome were the Franks only in one regard, namely the possession of relics. Interestingly, the Franks continued to operate in the already familiar dependency system that had been shaped above all by Rome and built on the use of relics as a resource. The modes of utilization of this resource also remained unchanged. For example, foreign saints continued to be imported to Rome. Specifically, the Frankish national saint, Dionysius, was brought to the eternal city.⁷² Dionysius was considered the first bishop of Paris and was buried in St Denis. Pope Stephen II had already brought relics of the Frankish national saint to Rome from his decisive visit to Pepin in 753 / 754.⁷³ In addition to importing relics to Rome, the Franks also made extensive use of the distribution of body relics of Roman saints as diplomatic gifts, which had become an established practice in the eighth century.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, these standard opportunities did not satisfy the Franks. Like others before them, they wanted to establish a lasting connection to Rome's most important resource: they wanted Peter. The various requests for relics by prominent persons in earlier periods to access Rome's most sacred body relics have already been addressed. Much had changed in the intervening centuries, but access to these relics was heavily curtailed. It was still only possible in the following ways:

- To make Peter accessible outside Rome, since the time of Gregory I (590–604), it had been possible to distribute contact relics – a practice that has become rare over time.⁷⁵
- Additionally, one could gain a place in St Peter's and the Confessio by donating valuable furnishings.⁷⁶

71 Becher, *Karl der Große*: 38; see also fn. 67.

72 Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 97–102.

73 Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 97. Since Charles Martel, Dionysius was regarded as a grandson of Peter and thus had a similar significance for the Frankish Empire as Peter had for Rome.

74 On the relics that were taken to the Frankish Empire and used as altar relics there see, e.g., John M. McCulloh, "From Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Continuity and Change in Papal Relic Policy from the 6th to the 8th Century," in *Pietas. Festschrift für Bernhard Kötting*, eds. Ernst Dassmann and Karl Suso Frank, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum – Ergänzungsbände* 8 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1980): 313–24, here: 323; Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 144–45.

75 At least we know of almost no Petrine relics that would have been taken to the Frankish Empire (an exception is Pope Stephen's II journey to St Denis in 753 / 754 [Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 99]).

76 During the pontificate of Stephen II, Pepin donated an altar mensa which was placed in the immediate vicinity of St Peter's tomb (Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 94–96). For a summary of donations of valuable objects to St Peter's, see Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 95;

As previously stated, in the long run, vicarious presence at Peter's tomb in the form of donations, which was by no means an exclusive Frankish privilege, was not enough for either Pepin or his son and successor Charlemagne. The Franks wanted what Arnold Angenendt called a 'liturgical presence'.⁷⁷ How could the Pope satisfy such a request when Rome's prominence relied, at least to a significant degree, upon its exclusive claims to some of the Church's most sacred relics? Regardless of the exigencies of a particular moment, Popes were not allowed to give away Peter's remains. Moreover, the tradition of Peter legitimized their own authority. The Roman monopoly on apostolic tradition, preserved and manifested over the centuries, could not be abandoned even in situations of existential emergency. Nonetheless, to satisfy the demands of the Franks, an (incomplete) complementary resource had to be created. It had to be a resource that was not Peter himself, but that was both directly connected to him and could not exist without him.

This brings us to Petronilla.⁷⁸ Petronilla was believed to be the daughter of Peter, but her cult seems to have developed only in the course of the eighth century.⁷⁹ It was this same Petronilla, in her function as Peter's daughter, to which Pepin had probably already laid claim in his negotiations with Pope Stephen II in St Denis in 754.⁸⁰ In order to fulfil this promise, which was no longer to be carried out by Stephen II himself, but by his brother and successor Paul I (757–767), Petronilla's sarcophagus had to be moved from the catacomb of Domitilla to St Peter's – notably St Peter's in Rome, and therefore not to the Frankish Empire.⁸¹ We can read about this transferal in the *Liber Pontificalis*:

Franz Alto Bauer, "Herrscher Gaben an St. Peter," *Mitteilungen zur spätantiken Archäologie und byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte* 4 (2005): 65–99, for the Franks esp. 79–87. However, gifts were also rejected or removed (cf. the dispute between an eunuch sent by Emperor Constantius II and Bishop Liberius in 355 [Dijkstra and van Espelo, "Anchoring Authority in Saint Peter's Grave": 239–40]).

⁷⁷ After Arnold Angenendt, "Das geistliche Bündnis der Päpste mit den Karolingern (754–796)," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 100 (1980): 1–94.

⁷⁸ For Petronilla, see Patrick Saint-Roch, *La martire Petronilla nella catacomba di Domitilla*, Quaderni del Collegium Cultorum Martyrum 3 (Rome: Pontificia Academia Cultorum Martyrum [?], 1984); Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 91–94; Roberto Giordani, "Avr(eliae) Petronillae filiae dvlcissimae. Qualche considerazione sulla leggenda di Petronilla presunta figlia dell'Apostolo Pietro," *Studi Romani* 53 (2005): 411–30 (with additional literature).

⁷⁹ For her legend and veneration, see Giovanni Battista de Rossi, "Sepolcro di S. Petronilla nella Basilica in Via Ardeatina e sua traslazione al Vaticano," *Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* 3, no. 3 (1878): 125–52, here: 135–39; Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 92; Giordani, "Avr(eliae) Petronillae filiae dvlcissimae": 414–18. The late dating is supported by the fact that her name appears neither in the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* of the fourth century nor in the pilgrim itineraries of the seventh century. During the eighth century, veneration of Petronilla must have increased, because Pope Gregory III ordered an annual *statio* to be held at her burial place in the catacomb of Domitilla (Duchesne and Vogel, *Liber Pontificalis*: 420).

⁸⁰ Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 93.

⁸¹ For the location of her burial in the catacomb, see De Rossi, "Sepolcro di S. Petronilla": 126–35; for the translation of the sarcophagus, see Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 92–94; Giordani, "Avr(eliae) Petronillae filiae dvlcissimae": 422–24.

To fulfil his elder brother and holy predecessor Pope Stephen's advantageous arrangements, immediately that pontiff had died, this blessed pontiff gathered the sacerdotēs, the whole clergy and this city of Rome's entire people, and began operations at the cemetery outside the Appian Gate some two miles from Rome where St Petronilla had once been buried. From there he removed her venerable and holy body along with the marble sarcophagus in which it lay and on which were carved letters reading 'To Aurea Petronilla, sweetest daughter'. This made it certain that the carving of the letters could be identified as engraved by St Peter's own hand out of love for his sweetest child. The holy body and the sarcophagus were laid on a new carriage and brought by his Beatitude with hymns and spiritual chants to St Peter's; he placed the holy body in the mausoleum close to St Andrew's, whose dedication in honour of this St Petronilla, Christ's martyr, had been decreed by his brother the holy Pope Stephen while yet living. There he made an adequate provision of adornment in fold, silver and brocades; he restored the church itself and in St Petronilla's honour he embellished it with wondrously beautiful pictures.⁸²

This text, which evokes a similar image to that of the description of the transfer of Phocas from Pontus to Constantinople by John Chrysostom, gives us, in addition to the description of the translation, another essential piece of information. We learn from this passage that Petronilla was henceforth to be venerated in the mausoleum close to the church of St Andrew the Apostle (Fig. 2).

The choice of this circular building on the south side of St Peter's was no coincidence – the structure had originally served as the mausoleum of the western Roman imperial dynasty.⁸³ Yet, when Roman dependence on imperial power for protection had been replaced by an alliance with the Franks, the function of the building was changed from an imperial mausoleum to a chapel of the Franks, directly attached to St Peter's in Rome.⁸⁴

4 Relics Create Dependencies

Now that a newly created, incomplete, but complementary reliquary resource has been introduced in the form of St Peter's daughter Petronilla, we can further clarify the persistence and transferability of the mutual religious and political dependencies associated with relics as a resource in late antiquity and the early middle ages. As previously referenced, the Martyrdom of Polycarp, the oldest known source to mention

⁸² Duchesne and Vogel, *Liber Pontificalis*: 464 (translation after Raymond Davis, *The Lives of the Eight-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis). The Ancient Biographies of Nine Popes from AD 715 to AD 817* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992): 81). References to these processes can already be found in the Vita of Stephen II (Duchesne and Vogel, *Liber Pontificalis*: 455).

⁸³ Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 91–94. For a short summary of the late antique mausoleum, see Mark Joseph Johnson, *The Roman Imperial Mausoleum in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 167–74.

⁸⁴ Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter*: 92 with reference to the possibility that the rotunda also served as a burial structure in the time of Stephen II.

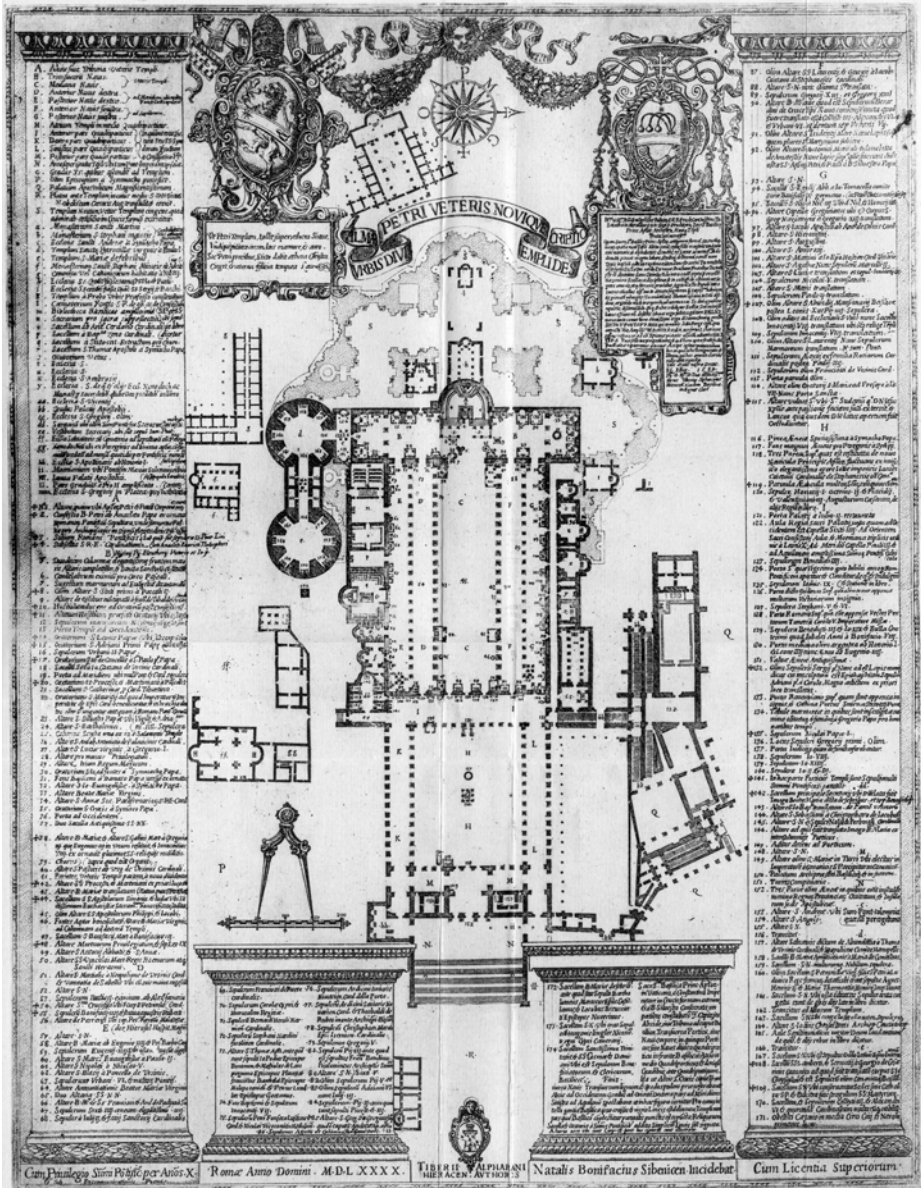


Fig. 2: St. Peter's, ground plan of the basilica and the rebuilding after Tiberio Alfarano (1589/90); the chapel of Petronilla is attached to the southern end of the transept of the basilica (in the ground plan left, the upper of the two round buildings, marked with "d") (Michele Cerrati, ed. *Tiberii Alfarani de basilicae Vaticanae antiquissima et nova structura* [Rome: 1914] Plate 1).

body relics, reveals a balanced relationship between Christians and relics. In this source, it is clear that Christians used relics to form a group identity. That said, it is equally apparent that relics only gained significance after Christian communities venerated them. Otherwise, at least in the case of Polycarp, they would have been thrown away. After the legalization of Christianity, this bilateral relationship was interrupted by the intervention of the Church, namely bishops and clerics. Thenceforth, relics were almost only accessible to Christians via the Church. Nevertheless, communities and bishops were unsatisfied with the exclusively local veneration of particular martyrs. They also sent relics to other communities. Thus, a transregional sacral network was created based on religious faith in venerated relics. Only because all actors adhered to this currency system was it possible to create dependencies through relics.

In this system, Rome has held a monopoly on relics from the very beginning. From the earliest period, Rome refused to share its body relics. The Church there maintained this policy out of respect for the sacrosanctity of the Apostle's tombs and to preserve its status as the home of a multitude of saints. The deliberately limited availability of relics made this resource all the more valuable. In particular, Rome did not share the body relics of Peter, in whose tradition the Roman bishop, the Pope, stood and stands. If Rome had handed over Peter, one of the most important legitimizations of papal primacy would have been lost. Despite this steadfast commitment to keeping Roman relics in Rome, the city did make compromises within the political system that developed around these sacred objects. Rome allowed itself to be integrated into the transregional network of relics. At the same time, the pontificate ensured that the trade in relics remained a one-sided exchange. No Roman body relics were exported from the city, but foreign were imported. The import of relics associated with foreign saints seems to have bolstered Roman prestige while simultaneously conferring special honour on the exporter. Indeed, the Franks even sent their national saint, Dionysius, to the eternal city.

Throughout this time, Peter himself remained accessible in but two ways. First, one could approach the Apostle by donating valuable furnishings and placing them in St Peter's Basilica or directly at the Confessio. Not everyone was allowed to do this, so the granting of this privilege was, itself, a venerable acknowledgement of the benefactor. Second, people could acquire contact relics, which have probably been produced and exported on a large scale since the reign of Pope Gregory I in the late sixth / early seventh century. To receive Peter's contact relics was also considered a special honour that was only granted to select groups or persons and became very rare over the time.

The special status of the Romans and the strict prohibition against distributing body relics could not be countermanded, even in response to inquiries from high dignitaries of the imperial dynasty. Perhaps in response to this policy, the imperial palace in Constantinople was systematically filled with relics associated with Christ from the seventh century onwards. Constantinople thus continued to operate within the framework of the traditional system based on relics as a currency but shifted the balance so that it could better control these valuable resources.

Only when the triadic relationship between Rome, Constantinople, and the Frankish Empire was completely reconstituted and after the Pope was confronted with an existential crisis did Rome soften its strict policy. As the early medieval period progressed, St Peter's body remained entombed in Rome, but his daughter Petronilla was handed over to the Franks as an incomplete but complementary resource. Despite their political and military superiority, the Franks continued participating in the traditional system – a system, which had been decisively shaped over the centuries by Rome and the Pope – and exchanged relics as valuable currency.

With Petronilla, the Pope gave the Franks a saint who was both directly connected to Peter and could not exist without him. Cleverly, the Pope not only handed over St Peter's daughter to the Franks and made her the patron of the Frankish empire, but also, he brought her even closer to the Apostle and, by extension, to himself: he moved her remains into a former imperial chapel directly connected to St Peter's – Petronilla also remained in Rome in the end.

The system handed down over the centuries in which relics were used as an expression or manifestation of ecclesiastical and political alliances remained unchallenged even as the triadic relation between Rome, Constantinople, and the Frankish Empire fundamentally shifted. With Petronilla, the daughter of Peter, the Pope created a new resource which he on the surface handed over to the Franks, but which – as the still most powerful gatekeeper in this game – he ultimately did not surrender, and instead tied not only Petronilla but also initially Pippin and later Charlemagne even more closely to himself and the eternal city.

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Julia A.B. Hegewald

Vīraśaiva and Jaina Rivalries in Medieval South India: Creating and Overcoming Structures of Dependency

1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the changing fortunes of the Jaina community in the South Indian state of Karnataka. It analyses how initially, from the early fifth century onwards, the authority of the Jainas appears to have consistently increased throughout the region. The Early Medieval period was a time when many kings and their ministers in South India were Jainas, and literature, as well as other arts and architecture, openly articulated Jainism's sacred ideas.

However, during the twelfth century, the situation changed significantly. Internal transformations had already begun in Jaina society, practice, and the religious values they maintained as early as the tenth century. As argued here, shifts in Jaina society made them more prone to harm and maltreatment. The main change, however, was the formation of new and the arrival of other competing religious groups in the area from the twelfth century. These rivalling faith communities established structures of strong dependency into which the previously dominant Jainas had to integrate. Particularly threatening was the local but newly formed religious creed of the Vīraśaivas.¹ Due to the rise in Vīraśaiva control and dominance, emerging first in northern Karnataka and then spreading throughout the region, the Jainas lost most of their power and were persecuted. During this period of religious, political, and communal turmoil, Jaina icons, shrines, and religious centres were targeted, and many were destroyed: others were annexed, adapted, and re-used by the Vīraśaivas.² Despite the severe decline in Jainism's influence, the faith survived and continued to be practised, which demonstrates that the Jainas eventually managed to overcome newly created structures of dependency. These are the core issues, which will be explored in more detail in the following sections.

¹ Basic information on the Vīraśaivas will be provided in section 4 of this chapter.

² For more information on the theory of re-use, see the theory chapter by Julia A.B. Hegewald, "Towards a Theory of Re-Use: Ruin, Retro and Fake Versus Improvement, Innovation and Integration," in *Re-Use: The Art and Politics of Integration and Anxiety*, eds. Julia A.B. Hegewald and Subrata K. Mitra (New Delhi: Sage Publishers, 2012): 30–54, and the many practical examples from the areas of art and politics within the same publication.

Note: The material presented here presents a work-in-progress presentation of a larger research project, which will lead to a substantial book on the subject to be published in the series "Dependency and Slavery Studies" of the Bonn Centre for Dependency and Slavery Studies with de Gruyter, probably in 2024.

2 Jaina Roots in Karnataka

Jainism originated in the east Indian state of Bihar in the fifth or sixth centuries BCE. A severe drought, which affected the region during the fourth century BCE, caused a large portion of the local Jaina community to migrate from the area. The Jainas ventured both to the northwest and the south of the country, which led to a schism between the Digambara group of the sky-clad or naked ascetics and the Śvetāmbaras, who wear simple white cotton garments.³

A number of legends assert that Jainism came to Karnataka in the fourth century BCE through the religious teachings of Bhadrabāhu (Fig. 1). Despite this popular tale, historically, it is more likely that the religion was transmitted from its place of origin in Bihar, through the East Indian state of Orissa and into Tamil Nadu in the south. From there, it appears to have reached Karnataka during the early centuries of the Common Era, probably around the second century CE.⁴ Jainism became firmly established throughout the region and proliferated extensively until about the ninth century CE when its influence appears to have reached a temporary plateau. One reason for Jainism's significant popularity and increased following in Karnataka during this period appears to have been the activities of the Digambara Jaina subgroup of the Yāpanīyas. They were more liberal than mainstream Digambara Jainas. For instance, they believed that salvation could be attained from within a female body.⁵ The Yāpanīyas appear to have contributed to the firm integration of the Jainas into the wider society and to the propagation of a relative collective societal harmony.⁶ Additionally,

3 For additional information on Digamabara and Śvetāmbara Jainas and further subdivisions, see Julia A.B. Hegewald, *Jaina Temple Architecture in India: The Development of a Distinct Language in Space and Ritual*, Monographien zur indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie 19 (Berlin: Stiftung Ernst Waldschmidt, G+H-Verlag, 2009): 17–21.

4 For a more detailed exploration of the subject, see Julia A.B. Hegewald, *Jaina Temple Architecture in India: The Development of a Distinct Language in Space and Ritual*, Monographien zur indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie 19 (Berlin: Stiftung Ernst Waldschmidt, G+H-Verlag, 2009): 319, 476–77.

5 On the fact that this is not part of majority Digambara religious thought, see Padmanabh S. Jaini, *Gender & Salvation: Jaina Debates on the Spiritual Liberation of Women* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1991) and Aloka Parasher-Sen, "Jaina Women, Ritual Death and the Deccan," in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (New Delhi: Saṃskṛiti, 2011): 213–43.

6 This has been deduced from a number of inscriptions, which suggest that local Hindus provided protection and monetary support for the construction and preservation of Jaina temples. Additional information on the Yāpanīyas can be found in P.N. Narasimha Murthy, "History of Jainism in Karnataka: Developments from the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries CE," in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (New Delhi: Saṃskṛiti, 2011): 47–48; Shantinath Dibbad, "The Construction, Destruction and Renovation of Jaina Basadis: A Historical Perspective," in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (New Delhi: Saṃskṛiti, 2011): 66; Parasher-Sen, "Jaina Women, Ritual Death and the Deccan": 221–23; and Vatsala Iyengar, "Jaina Goddesses and their Worship in Karnataka," in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (New Delhi: Saṃskṛiti, 2011): 247.

the spread of Jainism appears to have been further supported by its ability to adapt well to local circumstances. As will be shown later in this chapter, Jainism survived and thrived, especially in the coastal region of western Karnataka, where its proponents entered a close dialogue with Hindus and various local sacred practices and cults.⁷



Fig. 1: Panels on two steatite screens in the Candragupta Basti at Shravanabelgola depict the alleged introduction of Jainism to Karnataka through Bhadrabāhu in the fourth century BCE.

After the introductory phase of religious consolidation in Karnataka, Jainism flourished from the ninth to the eleventh centuries of the common era. This phase referred to as a “glorious period”.⁸ The time of the Gaṅgā dynasty (c. fourth to eleventh centuries) and even more so that of the Hoysaḷa rulers (c. twelfth to fourteenth centuries) have also been classified as a “golden age” of Jainism in Karnataka.⁹ In the lead-up to

⁷ On this subject, see section 6 on later Jaina continuities.

⁸ R.V.S. Sundaram, “Elements of Jaina History in Kannada Literature,” in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (New Delhi: Saṁskṛiti, 2011): 30–34 has used this term.

⁹ The application of the term “golden age” for the Hoysaḷa period in Karnataka has been discussed in Julia A.B. Hegewald, “Golden Age or Kali-Yuga? The Changing Fortunes of Jaina Art and Identity in Karnataka,” in *In the Shadow of the Golden Age: Art and Identity in Asia from Gandhara to the Modern Age*, vol. 1, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald, Studies in Asian Art and Culture (SAAC) (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014): 316–22. The generally problematic nature of using this term has been discussed in Julia A.B. Hegewald, “Introduction: Out of the Shadow of the Golden Age,” in *In the Shadow of the Golden Age: Art and*

the twelfth century, large numbers of temples and sacred centres were established. Nevertheless, this period of flowering was soon followed by pressures, intimidations, and coercions.¹⁰ Already during the second half of the eleventh and in the twelfth century, the Jaina community came under relentless political and physical attack, leading to a severe decline and a struggle for survival in the area. There is literary, as well as artistic and architectural evidence for persecution.¹¹

3 Changes in Jainism

So far, we have highlighted the ability of the Jainas to adapt as a positive skill. A religion, however, which changes too significantly and moves away too far from its essential doctrines, may risk losing its identity and credibility. This appears, at least partially, to have been the fate of the Digambara Jainas in Karnataka under the rule of the Cālukyas and the Hoysaḷas from the early tenth century onwards.

This period of stability, calm and the accrual of increased authority appears to have motivated the Jainas to undertake substantial changes in the organization and social outlook of their religion.¹² By way of example, consider the emergence of Jaina castes, the elaboration of ritual practices, and the formation of monastic institutions as permanent seats of control, religious learning, and landownership (*maṭhas*) (Fig. 2). Castes had been absent from the earlier, more archaic form of the religion, and their reconfirmation created hierarchies and inequalities which had not previously existed. The fragmentation of Jainism into castes and sub-groups, such as the Yāpanīyas, which paid allegiance to different monastic centres, weakened the unity of the Jaina populace. Increased intra-religious divisions, in turn, made it easier for other groups to split, disintegrate, and disempower the community. Whether an intensification of ritual practices and the development of Tantric Jainism further destabilized the faith remains questionable.¹³ However, such developments clearly diluted the distinc-

Identity in Asia from Gandhara to the Modern Age, vol. 1, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald, Studies in Asian Art and Culture (SAAC) (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014): 31–76; and backed up with many examples in Julia A.B. Hegewald, ed., *In the Shadow of the Golden Age: Art and Identity in Asia from Gandhara to the Modern Age*, vol. 1, Studies in Asian Art and Culture (SAAC) (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014).

¹⁰ For further details, see Hegewald, “Golden Age or Kali-Yuga?”: 322.

¹¹ For textual references in Jaina and Viraśaiva literature, referring to the persecution of the Jainas from the early twelfth century, see R.V.S. Sundaram, “Elements of Jaina History in Kannada Literature”: 35–36.

¹² Refer to the chapter by P.N. Narasimha Murthy, “History of Jainism in Karnataka: Developments from the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries CE,” in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (New Delhi: Saṃskṛiti, 2011): 43–44.

¹³ Whilst K.M. Suresh, “Jaina Monuments in and Around Hampi,” in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (New Delhi: Saṃskṛiti, 2011): 182 suggests that Jaina temples and icons were the result of the tenth-century changes taking place in Jainism, we know that statues

tiveness of Jainism and established closer links to Hindu practices. The once highly ascetically-minded Jaina religious institutions gradually accumulated enormous prosperity and became powerful landowners.¹⁴ From the early twelfth century, the support of prominent and instrumental royal families in the region deteriorated, and resentment against the often wealthy and authoritarian Jaina elite led to confrontations. This resulted in discrimination and, at times, outright collective public aggression. In addition to these internal developments, external forces also undermined the authority of the Jaina community. Specifically, Jainism had to grapple with the rise of both local and supra-local religious beliefs and groups, which started to threaten the Jaina's social position.



Fig. 2: The Jaina *matha* at Karkal illustrates the creation of monastic institutions as seats of religious and political control in Karnataka from the tenth century CE onwards.

of Jaina saints existed already at the time of Mahāvira. On this issue, see the section entitled “Questions Concerning the Veneration of Images in Jainism” and “The Beginnings of Jaina Sculptural Art” in Julia A.B. Hegewald, *Jaina Temple Architecture in India: The Development of a Distinct Language in Space and Ritual*, Monographien zur indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie 19 (Berlin: Stiftung Ernst Waldschmidt, G+H-Verlag, 2009): 63–65. Furthermore, temples had been fashioned for centuries at this time already and it is now widely acknowledged that a “pure” and abstract form of Jainism, devoid of icons, sacred structures and image veneration never existed. On this issue, see Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London: Routledge, 1992): 182 and Hegewald, *Jaina Temple Architecture in India*: 94, 107.

14 On this issue, see Narasimha Murthy, “History of Jainism in Karnataka”: 113–16.

4 The Rise of Viraśaivism

The creed which gained most rapidly in power at this time was the so-called “heroic Śaivas”, the Viraśaivas, also known as Liṅgāyats, the “worshippers of the *liṅga*”.¹⁵ Viraśaivism was initiated in northern Karnataka by the religious leader Basava.¹⁶ He lived from approximately 1105 to 1168. Viraśaivism is a *bhakti* reform movement¹⁷ that focuses on the god Śiva. However, it is a distinct faith and not a form or subgroup of Hinduism. This becomes apparent, for instance, in its complete rejection of multiple gods, the concept of *karma*¹⁸ and the authority of the central body of religious texts in Hinduism, known as the *Vedas*. Viraśaivas preach against social inequalities and reject the caste system, so prevalent in Hindu social and religious life. Furthermore, orthodox followers rebuff temple worship, sacrifices, and the concepts of purity and pollution, which are central to mainstream Hinduism. Viraśaivas worship the symbol of the god Śiva, the *liṅga*, which they wear on a thread around their neck.¹⁹

Other local groups that gained power were the Śaivas and the Kāḷāmukhas. The latter are an extreme Śaiva sect that worships the Hindu god Bhairava and the goddess Kālī.²⁰ In the fifteenth century, the powerful and expanding cult of the Viraśaivas absorbed the Kāḷāmukhas.²¹ Due to the social reorganization prompted by this

15 While the concept of the “hero” (*vīr*) plays a role in various religious systems, including Jainism, in the context of the Viraśaivas, it is also related to an aggressive and militant attitude, which its *bhakti* supporters followed. For further details on *bhakti* devotionalism, see n. 17.

16 Alternatively, he is also known as Basavaṇṇa.

17 *Bhakti* has generally been translated as “devotion”. However, the meaning of the term changed over the centuries; it can also signify love and personal surrender to a specific divinity. Although it traces its roots to early Indian literature, such as the *Upaniṣads*, it eventually became a wide-ranging ideology. The *bhakti* movement originated in Tamil Nadu between the sixth and the seventh centuries CE. In addition to the expectation of complete surrender to a personal god, the *bhakti* message is one of strict adherence to religious rules and the rejection of caste inequality. For further details, see Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987): 8–35, 201–54.

18 The concept of *karma* basically refers to the totality of a person’s actions and deeds in both the present as well as previous lives. *Karma* is believed to influence subsequent rebirths and one’s status in future existences. The rejection of other gods here is not a form of henotheism, but the outright rejection of any other divinities.

19 While ordinary worshippers carry a small black stone or raisin *liṅga* tied to a thread, contained in a small cloth sachet, or sliver container, there are also more elaborate necklaces. Among the Viraśaivas, the *liṅga* as divine principle is referred to as *iṣṭaliṅga*.

20 On this issue, see Shantinath Dibbad, “The Construction, Destruction and Renovation of Jaina Basadis: A Historical Perspective,” in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (New Delhi: Samskṛiti, 2011): 70. Kāḷāmukha means “black-faced”. They were mainly prevalent in South India between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries CE.

21 Compare Julia A.B. Hegewald, “Introduction: The Jaina Heritage of Southern India and Karnataka,” in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald, Heidelberg Series in South Asian Studies (Delhi: Samskṛiti Publishers, 2011): 23.

expansion, the Jainas became a minority in Karnataka, while diverse Śaiva denominations continued to increase in numbers and authority. This led to a remarkable Śaivite revival during the twelfth century. In addition to this primarily local, regional rivalry, from the mid-twelfth century, Śrīvaiṣṇava *bhakti* followers of Viṣṇu from Tamil Nadu also penetrated the region. These developments were all part of a broader renewal of Brāhmanical faiths in the region. However, to a lesser extent, Muslim groups from the north also infiltrated the region from the late thirteenth century onwards. All these faith groups competed for influence, thus disturbing the relative Jaina-Hindu religious balance, in which the Jainas had maintained a prominent place for many centuries but eventually were downgraded to fourth or fifth place.

As we have already seen, both internal and external factors contributed to the decline of the Jainas. The growing impact of Viraśaivas on trade and commerce also appears to have expedited the conversion of leading Jaina families, including landowners and heads of trade guilds, to the newly ascendant faith.²² Since it allowed them to live by their ideals of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), before the rise of the Viraśaivas, Jainas had been the leading players in trade. However, in the twelfth century, amid fierce competition, the Viraśaivas ultimately took control of trade in the region. This had catastrophic consequences for the maintenance of Jaina temples and the funding of costly ceremonies: conversions resulted in the withdrawal of the financial support from which Jainism had previously benefited.²³ Religious opposition and commercial competition were linked as the various centres of the competing religions struggled for the support of the wealthiest trading communities.²⁴ Upon the conversion of influential players, like wealthy landowners, to Viraśaivism and other faith groups, the ordinary population followed suit. The list of influential converts also, perhaps surprisingly, included influential Jaina religious figures, such as monks. They often controlled large properties and seem to have been more concerned with maintaining their wealth than the survival of their religion at this time. Due to the important roles that temples as religious, educational, cultural, economic, and political centres played for the Jaina community, the sacred edifices were usually the

22 On this issue, see P.N. Narasimha Murthy, “History of Jainism in Karnataka”: 58. The participation in trade appears to be based on the religious view of work. Likewise, it exemplifies an understanding of trade as a religious and social service (*kāyaka*) in which a part of a person’s earnings is given to the support of the community, especially its poorest members. This was known as the *vīra bāñjiga dharma*, the “law of the noble merchants”. Due to the prominence of the Viraśaiva traders in commerce, Indian tradesmen are often referred collectively as Bāñjiga, Bāñia, Bāñiya, or Bāñija merchants. The information on the involvement of Viraśaivas in trade has been taken from a lecture by Tiziana Lorenzetti made by invitation through the Deccan Heritage Foundation on 20 May 2022 (Tiziana Lorenzetti, “The Viraśaivas / 12th Century Karnataka’ – A Talk by Tiziana Lorenzetti (ISAS),” 20.05.2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsBqa756fR4> [accessed 30.05.2022]).

23 Consult the chapter by Narasimha Murthy, “History of Jainism in Karnataka.”

24 This is based on the paper presentation by Tiziana Lorenzetti at the Deccan Heritage Foundation on 20 May 2022 (Lorenzetti, “The Viraśaivas / Liṅgāyats of 12th Century Karnataka”).

first to be targeted in the fight for hegemony.²⁵ The groups gaining in influence at this time – Śaivas, Śrīvaiṣṇavas, Kālāmukhas, and Muslims – participated in both the destruction and the conversion of former Jaina statues and temples.²⁶ Indeed, there are countless records which glorify conversions of Jainas and their temple edifices to other faiths. Now that we have explored the religious and political background that is relevant to the present discussion, we will turn to art and architecture, which reflect the religious changes already introduced.

5 Transformations in Jaina Art and Architecture

Some of the changes that occurred in Jaina temple architecture were voluntary, but others were enforced. The latter have to do with attacks and alterations conducted by rival groups, particularly the Vīraśaivas, who, from their newly-won positions of supremacy and control, expressed their political and religious power by looting, damaging, and even destroying the icons and sacred spaces of the deposed Jainas.

5.1 Voluntary Changes

If we start by considering the freely chosen aspects of the transformation of the Jaina religion's life and practice, we notice that intra-religious developments had a pronounced effect on the design of Jaina edifices. The earlier temples of the Gaṅgā period, roughly from the fourth to eleventh centuries, exhibit a primarily functional character and reflect a form of the religion which propagates a more or less ascetic approach to life.²⁷ Typical of this style is the Jaina temple (634 CE) on Meguḍi Hill at Aihole (Fig. 3). However, with an increase in power and worldly influence, the growth of monasteries and the economic influence of temples, the socio-religious standards of the Jainas appear to have changed. At least some sacred edifices, dating from the

25 The multidimensional use of the Jaina temples and religious centres has also been stressed by K.M. Suresh, "Jaina Monuments in and Around Hampi": 178. Shantinath Dibbad has written about temples being primary targets in conflicts in South Asia (Shantinath Dibbad, "The Construction, Destruction and Renovation of Jaina *Basadis*: A Historical Perspective," in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald [New Delhi: Samskriti, 2011]: 73).

26 Two examples of Vīraśaiva conversions of former Jaina temples in Karnataka have been examined by Julia A.B. Hegewald in a joint publication with Subrata K. Mitra, "Jagannatha Compared: The politics of appropriation, re-use and regional state traditions in India," *Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics (HPSACP)* 36 (2008): 1–37. See, in particular, pages 22 to 29.

27 On this issue, see M.S. Krishna Murthy, "The Development of Jaina Temple Architecture in Southern Karnataka: From the Beginning to c. 1300 CE," in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (New Delhi: Samskriti, 2011): 98.

subsequent Hoysala period (roughly the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries), display an amount of decoration and ornamentation – both on the outside as well as on the inside of the temples – which visually represents a celebration of splendour and wealth: it also clearly reveals an increasingly mundane attitude.²⁸ These developments are well-reflected in the comparatively ornate style of the Śāntinātha Basti at Jinanathapura.²⁹ The term *basti* or *basadi*, employed in the name of the aforementioned structure, is the local term used to refer to a Jaina temple.



Fig. 3: Rear view of the seventh-century CE Jaina temple on Meguḍi Hill at Aihole, reflecting an unpretentious and minimalistic approach to sacred architecture during the Gaṅgā period.

²⁸ See, for instance, M.S. Krishna Murthy, “The Development of Jaina Temple Architecture”: 98; and Robert J. Del Bontà, “The Shantinatha Basadi at Jinanathapura,” in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (New Delhi: Saṁskṛiti, 2011).

²⁹ M.S. Krishna Murthy explains this change as representative of the general transformation that took place in religious attitudes, practice, and architectural approach of the Jainas, see M.S. Krishna Murthy, “The Development of Jaina Temple Architecture”: 98. Robert J. Del Bontà, on the other hand, argues for a more personal choice in style of the donor, see Robert J. Del Bontà, “The Shantinatha Basadi at Jinanathapura”: 123–25. In the context of the changed self-understanding of the Jaina community, I support Krishna Murthy’s interpretation.

5.2 Enforced Modifications

Even more marked than these initial voluntary stylistic changes was the influence that Viraśaivism and other denominations had on the temple architecture of the Jainas. From about the mid-twelfth century, large numbers of sacred places, which were hubs of wealth but also social and political centres, were looted and destroyed. As the icons were the most important elements of these sacred sites, they were targeted first. Regarding these attacks, different approaches towards the statues can be outlined.

5.2.1 Theft and Adjustments of Icons

First, large numbers of Jaina temples were deprived of their venerated sculptural representations. In these instances, often only empty image platforms (*siṃhāsanas*) remain. If the images were removed, the temples were often saved, as this made them religiously and politically ineffective, thus depriving the community of its power. This was the case in the Candranāteśvara Basti at Bhatkal, whose statues were all eliminated, and which as a temple has not been reconsecrated, although the edifice itself was only marginally damaged.

However, there were other ways to deprive the community of its power by modifying their temple complexes. The second approach to temple modification shows that icons were not always completely removed. Some were left behind but desecrated. To defile them, it was enough to simply remove them from their raised pedestals and place them on the dirty ground.³⁰ In a context increasingly dominated by Viraśaivas, they were also smeared with sacred ashes (*vibhūti*), indicating their annexation. An example of this practice can be seen in the former Jaina temple at Hallur, which the Viraśaivas converted.³¹ In other instances, the images were kept in place but disfigured, for instance, by cutting off an arm or the face. Both approaches are on display in the same temple at Hallur.³²

³⁰ In a sacred context, icons of all Indic religious groups should be lifted above the ground in order to signal their purity and religious importance.

³¹ The temple and site have been discussed by Julia A.B. Hegewald in the joint chapter with Subrata K. Mitra (Hegewald and Mitra, “Jagannatha Compared”: 1–37; Julia A.B. Hegewald and Subrata K. Mitra, “The Past in the Present: Temple Conversions in Karnataka and Appropriation and Re-Use in Orissa,” in *Re-Use: The Art and Politics of Integration and Anxiety*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald and Subrata K. Mitra [New Delhi: Sage Publishers, 2012]: 57–61.

³² The mutilation of these statues has also been highlighted by Michael Meister and M.A. Dhaky, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture: South India – Upper Dravidadesha (Early Phase, AD 550–1075)*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986): 147 and by K.M. Suresh, *Temples of Karnataka (Ground Plans and Elevations)*, 2 vols. (Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 2003): 110.

The third line of assault is even more stunning. In this case, rather than damaging or defacing statues, the attacking religious community fully decapitated them. An example of this practice is the seated Jaina teacher³³ in the first-floor sanctum of the Meguḍi Temple on the hill overlooking Aihole (Fig. 4). The complete elimination of the head precludes a later reconsecration of the icon. Furthermore, it impedes devotees from looking at the eyes of the figure, which plays an important role in the Jaina ritual of worship. Beheaded sculptures were frequently exhibited at the front of Jaina sacred edifices to indicate to those who approached that a new group had taken over the structure. When, during later centuries, Jainas regained control over some of their former sites, they frequently kept the severely mutilated icons in place. In this context, the disfigured objects fulfil a new meaning. The statues act as lively reminders of the violent times the community endured but survived.³⁴ The victory is taken as a reconfirmation of the strength and the superiority of the Jaina faith. An expressive example is the headless torso of a seated Jina displayed in front of the Jaina shrine next to the Brahma Jinālaya at Lakkundi. The dismembered limbs and heads, which were cut off stone figures, have also been displayed in sacred Jaina centres. Examples are housed in the outer niches of the Anantanātha Basti at Lakshmeshvar (Fig. 5). This way of using dismembered statues was first employed by those who violated Jaina shrines to signal a takeover and exercise control. Yet, later, the practice was also taken up by the Jainas themselves to memorialize the violence they had suffered. Therefore, it is comparatively rare for such mutilated statues to have been restored. During the preparations for the 2018 Mahāmastakābhīṣeka, the local *bhaṭṭāraka*³⁵ commissioned the restoration of the statues placed in the outer niches of the Pañcakūṭa Basti at Kambadhalli.³⁶

5.2.2 Modifications of Temple Buildings

It was not only Jaina statues but also entire temple edifices that were severely damaged (Fig. 6) or entirely demolished by rival groups.³⁷ With architecture, as with stat-

³³ These are referred to as Jinas or Tīrthaṅkaras.

³⁴ The issue of survival is very important in a Jaina context. See the discussion in Julia A.B. Hegewald “Jaina Temple Architecture in India from the Fifteenth and later Centuries: Stylistic, Religious and Political Meanings,” in *Festschrift: Jan Pieper zum 65. Geburtstag – Von seinen Schülern, Freunden und Kollegen*, eds. Anke Fissabre and Caroline Helmenstein (Aachen: Eigenverlag, 2009): 74.

³⁵ A *bhaṭṭāraka* is the clerical head of a Digambara religious institution, such as a *maṭha*.

³⁶ During the Mahāmastakābhīṣeka, an important religious festival taking place only once about every twelve years, for instance, at Shravanabelgola, the monumental statue of Bāhubali is reconsecrated with a so-called “great-head-anointing” ablution ceremony (Mahāmastakābhīṣeka). During the restoration in Kambadhalli, the limbs were replaced in a different colour to mark the alteration.

³⁷ Some temples may also have degenerated and collapsed due to neglect, such as the abandonment suffered after voluntary or enforced conversions from Jainism to other faith groups.



Fig. 4: Stone statues of fully decapitated Jain teachers, which had formerly served as objects of veneration, have been left inside the sanctums of Jain temples throughout Karnataka.

ues, several different approaches can be outlined. From inscriptions, we know that large numbers of Jain temples were completely razed to the ground in religiously motivated attacks. These complete demolitions have been attributed to both Muslims and Viraśaivas. For instance, at the site of Chikka Hanasoge, the Ādinātha Trikūṭa Basti has been well-preserved. Allegedly, however, there were another sixty-four temples in the village, most of them Jain, which were completely destroyed in religiously motivated assaults.³⁸ Nevertheless, as already mentioned, Viraśaivas were not the only group who destroyed entire temple buildings. From Mulgund, near Dharwar, we

³⁸ This is based on personal communications with local Jain families in Chikka Hanasoge in 2001.



Fig. 5: The dismembered limbs and heads of Jaina icons have been put on display in the outer niches of Jaina temples, as seen here in the Anantanātha Basti at Lakshmeshvar.

have a sixteenth-century epigraphic record that narrates the complete flattening of the Pārśvanātha Temple by Muslim troops and, in the process, the martyrdom of the Jaina teacher Ācārya Sahasra Kīrti.³⁹ Another particularly fascinating case is the Ādinātha Basti (1589 CE) from Srirangapatnam: the icons housed inside have all come from wrecked Jaina temples in the area. According to legend, it was the Muslim ruler Malik Kafur who tore down one thousand and eight Jaina temples.⁴⁰ Above entirely flattened Jaina shrines, new buildings could be erected by other religious groups or, later, even by the Jaina community itself. The continuity of sacred sites across multiple architectural iterations is common:⁴¹ annihilating temples of one religious denomination and replacing them with structures of a different faith represents a powerful

³⁹ The inscription states that the Jaina saint stayed inside the temple and was killed when it was set on fire (P.B. Desai, ed., *South-Indian Inscriptions*, vol. 15, Bombay-Karnataka Inscriptions 2 [Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1964]: 433, inscription no. 695; K.R. Srinivasan, “Monuments & Sculpture AD 1300 To 1800: The Deccan,” in *Jaina Art and Architecture*, vol. 2, ed. Amalananda Ghosh [New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1975]: 365).

⁴⁰ This information was obtained in a personal communication with Jaina families in Srirangapatnam in 2001. One thousand and eight is a number perceived as sacred or auspicious by most indigenous religious groups in South Asia and is often used when a particularly large amount is referred to.

⁴¹ On this issue, see Hegewald, “Towards a Theory of Re-Use”: 34–35.

political statement. However, only on the basis of temple inscriptions and other written records made in the context of raising new shrines on former entirely destroyed temple plots, is it possible, to identify such sites. Some severely damaged temples were later reconstructed. A remarkable sample is the Śāṅkha Jinālaya at Lakshmeshvar, originally commissioned by the Kalyāṇi Cālukyas in the eleventh century.⁴² The strike on this temple was so fierce and the destruction so severe that a faithful reconstruction was impossible. Instead, small pieces were fitted together in what seems like a haphazard manner. The edifice thus reflects the violence and the scars of the past. In other instances, only selected former building elements, such as thresholds, lintels, entire doorframes, or altars, were fitted into largely new and modern temple structures. The City Basti in Mysore contains such a blend of ancient and modern elements.



Fig. 6: External view onto the severely damaged former Pārśvanātha Jaina Temple at Hale Belgola, which has not been reconsecrated.

⁴² This temple has been discussed in detail by K.V. Soundara Rajan, “Monuments & Sculpture AD 1000 to 1300: The Deccan and South India,” in *Jaina Art and Architecture*, vol. 2, ed. Amalananda Ghosh (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jnanpith, 1975): 312–13.

5.2.3 Re-Use of Icons and Temples

So far, we have analysed stolen, desecrated, and mutilated statues. We have also examined flattened, severely damaged, and reconstructed temples. Another option frequently chosen by newly dominant groups in the Deccan to express their superiority, namely Viraśaivas, Śaivas Kāḷāmukhas, and Muslims, was to absorb, convert, and re-use Jaina icons and temples. In these cases, sacred objects and architectural spaces were conserved and continue to influence local culture and identity to the present day. For those deprived of their revered places of worship, however, such sites express painful memories and act as constant reminders of humiliation, theft, and conversion.

In Karnataka, there is evidence of an exceptionally high number of such temple annexations and changeovers from Jaina to Viraśaiva usage. Re-used temples largely fall into three distinct groups. In the first group are those which openly publicize their appropriation. Those in the second group consciously try to hide it, while temples that fall into the third group indicate a less intentional middle way. Converted shrines, which openly advertise enforced annexation, are reasonably scarce. For a clear example, we can again look at the Meguḍi Temple at Hallur. On the outside of this large temple, the tall statues of naked Jaina ascetics have been intentionally retained on the facades as trophies, advertising the conversion of the temple (Fig. 7). Re-used temples, where the Jaina origin is less obvious, are more numerous. In these examples, we encounter two different gradations of how cautiously the adaptation has been conducted. In some instances, the new users have taken considerable care to remove all traces which indicate a Jaina origin. In such instances, one can only prove that the temple was initially of Jaina construction based on historical research and the analysis of written records. In most cases, however, there are traces of a takeover. This approach can be seen, for instance, in the Jina statues carved onto the lintels of temples (*lalāṭa-bimba*), which frequently have been chiselled away and not been replaced. Often this has been done quite crudely, and the forceful change is not concealed. This approach can be seen in the former Jaina Temple at Hangal (1150 CE) and the Pārśvanātha Temple at Annigeri. Clear iconographic indications of the original Jaina affiliation of a temple are not only found on the lintels but also in other architectural features. Although the outer walls of Jaina temples are often relatively unadorned, sculptures have regularly been integrated into the roof structures of halls and shrines. While iconographic remnants on the inside of temples were usually carefully removed, in relatively hidden sections on the outside, they often survived. This can be seen in the Nāganātha Temple, today dedicated to Śiva, which still bears icons of Jinās in its roof (Fig. 8).

Rarer than the annexation of architectural spaces or empty altars is the re-use of Jaina icons by other faith groups. Nevertheless, there are instances where Jinās and



Fig. 7: On the Megudi Temple at Hallur, the statues of Jain ascetics were intentionally kept in place after its conversion and use as a Viraśaiva place of worship.

other objects of veneration⁴³ were absorbed, reinterpreted, and reconsecrated by other religions. Of particular interest in this regard is the fact that Viraśaivas, whose tenets reject the veneration of images other than that of the *liṅga*, absorbed and continued to venerate Jain statues and symbols. See, for instance, the large, seated sculpture of a Jina, which today is venerated by the Viraśaivas at Adargunchi (Fig. 9). The icon is referred to as “Doḍḍappā”, meaning paternal uncle in Kannada.⁴⁴ The statue does not appear to represent a specific religious or mythical character but seems to provide contact to a family figure to whom one can turn in times of trouble.

⁴³ This has, for instance, also been done with venerated foot imprints. Sacred depictions of feet lend themselves especially well to re-use, because though they relate to a human body, they are abstract enough so that they do not bear many iconographic details. See Julia A.B. Hegewald, “Foot Stones and Footprints (*Pādukās*): Multivariate Symbols in Jain Religious Practice in India,” in *In the Footsteps of the Masters: Footprints, Feet and Shoes as Objects of Veneration in Asian, Islamic and Mediterranean Art*, vol. 7, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald, Studies in Asian Art and Culture (SAAC) (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2020): 413–16.

⁴⁴ On this, see Julia A.B. Hegewald in the joint article together with Subrata K. Mitra (Hegewald and Mitra, “The Past in the Present”: 63–64).



Fig. 8: Although the outer walls of the former Jaina temple in Lakkundi are quite plain, Jina statues integrated into the roof decorations were retained following the conversion of the structure.

6 Jaina Continuity

This chapter has outlined the reasons for the initial rise and subsequent religious persecution of the Jains, which resulted in the destruction and re-use of their sacred icons and temples. Literary evidence indicates that the Jains continued to experience discrimination in Karnataka well into the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ However, despite per-

⁴⁵ R.V.S. Sundaram has written on this issue, see Sundaram, “Elements of Jaina History in Kannada Literature”: 35.



Fig. 9: Today, the Jina housed in the main sanctum of the erstwhile Jaina temple at Adargunchi has been absorbed, rededicated, and is venerated by Viraśaivas as an icon of Doḍḍappā.

petual threats and real physical persecution, Jainism, as well as Jaina art and architecture, never completely ceased to be produced and to develop.

Regarding Karnataka, in the present discussion about religious affiliation, there is a certain interest in the Vijayanagara Empire, founded in 1346 CE. Although the rulers were Hindu, some had Jaina wives and protected the Jaina community.⁴⁶ Their capital, Vijayanagara, also known as Hampi, includes a number of substantial Jaina temples. The largest is the Pārśvanātha Basti (1426 CE), and the probably most famous is the Gaṇagitti Temple in neighbouring Kamalapuram (1385).

In the important religious centre of Shravanabelgola, west of Bangalore, we also encounter uninterrupted building activities by the Jainas. The style of the later temple constructions continues the earlier Hoysala paradigm in many respects. The Maṅgāyi Basti in town, dating from about 1325 CE, provides one example of this continuity

⁴⁶ This has been discussed in Basker Anand Saletore, *Mediaeval Jainism: With Special Reference to the Vijayanagara Empire* (Bombay: Karnataka Publishing House, 1938): 298–321 and K.M. Suresh, *Temples of Karnataka*: 60. An inscription of King Bukka I, testifies that he mediated in a dispute between the Śrīvaiṣṇavas and the Jainas in 1368 and extended royal protection towards the latter (Saletore, *Mediaeval Jainism*: 302; Srinivasan, “Monuments & Sculpture AD 1300 To 1800”: 365. This enabled the Jainas to recommence construction works on temple sites.

(Fig. 10).⁴⁷ Another example is the very small temple on Vindhyaḡiri, close to the entrance of the Gommaṡeśvara enclosure, known as the Siddha Bhagavāna Temple or Siddha Basti (1398). An even later testament is the Cennaṡṡa Basti on the same sacred hill, dating from 1673 CE.⁴⁸

Jainism also continued to flourish in various provincial courts,⁴⁹ particularly from the fifteenth century onwards. The Jaina temples on the west coast of Karnataka from this period merit consideration here. In this region, vassals of the Vijayanagara kings ruled comparatively independently from the capital. Since most were Jains, they restored, enlarged, and founded new *bastis* throughout the region. The temples reveal a distinct architectural style, which has been adapted to the local climate of heavy monsoon rains.⁵⁰ Major centres of Jainism in the region are, Mudabidri, Karkal, and Venur. Typical examples displaying the regional style are the Candranātha Basti (1429 CE) at Mudabidri and the Caturmukha Basti (1586–1587) at Karkal. Jainism appears to have survived and thrived in this region due to its firm integration of local customs. The Jains absorbed elements from Hinduism and local cults.⁵¹ Even today, Jainism is still an active religious force in the region.

Though the Jaina presence in the northern regions of Karnataka was much diminished by vigorous encounters with Viraśaiva and Islamic followers, there is also some continuity.⁵² This continuity can, for instance, be seen in the Pārśvanātha Temple at Bagalkot in the very north of Karnataka, which was founded as late as 1976. Also relevant for considerations of ongoing religious practices in the region is the migration of Śvetāmbara Jains into the area for commercial reasons, especially during the past forty to fifty years, but which commenced even earlier. The Pārśvanātha Śvetāmbara Temple at Gadag (1914) provides an architectural attestation of early twentieth-century Jaina practice in the region. Also fascinating are the many contemporary building sites erected in and around the regional capital Bangalore. The comparatively recent construction of these sacred spaces reveals that, despite their severe persecution during the late Medieval and Early Modern periods, there is an uninterrupted continuity of Jaina temple construction throughout Karnataka to the present day.

47 Srinivasan has written on this temple (Srinivasan, “Monuments & Sculpture AD 1300 To 1800”: 369).

48 Detailed information on all these temples can be found in Julia A.B. Hegewald, *Jaina Tradition of the Deccan: Shravanabelagola, Mudabidri, Karkala*, Jaico Guidebook Series (Mumbai: Deccan Heritage Foundation and Jaico Publishing House, 2021).

49 Srinivasan points out that Jainism flourished especially at regional courts as ‘they were more congenial for its growth than the capital of the empire’ (Srinivasan, “Monuments & Sculpture AD 1300 To 1800”: 366).

50 For a detailed discussion of these temples, see Hegewald, *Jaina Tradition of the Deccan*.

51 This has been argued by Pius Fidelius Pinto, “Jainism in the Vijayanagara Empire: The Survival of the Religion in the Capital and in the Coastal Region of Karnataka,” in *The Jaina Heritage: Distinction, Decline and Resilience*, ed. Julia A.B. Hegewald (New Delhi: Saṡskṡiti, 2011): 88–90.

52 We noticed this already in the Jaina temples at Hampi, which is also located in the north of the State.

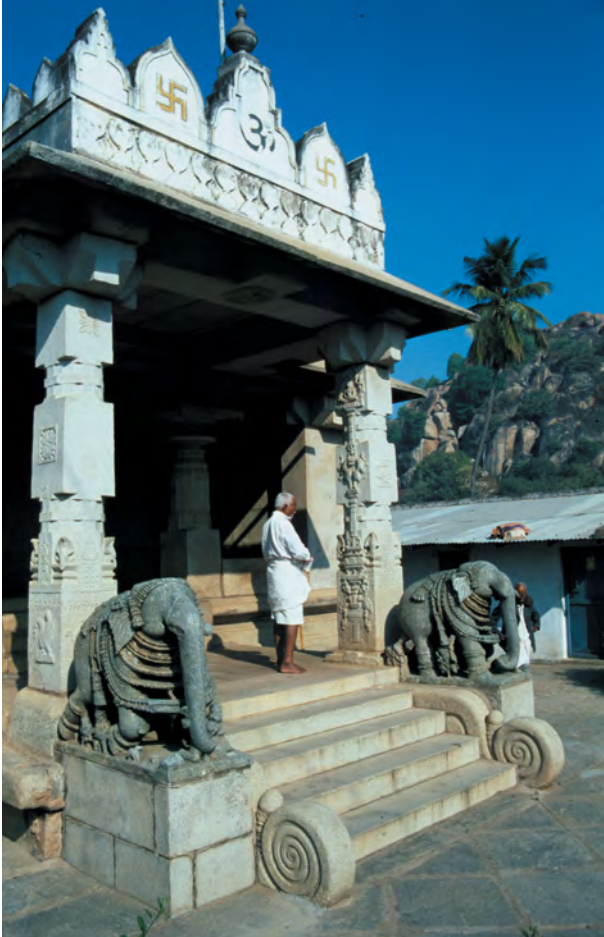


Fig. 10: Despite severe persecution, continuity in the architectural tradition and practice of Jainism can be observed in the fourteenth-century Maṅgāyi Basti at Shraavanabelgola.

7 Conclusion

The situation outlined in this chapter reveals the complexity of relationships and interactions between different religious groups in Karnataka. For the Jainas, after an initial phase of flourishing and substantial influence, religious competition became particularly pronounced between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries. In many areas, this competition continued well beyond the advent of the early modern period. The Deccan region was characterized by often violent inter-religious struggles. Jainism was only one of many beliefs in a system of interrelated faith communities that

were all competing for an increase in their following and for religious, political and commercial influence.

Due to changes within their own religious structure, during a period in which the Jainas found themselves in a situation of superiority, Jainism appears to have become increasingly susceptible to criticism from within its own ranks and to competition from other faith groups. Due to these changes, Viraśaivas, in particular, gained power and exercised control, coercion, and constraint over the Jainas in large areas of Karnataka. The formerly austere and highly ascetic Jainas had accepted caste segregation, increased their ritual activities, expanded their pantheon of gods and goddesses, settled, and amassed substantial wealth. Initially, this evolution from simplicity and abstraction to elaboration and abundance might have been attractive to devotees because the detached and fully enlightened Jinās could not be called upon for help and advice in times of difficulty. However, the changes might have eventually gone too far and created a rift between the ordinary population and the privileged Jaina religious leaders. At times, due to religious and political pressure, but also because of its appealing simplicity and propagated equality, people also converted voluntarily to the Viraśaiva form of *bhakti* veneration, which made temples, donations, and massive religious administrations superfluous. Viraśaivism, with its focus on believers, who are themselves considered “a temple”, that is, “a carrier of the divine principle”, empowered the general public and dislodged a wealthy elite, which had been in power for centuries.

Nevertheless, despite this pronounced period of severe persecution, Jainism survived at a number of provincial courts and even in some major royal and religious centres. Through partial withdrawal but quiet perseverance and with some support from individual rulers and wealthy merchants, they managed first to persist in a much-reduced form and slowly to enlarge their influence again. Through their decline and subsequent reassertion, the Jainas overcame the newly created Viraśaiva dependency structures in Karnataka.

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Religion and Gender Dependency

Maria Munkholt Christensen

Sisters and Equals? Slavery and Hierarchies in Early Monastic Communities for Women

1 Introduction

1.1 Hildegard of Bingen as a Late and Famous Point of Departure

Although this article will focus primarily on late antiquity and the rise of Christian monasticism, the first revealing example of ambivalent stances to social hierarchies in women's monasteries is drawn from a much later period, i.e., the twelfth century. This example, a correspondence between the two abbesses Tengswich of Andernach and Hildegard of Bingen, demonstrates a persistent inconsistency between expectations and practices in the monastic world. In a letter to Hildegard, Tengswich raises a series of questions about how her contemporary leads her monastery. One of Tengswich's main concerns is that Hildegard upholds a worldly hierarchy in her monastery and only permits noble women to enter. Tengswich writes: 'That which seems no less strange to us is the fact that you admit into your community only those women from noble, well-established families and absolutely reject others who are of lower birth and of less wealth.'¹ To Tengswich, this seemed 'strange and irregular'² and not in accord with 'all the precedents laid down by the fathers of the Church, to which all spiritual people must conform [. . .]'.³ Nevertheless, Hildegard remained unmoved by Tengswich's indignation and defended the practices of her monastery by referring to the created order. She declared:

God also keeps a watchful eye on every person so that a lower order (*minor ordo*) will not gain ascendancy over a higher one, as Satan and the first man did, who wanted to fly higher than they had been placed. And who would gather all his livestock indiscriminately into one barn – the cattle, the asses, the sheep, the kids? Thus it is clear that differentiation must be maintained in these matters (*discretio sit in hoc*), lest people of varying status, herded all together, be dis-

1 Hildegard of Bingen, *Epistolarium* 127–130, no. 52r, in *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium, 91–250*, vol. 2, eds. Leonardo van Acker and Monika Klaes-Hachmöller, *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis* 91 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1991]: 126: et quod his omnibus non minus mirandum nobis uidetur, in consortium uestrum genere tantum spectabiles et ingenuas introducere, aliis uero ignobilibus et minus ditatis commansionem uestram penitus abnuere. (Trans. in Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, vol. 1 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994]: 127).

2 Hildegard of Bingen, *Epistolarium* 127–130, no. 52r: 126: quoddam insolitum de consuetudine uestra. (Trans. in Baird and Ehrmann, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*: 127).

3 Hildegard of Bingen, *Epistolarium* 127–130, no. 52r: 126–27: Omnia quippe precedentium Patrum instituta, quibus cunctos spirituales maxime informari condecet, pro posse nostro perscrutantes subtilius [. . .]. (Trans. in Baird and Ehrmann, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*: 127).

persed through the pride of their elevation, on the one hand, or the disgrace of their decline, on the other [. . .]. For God establishes ranks on earth (*Deus discernit populum in terra*), just as in heaven with angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, cherubim, and seraphim. And they are all loved by God, although they are not equal in rank (*equalia nomina non habent*).⁴

The famous Hildegard thus did not promote social equality. On the contrary, she argued theologically for a static approach to (monastic) life, where ‘differentiation must be maintained’ (*discretio sit in hoc*). Though Hildegard had already obtained a status of spiritual authority in her own lifetime, her conservative monastic practice of strict social differentiation provoked other monastic authorities. In this case, it was Tengs-wich who found Hildegard’s approach problematic and apparently followed other principles in her convent in Andernach. The exchange between Hildegard and Tengs-wich shows us that it is impossible to present a monolithic history of monasticism: it also reveals that although monasticism was often radical in its non-worldliness, it also included conservative structures that preserved existing “worldly” hierarchies. Departing from this medieval example involving one of the most famous representatives of women’s monasticism, Hildegard of Bingen, we will now look further back to late antiquity.

During the late antique and early medieval periods, Christian monasticism came into being and developed into increasingly concrete and institutionalized forms. In recent decades, scholarship has emphasized the early development of female monasticism and its influence on the broader monastic movement.⁵ This contribution remains within that general field of research and focuses on women’s monasteries and ascetic communities, particularly on the role of enslaved people in early ascetic communities and monasteries for women. Furthermore, it seeks to establish which ideals of equality were formulated in these milieus. These topics are not altogether easy to present coherently, because there is not one obvious conclusion: the monastic institutions were not homogeneous from the beginning, and theological ideals and monastic practices did not always converge.

4 Hildegard of Bingen, *Epistolarium* 127–130, no. 52r: 129: *Deus etiam habet scrutinium scrutationis in omni persona, ita quod minor ordo super superiorem non ascendat, sicut et Satanas et primus homo fecerunt, qui altius uolare uoluerunt quam posit sunt. Et qui homo congregat omnem gregem suum in unum stabulum, scilicet boues, asinos, oues, hedos, ita quod non discrepant se? Ideo et discretio sit in hoc, ne diuersus populus in unum gregem congregatus in superbia elationis et in ignominia diuersitatis dissipetur [. . .] quia Deus discernit populum in terra sicut et in celo, uidelicet etiam angelos, archangelos, thronos, dominationes, cherubim et seraphim discernes. Et hi omnes a Deo amantur, sed tamen equalia nomina non habent.* (Trans. in Baird and Ehrmann, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*: 129).

5 Albrecht Diem, “The Gender of the Religious: Wo/Men and the Invention of Monasticism,” in *The Oxford Companion on Women and Gender in the Middle Ages*, eds. Judith Bennett and Ruth Marzokarras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 432–46; Anna M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); see also Susanna Elm, “*Virgins of God*”: *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

To provide a general impression of ideals and practices related to servants and slaves in early women's monasteries, a series of chronologically ordered examples will be given in the following. We will explore contexts ranging from Macrina's ascetic household in fourth-century Pontus to Radegund's monastery in Poitiers at the end of the sixth century. Before presenting these specific cases, however, this chapter first continues with an introduction to the early monastic world and a further description of how the word "slave" was reinterpreted in that context.

1.2 A Sketch of Early Monastic History and Its Dominant Principles

In the period primarily under investigation (400–600 AD), the monastic world, along with its institutions and rules, were still under development. The history of Christian monasticism begins in the third century in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, especially in the Egyptian desert, where Christians began to live ascetic lives either alone as hermits or together in so-called cenobitic communities.⁶ Only later did it become the standard that such Christian communities were organized by a set of specific regulations. The monastic communities came to be organized hierarchically with an abbess or abbot as the leader: eventually, a strict separation of the sexes also developed. Between the more or less unregulated ascetic life in the desert and the organized life in evolving monasteries, there were other monastic forms, including groups of women living as Christian virgins in Roman city houses or celibate married couples living a religious life together. Unfortunately, our knowledge of these informal groups is scarce. From an early stage, the church had a vested interest in trying to obtain some control over the ascetic / monastic movement to suppress developments that seemed too radical. Thus, the Council of Gangra, which took place around 340, condemned people who engaged in diverse forms of ascetic behaviour, such as women who wore men's clothes, those who were strict vegetarians, and anyone who taught slaves that it was an act of piety to leave their masters for religious reasons.⁷ The third point is, of course, of particular interest in the context of this article: it tells us that early on, ascetic communities dealt with slaves.

⁶ For a thorough introduction to early women's monasticism, see Elm, *Virgins of God*.

⁷ Council of Gangra, *Canon 3*, in *Fonti – Discipline Générale Antique*, fasc. 9, ed. Périclès-Pierre Joannou, *Les canons des Synodes Particuliers 1.2* (Rome: Grottaferrata, 1962–1964): 90; trans. Anna M. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St Basil the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 490: 'If anyone teaches a slave, under pretext of piety, to despise his master, to withdraw from his service and not to serve him with goodwill and all respect, let him be anathema.' (Εἰ τις δοῦλον, προφάσει θεοσεβείας, διδάσκει καταφρονεῖν δεσπότου, καὶ ἀναχωρεῖν τῆς ὑπηρεσίας, καὶ μὴ μετ' εὐνοίας καὶ πάσης τιμῆς τῷ ἑαυτοῦ δεσπότῃ ἐξυπηρετεῖσθαι, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω.).

Despite some variation in practice, a few principles always dominated monastic and ascetic fellowships: firstly, monastic life included a demand to choose celibacy and a lifestyle dominated by continency. Secondly, ascetic life was marked by an austere ideal of renunciation which demanded that its practitioners give away all their belongings, either to the poor or the monastic community.

The notion of voluntary renunciation drew upon the teaching of Jesus, who, according to Matthew 19:21, said: 'If you want to be perfect, sell all you have, and give to the poor, and come, follow me.' This is, in fact, the verse which, 'according to the Life of Antony, inspired St. Antony, around 270 CE, to pioneer the ascetic lifestyle in the Egyptian desert.'⁸

The biblical ideal of voluntary poverty is also relevant to our consideration of servants and slaves within the monastic world. In principle, it excludes the possibility that anyone could enter a monastic community with slaves as their possession or with a vast fortune that would entitle them to privileges.⁹ However, as exemplified in the different depictions of the life of Melania the Younger, the demand to give up all one's earthly possessions was not always followed, or the possessions were only given up over a certain period.¹⁰ Renunciation of private property served a spiritual pur-

⁸ Gillian Clark, "Women and Asceticism in Late Antiquity: The Refusal of Status and Gender," in *Asceticism*, eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 35.

⁹ Richard J. Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-Century Gaul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 191: 'The slave had no claim to rights as an individual – under Roman law, he or she was nothing more than a master's property. Although the slave could hold property or possessions as a *peculium*, ultimately these things were also the property of the master.'

¹⁰ Melania travelled extensively and gave out of her immense fortune for a long time. One description of her generosity also entails her manumission of slaves, see Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 61: in *Palladio. La storia Lausiaca*, ed. Gerhardus Johannes Marinus Bartelink (Verona: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1974): 'She sent across the sea to the east ten thousand pieces of gold to Egypt and the Thebaid, the same amount to Antioch and the area around it, fifteen thousand to Palestine, and ten thousand to the churches on the islands and those in exile beyond the frontiers; she also personally allotted a similar sum to the churches of the west. All these riches, and four times as much again, her faith enabled her to snatch from the lion's jaws (if God will forgive the expression), in other words, from Alaric. She set eight thousand slaves free who wished to be given their freedom; the rest did not want to be set free, but opted to become her brother's slaves. She allowed him to take them for three denarii each. She sold her possessions in Spain, Aquitaine and Gaul and kept for herself only those in Sicily, Campania and Africa, using the income from them for the upkeep of the monasteries. This was the wisdom she displayed with regard to the burden of her wealth.' [. . .] διὰ θαλάσσης ἀπέστειλεν ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ, Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ Θηβαΐδι νομίσματα μύρια, Ἀντιοχείᾳ καὶ τοῖς μέρεσι ταύτης μύρια νομίσματα, Παλαιστίνῃ νομίσματα μύρια πεντακισχίλια, ταῖς ἐν νήσοις ἐκκλησίαις καὶ τοῖς ἐν ἑξορίας νομίσματα μύρια, ταῖς κατὰ τὴν δύσιν ἐκκλησίαις ὡσαύτως δι' ἑαυτῆς χορηγοῦσα, ταῦτα πάντα καὶ τετραπλασίονα τούτων ὡς ἐπὶ θεοῦ ἐξαρπάσασα ἐκ τοῦ στόματος λέοντος Ἀλαρίχου τῇ πίστει τῇ ἑαυτῆς. Ἠλευθέρωσε δὲ τὰ βουληθέντα ἀνδράποδα ὀκτακισχίλια, τὰ λοιπὰ γὰρ οὐκ ἐβουλήθησαν ἀλλ' ἤρῃσαντο δουλεῦσαι τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτῆς· ᾧ παρεχώρησε πάντας ἀπὸ τριῶν νομισμάτων λαβεῖν. Τὰ δὲ κτήματα τὰ ἐν ταῖς Σπανίαις καὶ Ἀκυτανίαι καὶ Ταρακωνησίαι καὶ Γαλλίαις διαπωλῆσασα, τὰ ἐν Σικελίαι μόναι καὶ Καμπανίαι καὶ

pose: it was a sign of radical self-denial. Giving up one's property also meant forsaking one's self-determination and dependence on worldly goods to choose instead to serve others and live in accordance with the rule of a community. Basil the Great, one of the founders of monasticism, depicted this kind of asceticism as a form of slavery: 'No one should be his own master, but each should think and act in every respect as though given by God into slavery for the brethren who share one same mind, though each in his own allotted place.'¹¹

Monasticism arose in the eastern part of the Roman Empire but then spread westward. John Cassian was one of the theologians who transferred monastic ideas from the East to the West. He was active in the fourth century, and his *Institutes* give us a good impression of the monastic mindset which he transferred from the Egyptian deserts to Gaul. In the following quotation, he considers who is allowed to preside over a fellowship of monks. His aim is to underscore that persons who are unable to humble themselves should not rule over others:

For no one is allowed to preside over the assembly of the brethren, or even over himself before he has not only deprived himself of all his property but has also learned the fact that he is not his own maker and has no authority over his own actions. For one who renounces the world, whatever property or riches he may possess, must seek the common dwelling of a coenobium, that he may not flatter himself in any way with what he has forsaken or what he has brought into the monastery.

He must also be obedient to all (*sic oboedire cunctis*) so as to learn that he must, as the Lord says, become again a little child (Matthew 18:3), [. . .] he knows he is serving in Christ's service (*se gerere in Christi militia*), he should not hesitate to submit himself even to his juniors (*subdere se etiam innioribus*). Further, he is obliged to habituate himself to work and toil so as to prepare with his own hands, in accordance with the Apostle's command, a daily supply of food (1 Thessalonians 4:11), either for his own use or for the wants of strangers; and that he may also forget the pride and luxury of his past life, and gain by grinding toil humility of heart.¹²

Αφρικὴ ἑαυτῇ καταλείψασα ἐπελάβετο εἰς χορηγίαν μοναστηρίων. Αὐτὴ αὐτῆς ἡ σοφία ἢ περὶ τοῦ φορτίου τῶν χρημάτων. (Transl. in Carolinne White, *Lives of Roman Christian Women* [London: Penguin, 2010]: 123).

11 Basil, *Epistola* 22.1, in *Saint Basile. Lettres*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Yves Courtonne (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1957): 'Ὅτι οὐ δεῖ οὔτε αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ κύριον εἶναι τινα, ἀλλ' ὡς ὑπὸ Θεοῦ παραδεδομένον εἰς δουλείαν τοῖς ὁμοψύχοις ἀδελφοῖς, οὕτω καὶ φρονεῖν πάντα καὶ ποιεῖν, ἕκαστον δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι [. . .]. Cf. Richard Finn, *Asceticism in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 120.

12 John Cassian, *Institutes* 2.3, in *Institutions cénobitiques*, ed. Jean-Claude Guy, Sources Chrésiennes 109 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1965): 60–62: 'non enim quisquam conuenticulo fratrum, sed ne sibi quidem ipsi praeesse conceditur, priusquam non solum uniuersis facultatibus suis reddatur extemus, sed ne sui quidem ipsius esse se dominum uel potestatem habere cognoscat. ita namque renuntiantem huic mundo quibuslibet facultatibus ac diuitiis praeditum necesse est coenobii commorationem experere, ut in nullo sibi ex his quae reliquit aut intulit monasterio blandiatur, sic oboedire cunctis, ut redeundum sibi secundum sententiam domini ad infantiam pristinam nouerit, [. . .] quam se gerere in Christi militia recognoscit, subdere se etiam innioribus non moretur. operis quoque ac sudoris ad-

When we recall that Cassian was writing to an aristocratic audience in Gaul, it is evident that the sentiments he is expressing are quasi-revolutionary.¹³ Cassian was asking the upper classes to behave like slaves, for Christ's sake. He is, as Richard J. Goodrich has shown, introducing a "Rhetoric of Renunciation" into the language of the social elite in Gaul.¹⁴ In the East, Athanasia, a wealthy woman, was encouraged not to enter a monastery with the following argument:

You are adorned with great wealth, you have now taken a husband, you are of noble lineage, you have acquired much property, your body is delicate and weak, you are served in every way by handmaidens and attendants (πάντη ὑπὸ δουλίδων καὶ παίδων ἐξυπηρετεῖσαι). Asceticism, my child, is for the one who serves, not one who is served.¹⁵

Both the willingness to give away all of one's property and, in a certain way, to become a slave for others are key themes in the ascetic life. Beyond the scope of ascetic theology and practice, such demands would border on the absurd: how could anyone voluntarily give up everything, including one's will? The modern researcher, Richard Valantasis, argues that asceticism is 'performances within a dominant social environment intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe.'¹⁶ In other words, ascetic practice is meant to challenge and change the world, if not at large, then at least inside the ascetic and monastic community and within the life of the individual ascetic.

Throughout the late antique and early medieval period, slaves were a fundamental part of the socio-economic system in the Roman Empire and the ensuing kingdoms. What is the significance of the fact that the monastic vocabulary included the phrase "slave of Christ"? Did the monastic communities fight to overcome slavery in the world? Or did they instead depend on an enslaved workforce themselves? The source material available to us is not directly helpful in answering these questions because

suetudinem ita subire compellitur, ut propriis manibus iuxta apostoli praeceptum cotidianum uictum uel suis usibus uel aduenientum necessitatibus parans et fastus uitae praeteritae possit et delicias obliuisci et humilitatem cordis contritione laboris adquirere.' (Transl. in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series*, vol. 11, trans. Edgar CS Gibson (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1894): 206.

13 Cf. Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*.

14 Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*: 151–207.

15 *I. S. Matronae vita prima*, in *Acta Sanctorum Novembris*, vol. 3, eds. Hippolyte Delehaye et al., *Acta Sanctorum* 64, BHG 1221 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1910): 790–823: ἡ γούτω κομᾶς πολλῶ, ἀνδρὶ νῦν προσωμίλησας, τὸ γένος περίβλεπτον ἔχεις, περιουσίαν μεγάλην κέκτησαι, τὸ σωματίον σου τρυφερὸν ἔστιν καὶ ἀσθενέστατον, πάντα ὑπὸ δουλίδων καὶ παίδων ἐξυπηρετεῖσαι· ἡ δὲ ἄσκησις, τέκνον, ὑπηρετοῦντός ἐστιν, οὐχ ὑπηρετομένου: Trans. Jeffrey Featherstone and Cyril Mango, "Life of St. Matrona of Perge," in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996): 54, with my own alteration.

16 Richard Valantasis, "Is the Gospel of Thomas Ascetical? Revisiting an Old Problem with a New Theory," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7 (1999): 64.

most of what we have is normative material, either in the form of regulations or idealized depictions. Several scholars have already grappled with the sources and questions addressed here.¹⁷ The following compilation of material, daring in terms of the broad array of sources it utilizes, draws on and adds to the existing work.

2 Slavery and Women’s Monasticism in the Eastern Roman Empire

2.1 Macrina and Her Ascetic Community

Macrina is one of the few women of the fourth century whose biography and philosophy are well known to us. They have been passed down through the writings of her famous brother Gregory of Nyssa. Yet, as has become increasingly evident, we cannot transcend Gregory’s depiction of her to reach the historical Macrina herself.¹⁸ It should also be noted that Basil of Caesarea belonged to the prominent family of Macrina and Gregory. Basil is famous for his monastic rule, though some modern scholars suggest that Macrina should receive some of the credit for having “invented” the kind of monastic life that Basil’s Rule promotes.¹⁹ At a minimum, it should be acknowledged that, like her brother, Macrina also established an ascetic community. Indeed, Gregory made a big deal of this in his hagiographical *Vita Macrinae*. There Gregory explained how Macrina’s family belonged to the upper class of Roman society. Both her father and her brothers were well-educated. Her father was also a major landowner. After he passed away, her mother inherited the family estate and ran it with her oldest daughter, Macrina. Due to the size of the estate and social rank of the family, there were many enslaved people in the household, as was to be expected in that period. However, as a Christian striving towards perfection, this unequal social setting posed a problem for Macrina.

¹⁷ The focus on slavery and different kinds of (enforced) dependency in ascetic and monastic contexts is popular in current research, see e.g.: Ilaria Ramelli, *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery. The Role of Philosophical Asceticism from Ancient Judaism to Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Lilian Larson, “Constructing Complexity. Slavery in the Small Worlds of Early Monasticism,” in *Social Control in Late Antiquity*, eds. Kate Cooper and Jamie Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020): 131–50; Roy Flechner and Janel Fontaine, “The Admission of Former Slaves into Churches and Monasteries,” *Early Medieval Europe* 29, no. 4 (2021): 586–611. For some examples of monks with slaves or slaves entering monasteries to become monks, see Youval Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009): 147–53.

¹⁸ Elizabeth A. Clark, “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the ‘Linguistic Turn’,” *Church History* 67, no. 1 (1998): 1–31.

¹⁹ Cf. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*: 46–49.

According to her *Life*, in the wake of her father's death, Macrina found an opportunity to bring their customary upper-class lifestyle to an end. She convinced her mother that they should choose a new form of life, namely, a philosophical and spiritual way of life, which included an injunction to live with their former slaves as equals. In the *Life of Macrina*, Gregory explains at length how Macrina was the instigator of the reorganization of their upper-class estate with its servants into a monastic community of equals:

As they [that is, Macrina and her mother] no longer had any excuse for leading a materialistic life (ὕλωδεστέρας ζωῆς), Macrina persuaded her mother to renounce the life she was used to and give up her extravagant style of living and the services of servants (τάς ἐκ τῶν ὑποχειρίων θεραπειάς) to which she had grown accustomed. Instead, she came to regard herself as being on one level (ὀμότιμον) with the mass of ordinary people, sharing a life in common with the young girls who worked in the house (μεθ' ἑαυτῆς ἐκ δουλίδων καὶ ὑποχειρίων), making them her sisters and equals (ἀδελφάς καὶ ὀμοτίμους ποιησαμένη).²⁰

Gregory describes the pivotal moment when Macrina – at least in principle – equalizes the social differences in her house. She does not go so far as to set her former slaves and servants free because, according to the text, they are not offered a chance to leave the premises but are expected to remain in a community of equals. In this quotation, more than one Greek word for “slave” is used, indicating that there were different kinds of servants on the estate. One word is the unpleasantly physical ὑποχειρίων that spells out the servant's position “under the hands” of his or her owner. Peculiarly, Gregory reiterates (or adds to) the procedure once more in chapter eleven to underline this aspect of Macrina's achievements, which is viewed as the completion of an almost implausible social act:

[. . .] the young woman [Macrina] became her mother's guide to this kind of philosophical and spiritual way of life. Macrina, who had already given up all the norms of society (ἀποστήσασα τῶν ἐν συνηθείᾳ πάντων), inspired her mother to strive for the same humility (τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης): she persuaded her to live as an equal (ὀμότιμον) with the young women (τῶν παρθένων), sharing the same table, the same kind of bed, and all the same necessities of life on an equal footing. All differences of rank were removed from their way of life (κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν διαφορὰς ὑφαιρεθείσης αὐτῶν τῆς ζωῆς).

Indeed, it would be impossible to describe their noble way of life, its order and the loftiness of their philosophy, both by day and by night. Just as the soul released from the body by death is

²⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Macrinae* 7, in *Grégoire de Nysse. Vie de Sainte Macrine*, ed. Pierre Maraval, Sources Chrétiennes 178 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971): 164: ‘Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ πάσης ὑλωδεστέρας ζωῆς ὑπόθεσις ἤδη αὐτοῖς περικέκοπτο, πείθει τὴν μητέρα καταλιποῦσαν τὸν ἐν ἔθει βίον καὶ τὴν κομωδεστέραν διαγωγὴν καὶ τὰς ἐκ τῶν ὑποχειρίων θεραπειάς, αἷς προσείθιστο κατὰ τὸν ἔμπροσθεν χρόνον, ὀμότιμον γενέσθαι τοῖς πολλοῖς τῷ φρονήματι καὶ καταμίξει τὴν ἰδίαν ζωὴν τῇ μετὰ τῶν παρθένων διαγωγῇ, ὅσας εἶχε μεθ' ἑαυτῆς ἐκ δουλίδων καὶ ὑποχειρίων ἀδελφάς καὶ ὀμοτίμους ποιησαμένη· [. . .].’

also released from worries about this life, so their life was lived apart, far removed from all trivialities, and organized in imitation of the angelic life (πρὸς μίμησιν τῆς τῶν ἀγγέλων).²¹

Macrina thus promoted equality among “Christian sisters”. The equality she espoused had practical consequences: ideally, all members of the household, including former servants, should have shared the same table, the same kind of bed, and the same access to necessities.²² To what degree this ideal was put into practice and spread to other communities, we do not know, but the *Vita Macrinae* is itself a written testimony of equality within a limited Christian community. There are several questions that we cannot answer about the conceptual scope or extent to which the ideal of equality was realized in Macrina’s community. We are told in the *Life* that more women eventually joined the community, but we are given little information about their status. The former servants probably had to work as before, while Macrina and her mother also took on some tasks in the household. As Gregory, full of amazement,

21 Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Macrinae* 11: 174–76: [. . .] γίνεται σύμβουλος τῆς μητρὸς ἢ τῆς παρθένου ζωῆ πρὸς τὴν ἐμφιλόσοφον ταύτην καὶ αὐλον τοῦ βίου διαγωγὴν καὶ ἀποστήσασα τῶν ἐν συνηθείᾳ πάντων πρὸς τὸ ἴδιον τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης μέτρον κατήγαγεν, ὁμότιμον αὐτὴν γενέσθαι τῷ πληρώματι τῶν παρθένων παρασκευάσασα, ὡς καὶ τραπέζης μιᾶς καὶ κοίτης καὶ πάντων τῶν πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν κατὰ τὸ ἴσον συμμετέχειν αὐταῖς, τῶν πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν κατὰ τὸ ἴσον συμμετέχειν αὐταῖς, πάσης τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν διαφορᾶς ὑφαιρεθείσης αὐτῶν τῆς ζωῆς. Καὶ τοιαύτη τις ἦν ἢ τοῦ βίου τάξις καὶ τοσοῦτον τὸ ὕψος τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ ἡ σεμνὴ τῆς ζωῆς πολιτεία ἐν τῇ καθ’ ἡμέραν τε καὶ νύκτα διαγωγῇ, ὡς ὑπερβαίνειν τὴν ἐκ τῶν λόγων ὑπογραφὴν. Καθάπερ γὰρ αἱ διὰ θανάτου τῶν σωμάτων ἐκλυθεῖσαι ψυχαὶ καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον τοῦτον μεριμνῶν συνεκλύονται, οὕτως κεχώριστο αὐτῶν ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ἀπώκιστο πάσης βιωτικῆς ματαιότητος καὶ πρὸς μίμησιν τῆς τῶν ἀγγέλων διαγωγῆς ἐρρυθμίζετο.

22 ‘The material concerning the slaves suggests manumission of all domestic servants, at least those closest to Emmelia and Macrina. This manumission could have occurred in two ways, either as a *manumissio in ecclesia* or as a *manumissio inter amicos*. [. . .]. *Manumissio inter amicos* [. . .] was far less complicated. A master simply declared a slave to be his friend, expressing this either by letter (*per epistulam*) or by inviting him to dine at the same table (*per mensam*). In contrast to the other forms of manumission, *manumissio inter amicos* did not result in full citizenship: a slave thus freed merely became Latinized. The events in Emmelia’s household presumably took the latter form of manumission, *inter amicos*, more precisely *per mensam*.’ (Elm, “*Virgins of God*”: 85). Susanna Elm interprets Macrina’s choice as radical: ‘By undertaking a service task Macrina consciously overstepped the rigid boundaries set by her rank and social class and introduced a new dimension into her life. Whereas her entire life had previously been circumscribed by the limits of her social status, this personal act of humility signifies her first breaking away, her first tangible rupture with the conventions of the time.’ (Elm, “*Virgins of God*”: 46). Contrariwise, Lilian Larson is hesitant to ascribe significant radicality to Macrina’s actions: ‘At once, dismantling and instantiating institutionalized hierarchies, the presence of slaves at the table inversely marks Macrina’s elite ascetic, and social, status. If one eschews idealized interpretations, it is arguable that enforced “table fellowship” simply imposes an alternate type of servitude upon individuals who remain, nonetheless, subordinate.’ (Larson, “Constructing Complexity”: 140). Although both Elm’s and Larson’s interpretations are well-argued and hold some truth, I am inclined to follow Elm’s more positive estimation of the *original* ascetic impulse to create new relationships. Nevertheless, I do acknowledge Larson’s point that asymmetrical dependencies remained in place when aristocrats made new rules within their own house.

wrote of Macrina, she carried out the task of ‘making bread for her mother with her own hands’.²³ Whether or not the relations in this transformed household seemed equal to the former slaves is an open question. We must wonder, did they experience any significant change of circumstances?

What would have happened if an enslaved woman from another estate had fled, sought out Macrina’s community, and expressed a wish to join it? In such a case, it is possible that Macrina would have had to send the woman away and thereby follow the same principle as her brother Basil prescribed in his Rule. Likewise, when male slaves sought out his monastic community, he sent them back to their masters. The only deviation from this general rule was if their master was deemed *exceptionally* cruel.²⁴

While Macrina gives her former servants the new name of sisters, she designates herself and her famous brother Gregory as “slaves”. She thus further underlines the ideal change of norms in her household. Macrina prays: ‘God, you have filled me with this grace and have not failed to grant my desire, for you have inspired your servant (σὸν οἰκέτην), my brother, to visit me, your servant girl (παιδίσκης σου).’²⁵

There is no reason to doubt that there was a real historical person behind Gregory’s depiction of Macrina, but it is also certain that he had an interest in presenting her in a way that aligned with his own theological ideals. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that Gregory makes an elaborate point out of the transformation of his family’s household. In fact, Gregory of Nyssa is one of the few theologians of the Early Church who was a principal and outspoken opponent of slavery. In his homilies, he describes slaveholding as a sin against God’s law. He supports his perspective via several arguments, one being that since human beings principally belong to their creator: God, then holding slaves means stealing God’s possession.²⁶ Macrina and Gregory thus agreed that slavery should be dissolved when and where possible, which was a rare attitude in their time.

23 Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Macrinae* 5: 158: ‘[. . .] in particular often making bread for her mother with her own hands. This was not her main activity for it was only after she had performed the liturgical tasks that she used her spare time to cook for her mother, believing this was appropriate to her way of life.’ ([. . .] ἐν τῷ ταῖς ἰδίας χερσὶ πολλάκις τῇ μητρὶ παρασκευάζειν τὸν ἄρτον· ὅπερ οὐ κατὰ τὸ προηγούμενον αὐτῇ διεσπουδάσθη, ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ ταῖς μυστικαῖς ὑπηρεσίαις τὰς χεῖρας ἑαυτῆς ἔχρησε, πρέπειν ἡγησαμένη τῷ ἐπιτηδεύματι τοῦ βίου τὴν περὶ τοῦτο σπουδὴν ἐκ τοῦ περιόντος τῇ μητρὶ παρεχορήγει τὴν ἐκ τῶν οἰκείων πόνων τροφήν. (Transl. in Carolinne White, *Lives of Roman Christian Women* (London: Penguin, 2010): 108). Cf. Elm, “*Virgins of God*”: 46.

24 Basil, *Regulae Fusius Tractatae* 11, trans. in Silvas, *The Asketikon of St Basil the Great*: 196. Cf. Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*: 144–45.

25 Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Macrinae* 17: 196: ‘Καὶ ταύτην ἐπλήρωσάς μοι, φησί, τὴν χάριν ὁ θεός, καὶ οὐκ ἐστέρησάς με ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας μου, ὅτι ἐκίνησας τὸν σὸν οἰκέτην εἰς ἐπίσκεψιν τῆς παιδίσκης σου.’ (Transl. in White, *Lives of Roman Christian Women*: 124–25).

26 Ramelli, *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery*: 172–89, see especially 177–79: the interpretation of Gregory’s Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes.

2.2 Jerome Writing to and About Women

Some of our earliest sources about women's monastic communities are letters from the theologian Jerome to his female friends. Jerome corresponded with several noblewomen, and we know that some of these friends lived with other female virgins and widows and conducted a monastic life in Rome and Jerusalem. Jerome fully supported these women's choice to adopt a monastic lifestyle, but he also emphasized its severity. In a letter to Eustochium, written in 384, Jerome underlines what a significant decision it is to promise to be a virgin of Christ and how such a life with Christ as one's bridegroom ought to be. He addressed the letter ambivalently to the lady (*domina*) and fellow servant (*conserva*) Eustochium, thus conforming to the rhetoric of renunciation mentioned above. In late antiquity, such contrasting forms of address entailed a revolution in the making: 'my Eustochium, daughter, lady, fellow-servant (*conserva*), sister – for the first name suits your age, the second your rank, the third your religion (*illud religionis*), and the last our affection.'²⁷

Jerome explains to Eustochium that all servants in her house, who wished to join the monastic life, should be allowed to do so. Nevertheless, he also urges her to remain attentive to the sincerity of their motivation:

If any of your handmaids (*ancillae*) share your vocation (*propositi*), do not lift up yourself against them or pride yourself because you are their mistress (*domina*). You have all chosen one (*unum*) bridegroom; you all sing the same (*simul*) Psalms; together, you receive the same (*simul*) body of Christ. Why, then, should your thoughts be different (*diversa*)? [. . .]. But if a girl pretends (*simulat*) to have a vocation simply because she desires to escape from service (*fugiens servitatem*), read aloud to her the words of the Apostle: 'It is better to marry than to burn' (1 Corinthians 7:9).²⁸

In other words, for Jerome, eschatological salvation depends on the sincerity of the profession of a desire to become a Christian virgin. The appeal of living in a household dominated by equality should not mislead someone to pretend to be a Christian virgin. That Jerome imagines a Christian profession as an excuse for service indicates that some servants may have attempted to pursue a Christian vocation to avoid hard work.

²⁷ Jerome, *Epistula 22.26*, in *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 54 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1910): 181: 'mi Eustochia, filia, domina, conserva, germana – alius enim aetatis, aliud meriti, illud religionis, hoc caritatis est nomen [. . .].' Transl. in Frederick Adam Wright, *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933): 111.

²⁸ Jerome, *Ep. 22.29*: 187: 'Si quae ancillae sunt comites propositi tui, ne erigaris adversus eas, ne in fleris ut domina. Unum sponsum habere coepistis, simul psallitis Christo, simul corpus accipitis, cur mensa diversa sit? Provocentur et aliae. Honor virginum sit invitation ceterarum. [. . .]. Si qua simulat fugiens servitatem, huic aperte apostolum lege: "Melius est nubere quam uri." Transl. in Wright, *Select Letters of St. Jerome*: 111.

In Jerome's *Letter 22*, the emphasis is again on equality among sisters (they are *simul – simul*), but in this letter, we are not told about the details of daily life in Eustochium's home. Furthermore, we must acknowledge that not all monastic communities of late antiquity were organized according to an equality principle. In another letter from around the year 400, also addressed to Eustochium and known as the *Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae*, Jerome describes how Eustochium's mother Paula set up a monastic community in Jerusalem.²⁹

I shall now describe the order of her monastery (*de ordine monasterii*). [. . .] Besides establishing a monastery for men, the charge of which she left to men, she divided into three companies and monasteries (*in tres turmas, monasteriaque divisit*) the numerous virgins whom she had gathered out of different provinces, some of whom were of noble birth (*tam nobiles*) while others belonged to the middle or lower classes (*quam medii, et infimi generis*). But, although they worked and had their meals separately from each other (*in opere et in cibo separatae*), these three companies met together for psalm-singing and prayer (*psalmodiis et orationibus iungerentur*).³⁰

This description from the *Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae* is somewhat sobering since it shows us that from the very beginning, there were not only ideals of equality but also practical and social considerations behind the organization of monasteries. Social stratification also existed in some monasteries for men.³¹ In Paula's community in Jerusalem, the equality of the community members seems to have existed only in the context of liturgical actions and not in their common life. In late antiquity, it seems to have often been the case that Christian equality was interpreted liturgically and lim-

²⁹ Earlier in the same letter, Jerome describes the conditions in her household. The two descriptions are not in complete agreement. See Jerome, *Epistula 108.2*, in *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 55* (Vienna: F. Tempisky, 1912): 308: 'In dealing thus with her relatives and the men and women of her small household – her brothers and sisters rather than her servants – she has done nothing strange; for she has left her daughter Eustochium – a virgin consecrated to Christ for whose comfort this sketch is made – far from her noble family and rich only in faith and grace.' ('Nec mirum, de proximis et familiola, quam in utroque sexu de servis et ancillis in fratres sororesque mutaverat, ista proferre, cum Eustochium virginem, et devotam Christi filiam, in cujus consolationem libellus hic cuditur, procul a nobili genere, sola fide et gratia divitem reliquerit.') Transl. in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series*, vol. 6 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1893).

³⁰ Jerome, *Epistula 108.20*: 334–35: 'Dicam et de ordine monasterii [. . .]. Post virorum monasterium, quod viris tradiderat gubernandum, plures virgines quas e diversis provinciis congregarat, tam nobiles, quam medii, et infimi generis, in tres turmas, monasteriaque divisit: ita duntaxat, ut in opere et in cibo separatae, psalmodiis et orationibus jungerentur.' Transl. in Schaff and Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6.

³¹ Cf. '[. . .] social stratification existed among the *serui Dei* at both Nola and Primuliacum. [. . .]. Paulinus and Sulpicius may have intellectually acquiesced to the fundamental equality of all brothers in Christ, but on a practical level it is clear that the old social order persisted.' (Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian*: 196).

ited to certain spaces and occasions. Additionally, that which marked Christian interaction, in general, was not primarily the embrace of universal social equality.³²

Moreover, the Pauline saying in Galatians 3,28: '[In Christ Jesus] there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus', was, despite its possible radicalism, not immediately interpreted as a revolt against the Roman society in which Christianity was embedded. In Paula's monastery, it would seem that the noble women could still, in principle, have been served by slaves. However, Jerome mentioned a supplementary rule: that the noble women could not maintain the same slaves as they had possessed in their worldly life. If they were permitted to do so, the risk would be that they would simply continue their former lifestyle within the monastery.³³

2.3 Olympias and Her Monastery in Constantinople

While Paula set up her tripartite monastery in Jerusalem, in Constantinople the ultrarich widow Olympias did the same and opted for an ideal of relative equality. In the fifth century, she founded a women's monastery in connection with the famous church Hagia Sophia, where she enrolled all her female house servants and installed them in one wing of her monastic complex. We are told in her anonymous vita:

Then by the divine will, she [Olympias] was ordained deaconess of this holy cathedral of God and built a monastery at an angle south of it. She owned all the houses lying near the holy church and all the shops which were at the southern angle [. . .] In the first quarter she enclosed her own chambermaids (κουβικουλαρίας), numbering fifty, all of whom lived in purity and virginity (ἐν ἀγνείᾳ καὶ παρθενίᾳ βιωσάσας). [. . .] [Elisanthia with her sisters Martyria and Palladia] entered with all the others, having made over in advance all of their possessions to the same holy monastery.³⁴

³² Jaclyn LaRea Maxwell, *Simplicity and Humility in Late Antique Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 25–26.

³³ Jerome, *Epistula* 108.20: 335: 'atque inde pariter reuertentes instabant operi destructo et uel sibi uel ceteris indumenta faciebant, si qua erat nobilis, non permittebatur de domo sua habere comitem, ne ueterum actuum memor et lasciuientis infantiae errorem refricaret antiquum et crebra confabulatione renouaret.'

³⁴ John Chrysostom, *Vita Olympiades* 6, in *Jean Chrysostome. Lettres à Olympias. Seconde édition augmentée de la 'Vie anonyme d'Olympias'*, ed. Anne-Marie Malingrey, Sources Chrétiennes 13 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968): 418: Τῇ οὖν θεῖα βουλήσει χειροτονεῖται διάκονος τῆς αὐτῆς ἀγίας τοῦ Θεοῦ μεγάλης Ἐκκλησίας καὶ κτίζει μοναστήριον εἰς τὸν μεσημβρινὸν αὐτῆς ἔμβολον· πάντα γὰρ τὰ οἰκήματα τὰ παρακείμενα τῇ ἀγίᾳ Ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐργαστήρια τὰ εἰς τὸν λεγόμενον μεσημβρινὸν ἔμβολον ὄντα αὐτῇ διέφερον· [. . .] Καὶ κατὰ πρώτην μὲν τάξιν ἀποκκλείει ἐν αὐτῷ τὰς ἑαυτῆς κουβικουλαρίας, τὸν ἀριθμὸν πενήκοντα, τὰς πάσας ἐν ἀγνείᾳ καὶ παρθενίᾳ βιωσάσας. [. . .] καὶ εἰσέρχονται αἱ τρεῖς σὺν ταῖς λοιπαῖς πάσαις προσκυρώσασαι τῷ αὐτῷ εὐαγεῖ μοναστηρίῳ πάντα τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐταῖς. Trans. in Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1982): 131–32.

From this description, it would seem that former slaves lived in the same complex as the wealthy women who joined the monastery. Only later in the *vita* are we told that Olympias freed many of her servants in an act of manumission:

Having called from slavery to freedom (ἀπὸ δουλείας εἰς ἐλευθερίαν) a myriad of household servants (τὸν τῶν οἰκετῶν μυριάδεσμον), she proclaimed them to be of the same honour (ισότιμον) as her own nobility (τῆς ἰδίας εὐγενείας ἀνέφηνε).³⁵

The sources on women's monasteries from the late antique Eastern Empire confirm the general impression that noble women had some authority over their own wealth and life and that the Church let them utilize this power as founders and heads of monasteries as well as patronesses of the clergy. When hagiographers are lavish in explaining how much money and property the wealthy women gave to the church, they are probably interested in stressing these women's wealth and worldly power and lauding their virtue.

3 Slavery and Women's Monasticism: Fifth and Sixth Century Western Europe

In the fifth century, when there were already different forms of women's monasteries in the eastern centres of the Roman Empire, such as in Jerusalem and Constantinople, as well as in Rome, monasticism was still only slowly catching on in the West. The situation in Western Europe was radically different from that in the East: the Western Roman Empire had fallen, and newly ascendent kingdoms strove to dominate the heterogeneous and heterodox region. Women's monasticism finally spread throughout Merovingian Gaul in the fifth and especially sixth centuries. Thanks to Caesarius of Arles' *Rule for Nuns* and the two biographical writings that chronicle the life of Queen Radegund, we have relatively good information on women's monasticism from this epoch.

3.1 Caesarius of Arles: *Rule for Nuns*

From Caesarius' mid-sixth-century *Rule for Nuns*, we know that nuns were not to have personal slaves in the monastery. The rule states: 'No one, not even the abbess, may be permitted to have her own maid for her service (*Ancillam propriam nulli*); but

³⁵ Chrysostom, *Vita Olympiades* 15: 440: ἀπὸ δουλείας εἰς ἐλευθερίαν τὸν τῶν οἰκετῶν μυριάδεσμον ἀνακαλεσαμένη ἰσότιμον τῆς ἰδίας εὐγενείας ἀνέφηνε: [. . .].

if they have need, let them receive help from the younger religious (*de iunioribus*).³⁶ Obviously, according to this rule, there should not be any slaves for personal service, but a discernible hierarchy in the monastery was present in Caesarius' vision: the abbess held the greatest institutional authority; after her, it was the elderly sisters who deserved the most respect in the monastery. The lowest-ranked group in the internal hierarchy were the younger sisters, who were supposed to serve their elder sisters in a way which would have been expected from a maid. The abbess, who is also called mother, is the unquestionable authority, a fact that is underlined by a paragraph in the *Rule for Nuns*: 'All shall obey the mother after God.'³⁷

In accord with the original ideals of monasticism, Caesarius' *Rule* underlines the importance of renouncing property:

Those who had something in the world (*in saeculo*) shall, when they enter the monastery (*monasterium*), humbly (*humiliter*) offer it to the mother to be of use for the common needs (*communibus usibus profuturum*). However, those who had nothing ought not to seek in the monastery what they could not have outside. Those indeed who seemed to have something in the world should not look down upon their sisters who come in poverty to this fellowship [. . .]. All, therefore, pass your lives in unanimity and concord (*unianimiter et concorditer uiuite*), and honor God in one another (*honorate in uobis inuicem deum*) [. . .].³⁸

Caesarius' rule depicts a life dominated by humility, service, and equal honour. The prescribed humility is also supposed to have a practical consequence. The rule declares: 'All works will be done in common'.³⁹ There was obviously an ideal among the virgins that they should not depend on slaves or previous fortune but should regard each other as equals and live accordingly. However, this is a principle that applied only within the confines of the monastic community and among its members. The rule openly acknowledges that slaves were not to be avoided as such. Slaves were allowed to enter the monastery, i.e., enter the building, and to perform practical work:

36 Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines* 7, in *Césaire d'Arles. Oeuvres monastiques*, vol. 1, trans. and eds. Adalbert de Vogüé and Joël Courreau, Sources Chrétiennes 345 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1988): 186: 'Ancillam propriam nulli, nec abbatissae, liceat in seruitio suo habere; sed si opus habuerit, de iunioribus in solatio suo accipiat.' Trans. in Maria Caritas McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1960): 173.

37 Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines* 18: 192: 'Matri post deum omnes oboediant; praepositae deferant.'

38 Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines* 21: 194–96: 'Quae aliquid habebant in saeculo, quando ingrediuntur monasterium, humiliter illud offerant matri, communibus usibus profuturum. Quae autem non habuerunt, non ea quaerant in monasterio, quae nec foris habere potuerunt. Illae uero, quae aliquid uidebantur habere in saeculo, non fastidiant sorores suas quae ad illam sanctam societatem ex paupertate uenerunt, nec sic de suis diuitiis superbiant, quae eas monasterio obtulerunt, quomodo si eis in saeculo fruerentur. [. . .]. Omnes ergo unianimiter et concorditer uiuite, et honorate in uobis inuicem deum [. . .].' Trans. in McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns*: 176.

39 Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines* 57: 242: 'Omnia opera in commune faciant.' Trans. in McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns*: 189.

When the roofs have to be mended, or the doors and windows have to be replaced, or something of this sort has to be repaired, skilled workmen and slaves (*artifices tantu et serui*) to do any such work may come in with the provisor if necessity requires it; but not without the knowledge and permission of the mother.⁴⁰

In other words, while there was no place for slavery within the monastic community or for the possession of slaves by individual sisters, slaves could enter the physical grounds of the monastery. An enslaved workforce was still considered normal as part of “the world” and could even be employed by the monastery. This double standard gives rise to other practical questions that cannot be easily answered. For instance, did the monasteries depend on an enslaved workforce to manage the fields and buildings around the monasteries? The sources being investigated here do not tell us whether or not such women’s monasteries were at times connected with and possibly funded by agriculture, nor do they tell us who, if that was the case, worked in the fields.⁴¹

3.2 Receiving Former Slaves into the Monastery

Caesarius’ *Rule* does not explicitly say what the monastic community was supposed to do if a slave arrived with the wish to join the monastery as a member. Caesarius seems not to have foreseen this as a problem, so we might infer that during his lifetime, there were not many runaway slaves trying to enter the monastery. Alternatively, we could also conclude that Caesarius was reluctant to address an issue where monastic principles clashed with the interests of the surrounding society. However, certain slightly later sources indicate that slaves wished to join monasteries. Indeed, this happened so frequently that both secular and ecclesial laws had to be introduced to regulate how monasteries were to deal with runaway slaves. When Bishop Aurelian wrote his rule for nuns, he made sure to elaborate on the issue of runaway slaves and wrote: ‘Slaves shall not be received (*ancilla non excipiatur*); however, if a freed-woman (*liberta*) comes as an adolescent and presents herself with a letter from her patron, the abbess will decide if she should be received.’⁴²

⁴⁰ Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines* 36: 218: ‘Cum uero aut tecta retractanda sunt, aut ostia uel fenestrae sunt componendae, aut aliquid huiusmodi reparandum, artifices tantum et serui ad operandum aliquid, si necessitas exegerit, cum prouisore introeant; sed nec ipsi sine scientia aut permissio matris.’ Trans. in McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns*: 183.

⁴¹ Cf. Judith Evans Grubbs, “Slave and Free at the End of Antiquity,” in *Living the End of Antiquity*, eds. Sabine R. Huebner et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020): 181–94.

⁴² Aurelianus of Arles, *Regula ad Virgines* 13, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 68, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: JP Migne, 1847): 401: ‘Ancilla non excipiatur: liberta tamen si fuerit, adhuc adolescens aetate, et cum epistolis patroni sui venerit, in abbatissae sit arbitrio si excipi debeat.’ Trans. in Sarah Louise Greer, “Behind the Veil: The rise of female monasticism and the double house in Early Medieval Fran-

It did happen that released slaves came to monasteries to join them as virgins with the permission of their former masters. We know about such an instance from a sixth-century letter by Pope Gregory the Great in which he granted the slave Montana her freedom along with rights as a Roman citizen and the permission to join a monastery as she wished.⁴³ Montana had been a slave of the church and had worked for a priest, but after the priest died, the pope set her free with a manumission document. Gregory provides a theological justification for the manumission, i.e., God originally created humans with freedom.⁴⁴

Pope Gregory wished to make it possible for slaves of the church to join monasteries. He thought that if humans tried to stop someone from joining a monastery, it would be like stealing something from God himself. (In fact, Pope Gregory further developed the argument deployed against slavery by Gregory of Nyssa, cf. above.) However, Pope Gregory and the Roman church worried (as Jerome had done a century earlier) whether some slaves wished to join the monasteries for the “wrong” reason, i.e., merely seeking to escape a life of slavery instead of being motivated by the “right” spiritual reasons. Therefore, Canon 6 of the Roman Council of 595 (at which Pope Gregory presided) emphasized that there must be a noviciate in the monasteries, a time of testing, before someone – particularly a slave – could join a monastery as a full member. Canon 6 reads:

We know that many of the ecclesiastical *familia* hasten to the service of the omnipotent God in order that, living in monasteries in divine service (*seruitium*), they may be free from human servitude (*seruitudo*); [. . .] It is, therefore, necessary that he who wishes to be converted (*conuerti desiderat*) from the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical servitude to the service of God, ought to prove himself first in lay habit and, if his *mores* and way of life bear witness to his good intention, he should be permitted to serve (*seruire*) the omnipotent Lord in a monastery without objection, so that he, who yearns to enter harsher *seruitus* in divine obedience, may leave human service (*seruitium*) as a free person.⁴⁵

cia” (Master Thesis, University of Auckland, 2012): 122, <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/2292/20320/whole.pdf?sequence=2> [accessed 03.09.2024].

43 Gregory the Great, *Epistula* 6.12, in *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum Epistularum*, vol. 1, ed. Dag Norberg, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 140 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982): 380–81.

44 Gregory the Great, *Epistula* 6.12: 380.

45 Gregory the Great (Roman Council), *Incipit decretum ad clerum in basilica beati Petri apostoli (Roman Council §6)*, in *Gregorii I papae Registrum epistolarum (Liber 5–7 (Indictio XIII), Liber 5)*, eds. Paulus Ewald and Ludo M. Hartmann, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1891): 365: ‘Multos ex ecclesiastica familia nouimus ad omnipotentis Dei seruitium festinare, ut ab humana seruitute liberi in diuino seruitio ualeant in monasteriis conuersari; [. . .]. Si uero festinantes ad omnipotentis Dei seruitium incaute retineamus, illi inuenimur negare quaedam, qui dedit omnia. Unde necesse est, ut quisquis ex iure ecclesiasticae seruitutis ad Dei seruitium conuerti desiderat, probetur prius in laico habitu consitutus et, si mores eius atque conuersatio bono desiderio illius testimonium ferunt, absque ulla retractatione seruire in monasterio omnipotenti Domino permittatur, ut ab humano seruitio liber recedat, qui <in> diuino obsequio districtiorem subire appetit seruitutem.’

In fact, Emperor Justinian underlined the same demand in his law codex.⁴⁶ Obviously, the authorities had an interest in controlling the stream of slaves into monastic life. Imperial and ecclesiastical concern that slaves would flee to asceticism only to escape their harsh lot in life suggests that, on the one hand, the monasteries, with their attitude against slavery, posed a socio-economic problem in late antique and early medieval societies because they drained the enslaved workforce, while, on the other hand, they were also seen as important religious institutions and the profession of a desire to live there was so laudable that there was no discussion of altogether denying people the right to join a monastery.

In Leander of Seville's rule for nuns *De institutione virginum* from sixth-century Spain, he deals head-on with the question of how former slaves are to be dealt with within the monastery and urges the sisters to treat each other with love:

Their birth made them slaves (*ancillas conditio*), their profession has made them your sisters (*sorores professio*). Let nothing remind them of their ancient servitude. She who serves with you in the ranks of those having virginity in Christ should enjoy the same freedom that you have. We do not seek to challenge you to humility in order that we may raise them up in pride, but as long as you accept them as sisters, they will the more willingly be your servants, and they will offer their services, not as subjected to servitude (*obsequium non servitute*), but as free in love (*sed liberae charitate*).⁴⁷

Nonetheless, Leander does not expect that the differences existing in “the world” can be forgotten in the monastery because the nuns will have different needs depending on their upbringing and former life. Due to the diverse experiences of the nuns, certain distinctions should be maintained in the monastery, according to Leander:

For division must be made to each according to need. She who could be honored in the world and was rich in worldly goods may be more carefully treated in the monastery; she who left costly clothing in the world deserves better in the monastery. But she who lived in poverty in the world and was needy of clothing and food should be thankful to be in a monastery where she is neither cold nor hungry [. . .].⁴⁸

(Trans. in Roy Flechner and Janel Fontaine, “The Admission of Former Slaves into Churches and Monasteries,” *Early Medieval Europe* 29, no. 4 [2021]: 586–611).

46 Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*: 144–45.

47 Leander of Seville, *De institutione virginum et contemptu mundi* 12, in *Patrologia Latina* 72, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris 1844): 886: ‘Quas tibi fecit, aut fecerit ancillas conditio, et sorores profession, jam non pro nexu servitutis exulceres, sed pro paritate professionis honores. Quae ergo tecum in Christo virginitatis stipendiis militat, pari tecum libertate exsultat. Nec sic vos provocamus ad humilitatem, ut illas superbia erigamus: quas dum tu accipis it sorores, gratius illae tibi sint famulae, praebeantque obsequium non servitute addictae, sed liberae charitate.’ (I rely on both the translations of Claude W. Barlow, *Iberian Fathers*, vol. 1, *The Fathers of the Church* 62 [Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1969]: 215–16 and Charles de Montalembert, *The Monks of the West*, vol. 2 [London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1861]: 189).

48 Leander of Seville, *De institutione virginum et contemptu mundi* 27: 887: ‘Sic enim dividendum est, prout uniuersum opus est. Quae potuit honorari in mundo, et dives fuit in seculo, blandius fuvenda

3.3 Radegund – A Queen and a Slave?

We find a striking example of the idealization of service in monasteries in the hagiographical writings on the Merovingian queen, Radegund, i.e., the *regina* who served as an *ancilla*.⁴⁹ Radegund, who – to the dismay of King Clothar I – decided to step down as queen and live as a nun, founded a monastery in Sainte-Croix in *Poitiers* in ca. 560. Radegund decided that her community should follow the Rule of Caesarius of Arles. Her *Lives* thus shed light on the rule and its status.⁵⁰

Even in her own lifetime, Radegund became so famous and popular as a saintly person that shortly after her death in the late sixth century, two authors wrote her biography in a hagiographical fashion. In his biography, Venantius Fortunatus described Radegund's eagerness to serve in the monastery:

While all the nuns (*monachabus*) were deep in sleep, she [Radegund] would collect their shoes, restoring them cleansed and oiled to each. [. . .] she led an austere life in sackcloth and ashes, rising early to be singing Psalms when the others awoke. For no monasterial offices (*de officiis monasterialibus*) pleased her unless she observed them first. She punished herself (*ipsa se castigabat*) if anyone did a good deed before she did. [. . .] She did not shrink from cleaning the privies/latrines but cleaned and carried off the stinking dung. For she believed she would be diminished if these vile services did not ennoble her (*si se non nobilitaret vilitate servitii*). She carried firewood in her arms. [. . .]. She would care for (*serviens*) the infirm beyond her assigned week (*extra suam ebdomadam*), cooking their food, washing their faces [. . .], going the rounds of those she was caring for and returning fasting to her cell.⁵¹

Good deeds and service were organized in the monastery; there were specific offices and particular times assigned for acts of servitude. Radegund wanted to do even more

est, in monasterio; et quae reliquit in saeculo vestem pretiosam, cultiorem in monasterio meretur. Quae vero sub penuria vixit in saeculo, et tegumento victuque eguit, grate ferat in monasterio nec algeat, nec esuriat [. . .].' (Trans. in Barlow, *Iberian Fathers*: 222).

49 Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Radegundis* 4, in *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* 2, eds. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1888): 366: 'the devout lady, queen by birth and marriage, mistress of the palace, served the poor as a handmaid.' ('Sic devota femina nata et nupta regina, palatii domina pauperibus serviebat ancilla'). Trans. in Jo Ann McNamara, John E. Halborg and E. Gordon Whatley, eds., *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992): 72.

50 Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Radegundis* 24: 372: 'she took up the Rule of Arles' ('exciperet Arelatensem regulam'). Trans. in McNamara, Halborg and Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*: 81.

51 Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Radegundis* 23: 324: 'Adhuc monachabus omnibus soporantibus, calciamenta tergens et unguens. Transmittibat per singulas. [. . .]. In cinerem et cilicium semper vitam duxit austeram, prius se levans, ut psalleret, quam congregation surrexisset. Nam de officiis monasterialibus nihil sibi placuit, nisi prima serviret, et ipsa se castigabat, si bonum post alteram. [. . .]. Secretum etiam purgare opus non tardans, sed occupans, ferens foetores stercoris, credebat se minorem sibi, si se non nobilitaret vilitate servitii. [. . .]. Infirmantibus serviens, ipsa cibos decoquens, aegrotis facies abluens [. . .] visitabat quos fovebat, ieiuna rediens cellulam.' Trans. in McNamara, Halborg and Whatley, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*: 80.

than what the monastic rule and tradition prescribed: she even made service into a competition. The author of Radegund's life was not primarily interested in promoting a certain kind of social equality but in underlining both Radegund's extraordinary willingness to serve and her great humility. There seems to be some exaggeration in Radegund's behaviour or at least in her hagiographers' depiction of it. Thus, it is impossible to make definite social / historical inferences from the text. In effect, Radegund does not question the institution of slavery in society as such: she pushes herself to be the humblest slave of all, a fact that her hagiographer stresses. She thus represents a new ideal that accords with Cassian's message to the Gallic elite quoted previously, i.e., despite belonging to the aristocracy, they ought to serve like slaves.

4 Conclusion

This article has provided a broad and representative, but not exhaustive, depiction of the sources at hand concerning early monasteries for women and the role of slaves within these communities. Admittedly – because of either the prescriptive or laudatory character of the sources – many practical questions remain unanswered. For example, how frequently did slaves enter monasteries to work for the nuns? Moreover, were the monasteries, in fact, dependent on forced labour, even though various sources promote an ideal of equality among nuns? When looking for slaves in late antique monastic texts, they appear everywhere, as they did in any late antique society. In general, former slaves could become sisters if they had the permission of their former owner or were set free by the foundress of the monastery. In general, though, former slaves were not treated like the women who had left a position within the nobility. Social divisions and, at times, even physical separation persisted in many monastic communities.

Obviously, from the beginning of monastic history, there were diverse practices regarding slaves. The sources make it possible to distinguish different approaches:

The *Life of Macrina* promotes an ideal of full equality within a limited religious community of women. It was the managers of the estate, Macrina and her mother, who chose an ascetic lifestyle for the entire household. This transformation did not necessarily give the former slaves and servants better conditions or freedom in any modern sense of the word. Rather, it entailed that the former estate owners would work and live on equal terms with their former slaves. The relationship between the members of Macrina's community is characterized by the concept of *ὁμοτιμία*: equal honour. The same concept is used to describe Olympias' community. However, in the *Life of Olympias*, we encounter a vision of "relative equality". All former slaves were included in the monastic community, were assigned one wing in a big monastic complex, and were eventually set free.

Jerome's *Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae* describes a monastic community without social equality. A strict social hierarchy is upheld by means of different buildings, and diverse tasks are assigned to sisters, depending on their origin. Equality here only finds an expression in the liturgy.

Caesarius' *Rule for Nuns* indicates, in a prescriptive form, a community without personal slaves but with a strict internal hierarchy where the older sisters could exert power over the younger. Enslaved people were part of the maintenance of the monastic property. The complexity of living and describing this monastic life finds an expression in these sources.

Interestingly, the idea of a created order, willed by God, was used to argue both for and against slavery. Social divisions were sometimes understood (directly or indirectly) as integral to the created order (cf. Hildegard of Bingen). In other contexts, by contrast, human freedom was understood as a basic part of the created order (cf., e.g., Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory the Great).

In the monasteries, there was a constant reinterpretation of the vocabulary of the outside world and a vision to radically invert worldly practices. The word "slave" was regularly used as a metaphor to express the expectation that the individual nun would be ready to serve her sisters. Being a slave of God meant serving the community; slave-like service was ennobling. The ideal figures were noble ladies and queens who behaved like servants. Though the metaphorical language did not immediately effect concrete changes in the outer social world, the advent of the Christian ethos and the idea of fundamental equality were nevertheless turning points in human history.⁵²

52 The German socialist Karl Kautsky (1854–1938) argued that what was going on in the early monastic communities were nothing short of a "communist" revolution. By now, his Marxist reading of the ancient sources is, of course, hopelessly outdated and academically dubious. However, Kautsky's book is of interest in this context, because he focused on the institution of slavery in the Roman world and picked up on a monastic transformation of some worldly standards. In his book *Foundations of Christianity* (originally published in German in 1908) Kautsky wrote: 'The monasteries took them up again and continued them; in fact, could develop them to a higher point, as the monasteries replaced slave labor by that of their own free members. In view of the general disintegration of society, the monasteries finally became the only places in the decaying empire in which the last remnants of ancient technology were preserved through the storms of the migration period and even perfected in many points. Aside from the influences of the Orient, particularly of the Arabs, the monasteries were the points from which civilization in Europe again started to grow during the Middle Ages.' (Karl Kautsky, *Foundations of Christianity. A Study in Christian Origins* [New York: International Publishers, 1925]: 451–52). However wrong Kautsky might have been, I find it peculiar and worth mentioning that a Marxist interpretation concluded that monasteries were, ideally, communities of shared work and resources.

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Sinah Theres Kloß

Beyond Subordination versus Emancipation: Caribbean *Godna* (Tattoos) as Means of Recreating Social Relations and Affective Bonds

1 Introduction

Aunty Daro and I sat in her bottomhouse¹ in Berbice, a region in Guyana bordering Suriname along the Corentyne / Corantijn River.² Daro had been living here for several decades together with her youngest daughter, son-in-law, and two grandsons. In our meeting in September 2017, during which our eleventh formal interview took place, Daro – born in 1933 – was 84 years old, had been a widow for almost thirty years, had retired from working in the cane fields and from selling greens at the local market, and explained to me – with pride and fatigue – that she was the mother of nine “living” children. Before I joined her in the bottomhouse, Daro had just finished praying to the different Hindu deities, whose *murtis* (statues; representations and manifestations of deities) were placed in the small *mandir* (temple) built in a sanctified area of the house lot. This form of prayer, as she explained, had been part of her daily routine for as long as she could remember. I often visited her during morning hours, when other members of the household had either left for work or school, and there was time to talk extensively about her life, the history of the villages, and (Hindu) spirituality and religion.

Aunty Daro had already introduced me to the topic of *godna* (tattoo, tattooing) in 2011 when I had conducted research for my PhD dissertation on the role of the materiality of clothing in the reconstruction of closeness and touch in transnational Guyanese migration.³ Only in 2017, however, was I able to start my in-depth anthropological research about *godna* and the related themes of body modification, body politics, and oral history among senior Caribbean Hindu women. These women usually defined themselves as descendants of Indian indentured labourers who had arrived in the Caribbean between 1838 and the 1920s. Seeking a comparative approach that highlights the entangled, border-crossing networks of Surinamese and Guyanese people, especially

1 The bottomhouse is the open space under traditional-style Guyanese houses, built on stilts. Today, rear parts of the bottomhouse are commonly enclosed and incorporated into the house.

2 At the request of my interviewees, I have anonymized their names, but Daro consented to the publication of her name.

3 Sinah Theres Kloß, *Fabrics of Indianness: The Exchange and Consumption of Clothing in Transnational Guyanese Hindu Communities* (New York: Palgrave, 2016).

in border regions such as Berbice in Guyana and Nickerie in Suriname, I included practices of *godna* among both senior Surinamese and Guyanese women in my research. So that I would not unreflectively reproduce historiography and anthropology, which are often framed within national borders, I sought to examine the movements and networks of people, for example, by reflecting on the roles of travelling tattooists who had also crossed the Surinamese-Guyanese border in the past. Unfortunately, my informants remembered little about the tattooists, and archival records were equally unhelpful in this endeavour.

During one of our first conversations in December 2011, Daro had explained that *godnas* were tattooed after a woman “had been married.” When I asked about the meaning of *godnas*, the majority of my interlocutors either suggested that they did not know anything about *godna* (though some acknowledged that, as a child, they had noticed this specific kind of tattoo on a grandmother’s arm) or they explained that in the past women had needed such a tattoo to serve the food they had prepared. Often, my interlocutors identified the people whom the women served as husbands and parents-in-law. I was often told: “If you did not have *godna*, your parents-in-law would not eat your food or take water from you.” Most of my informants – male and female, tattooed or untattooed – related *godnas* to a girl’s wedding and transformation into a (married) woman, hence to (Hindu) rites of passage.⁴

In the Caribbean, *godna* refers to the tattoos and tattooing practices of mostly senior Hindu women born before the 1960s.⁵ The practice is disappearing, and, in the intervening decades from the 1960s to the present, most women with these kinds of tattoos have passed away. Oral history interviews and the remaining senior Hindu women with *godnas* in Nickerie and Berbice indicate that the tattoos had gained significance and popularity, especially among female Hindus in the first half of the twentieth century.⁶ Contemporary discourse in Suriname and Guyana links these tattoos to the status of wifehood and the subordination and dependence of wives on their husbands and in-laws.⁷ This dominant interpretation represents *godnas* as marks of oppression

4 Sinah Theres Kloß, “Embodying Dependency: Caribbean *Godna* (Tattoos) as Female Subordination and Resistance,” *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 27, no. 4 (2022): 601–12, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jlca.12644>; Sinah Theres Kloß, “Tattooed Dependencies: Sensory Memory, Structural Violence and Narratives of Suffering Among Caribbean Hindu Women,” in *Narratives of Dependency*, eds. Elke Brügggen and Marion Gymnich (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024): 347–65.

5 The *godnas* to which Clare Anderson refers in her insightful research concern mostly penal tattooing practices and cannot be compared to the *godnas* to which I refer in this chapter (Clare Anderson, “Godna: Inscripting Indian Convicts in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. Jane Caplan [London: Reaktion Books, 2000]: 102–17; Clare Anderson, *Legible Bodies: Race, Criminality and Colonialism in South Asia* [Oxford: Berg, 2004]).

6 Sinah Theres Kloß, “Serving Toward Release: Tattoos, Religious Work, and Coercion in Post-Indenture Communities,” *Journal of Global Slavery* 9, no. 1–2 (2024): 17–42, <https://doi.org/10.1163/2405836X-00901007>.

7 For a more detailed analysis, see Kloß, “Embodying Dependency.”

and possession. Therefore, I was surprised when, in our interview in September 2017, Daro stated that it had not been her husband or in-laws who had demanded the *godna*. Instead, in her case, it had been a *pandit* (priest) who had recommended the practice. The following is excerpted from the interview:

DARO: [. . .] Then [after getting a *godna*] ee go take food from me.

SINAH: You husband? Or de . . .

DARO: Nuh me husband! De *pandit say*, dut duh is good.⁸

Daro interrupted me and exclaimed that it had not been her husband but the *pandit* himself who had suggested that a *godna* was good to have.

Her elaborations indicated that some *godnas*, or parts of them, were interpreted as marks of purification that could prevent (ritual) pollution. The markings thus possessed a specific religious meaning or meanings. Indeed, as I argue in the following pages, some *godnas*, at least those tattooed during the 1930s and 1940s, were also a potential means of actively challenging Hindu orthodoxy and the subordination of Hindu women, who were traditionally prohibited from administering ritual performances and restricted from certain forms of spiritual knowledge. The *godnas* allowed the tattooed women to create direct spiritual and devotional relations with a guru and deities. This chapter, therefore, highlights that a mere focus on the oppressive nature of *godna* would uncritically reproduce contemporary popular discourse, which represents Hindu women as suppressed victims without agency. Although I do not deny that in numerous cases and from the perspective of different social actors, *godnas* were understood as marks of female subordination, I still think it is necessary to consider the multiple and often overlapping interpretations of *godna*. Indeed, a discussion of tattoos' meanings and motifs along the lines of simplified juxtapositions, such as subordination versus emancipation, does not overcome the continuing stigmatization and victimization of Hindu women. Instead, it reproduces and perpetuates the trope of the "suffering coolie woman."⁹

The limited perspective offered by this trope and the persistent popular description of *godnas* as oppressive are also influenced by the biased framing of tattoos as

⁸ Daro, 84, Berbice, Guyana, September 2017; emphasis in original.

⁹ In the Caribbean, a recurring trope regarding female Indian indentured labourers in popular culture and historiography is that of them being only suppressed and victimized. An especially prominent framework in past analyses of this trope were the so-called "coolie wife murders"; Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora* (London: Anthem Press, 2002). According to Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, the notion of "coolie wife murders" contributed to 'European assumptions of the barbarism of Indian males and their treatment of women as their property' (Carter and Torabully, *Coolitude*: 52). See also Margriet Fokken, "Beyond Stereotypes: Understanding the Identities of Hindustani Women and Girls in Suriname Between 1873 and 1921," *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 18, no. 3 (2015): 273–89, <https://doi.org/10.5117/TVGN2015.3.FOKK>.

predominantly visual objects and representations. Tattoos, however, can be interpreted via perspectives other than those that focus on their visual characteristics. The meanings of tattoos may not only be found in their designs and motifs but also in the processes and practices of tattooing that led to the creation of the mark. A tattoo may serve as a reminder or commemoration of specific social actors, in addition to or alongside those directly depicted or represented in the tattoo's image, for example, people present during the tattooing process. Therefore, this chapter also draws attention to senior women's narratives of the performative practice of tattooing *godnas*. It illustrates that the integration of tattooing practices into social analyses facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of tattoo(ing)'s capacity to (re)create hierarchical relations as well as familial and devotional bonds.¹⁰

2 Becoming a Guru's Disciple: Capacitating Female Bodies for Religious Service

Most of my interlocutors and informants described *godnas* as signs or symbols that subjugated women to their in-laws and marked them as their husbands' possessions. As indicated in the introduction, in contemporary Suriname and Guyana, the dominant interpretation frames *godnas* as marks of wifehood, relates them to "housewifely devotion" and to the subordination and dependence of wives on their husbands and in-laws. At the time of my research, between 2017 and 2019, many senior Hindu women in Berbice and Nickerie had *godnas* on their inner arms. Often, one component of this kind of tattoo was a husband's initials and the tattooed words रामनाम or श्रीरामनाम (Rāmnām or Śrīrāmnām, the name of [Lord] Ram), the symbol ॐ (Aum, Om), and symbols of fertility or good fortune (e.g., flowers). These *godnas* were usually placed near the crook of the right arm, and designs were occasionally complemented with a circular symbol on the left hand, usually interpreted as "sun" or "flower" by its wearer. Less often, a dot was added on the forehead. Unfortunately, by the time of my return visit

¹⁰ The text is based on anthropological fieldwork conducted in the Surinamese-Guyanese border region during various stays between 2017 and 2023, as well as in the Surinamese community of The Hague, Netherlands, in 2018. The research that gave rise to this chapter also included archival work in the "Indian Immigration Records" accessed in the Guyana National Archives and the Nationaal Archief Suriname. I thank my Surinamese and Guyanese friends and informants for their time, enthusiasm, and support of my research. I am especially indebted to Dharamdai "Daro" Bhowandin and the Bhowandin family for introducing me to the topic of *godna*. I thank Claudette Austin, Maurits Hassan-khan, and Sebieren Hassenmahomed, who allowed me access to various institutions in Guyana, Suriname, and the Netherlands. I thank Aruna Mungra for her support of my research project, conducting archival research in the Nationaal Archief Suriname on my behalf, and for sharing her experiences, photographs, and information with me. I thank the KITLV at the University of Leiden, especially Rose-marijn Hoefte for hosting me as visiting researcher during my fieldwork in the Netherlands.

to Suriname in May and June 2023, delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the senior women with *godna* had passed away, or their health condition no longer allowed for ethical research.

Today, most women consider *godnas* “old-fashioned” or even “backward” signs of female subordination. During my fieldwork, I did not encounter women younger than 60 who had a traditional *godna* – although it is not uncommon for men and women to be tattooed. Indeed, my informants regularly differentiated the practice and marks of *godna* as “traditional” and something that “long-time people” did, while they defined “tattoo” as something “modern” and what “younger people do,” indicating different designs and tattooing methods. Traditional *godnas* have vanished from contemporary body art and practice in Suriname and Guyana, although at “times we still see elder Hindustani women in Suriname who have tattoos on the inner side of their arms.”¹¹

When inquiring as to the reasons for this decline in the practice of taking a *godna*, my Surinamese and Guyanese interlocutors, regardless of their gender or age, usually pointed out that the knowledge needed to tattoo *godnas* has disappeared: some also added that this decline of knowledge is linked to the end of Indian indentured immigration in the 1920s.¹² I further suggest that the devaluation of *godnas* and their stereotypization as an “uncultured” practice in the (colonial) Christian societies of Suriname and Guyana have influenced this development. During much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Christians and European colonizers labelled tattooing as a remnant of an “uncivilized” practice that was found among people defined as “savage” and “heathen.”

Research on tattoos and tattooing practices, especially in colonial and postcolonial contexts, has highlighted the influence of European colonization and Christian missionization on tattooing.¹³ Part of this “civilizing mission” was the eradication of (traditional) tattooing, and failures to do so were, in some cases, regarded as signs of the

11 Hilde Neus, “Fu Moimoi: Body Art as Identity Marker,” in *Social and Cultural Dimensions of Indian Indentured Labour and Its Diaspora: Past and Present*, eds. Maurits S. Hassankhan, Lommarsh Roopnarine, and Radica Mahase (New York: Routledge, 2017): 259.

12 Indian indentured labourers were shipped to the Caribbean to work on plantations during British and Dutch colonial rule between 1838 and the 1920s. In Guyana, approximately 240,000 indentured labourers arrived between 1838 and 1917 and more than 34,000 came to Suriname between 1873 and 1916. See, e.g., Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas: 1830–1920*, 2nd ed. (London: Hansib, 1993 [1974]).

13 Pauline Alvarez, “Indigenous (Re)Inscription: Transmission of Cultural Knowledge(s) Through Tattoos as Resistance,” in *Tattoo Histories: Transcultural Perspectives on the Narratives, Practices, and Representations of Tattooing*, ed. Sinah Theres Kloß (New York: Routledge, 2020): 157–75; Anne D’Alleva, “Christian Skins: Tatau and the Evangelization of the Society Islands and Samoa,” in *Tattoo: Bodies, Art, and Exchange in the Pacific and the West*, eds. Nicholas Thomas, Anna Cole, and Bronwen Douglas (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005): 90–108; Heidi Gengenbach, “Boundaries of Beauty: Tattooed Secrets of Women’s History in Magude District, Southern Mozambique,” *Journal of Women’s History* 14, no. 4 (2003): 106–41.

waning of colonial power.¹⁴ Hinduism has always been a minority religion in the Caribbean, and especially during British and Dutch colonial rule, Hindu beliefs and practices in Suriname and Guyana were marginalized and commonly denoted as inferior to Christian values.¹⁵ Especially from the 1920s and 1930s, Hindu leaders – usually *pandits* – actively sought to consolidate the Hindu community, creating and standardizing what is now commonly referred to as “official” or “Brahmanic” Hinduism in the Caribbean: the “Sanatan” tradition.¹⁶ A Sanskritic orthodoxy was formed, constructing a religion that – in direct comparison to Christianity – could be legitimized as a “respectable” (book) religion, excluding and dissociating beliefs and practices considered morally suspect or “uncivilized.”¹⁷

To clarify the direction of my argument in the coming pages, I also want to note that it was not only Hinduism’s marginalization in a predominantly Christian environment which fostered these developments. Hindu reform movements, including the Arya Samaj, also contributed significantly to the standardization and transformation of specific ritual aspects and institutional organization. The Arya Samaj developed as a Hindu reform movement in colonial British India at the end of the nineteenth century and was brought to the Caribbean through Arya Samaj missionaries, especially from the 1920s onward.¹⁸ The movement promoted reforms of Hindu ritual and a return to Vedic scripture, challenging the developing monopoly of Brahmins over

14 Jordanna Bailkin, “Making Faces: Tattooed Women and Colonial Regimes,” *History Workshop Journal* 59, no. 1 (2005): 33–56, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbi004>.

15 Sinah Theres Kloß, “Contesting ‘Gifts from Jesus’,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 30, no. 3–4 (2017): 346–65, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748945-03003003>.

16 Peter van der Veer and Steven Vertovec, “Brahmanism Abroad: On Caribbean Hinduism as an Ethnic Religion,” *Ethnology* 30, no. 2 (1991): 149–66.

17 Paul Younger, *New Homelands: Hindu Communities in Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, South Africa, Fiji and East Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Marcelo M. Mello, “Materiality, Affection, Personhood: On Sacrifice in the Worship of the Goddess Kali in Guyana,” *Vibrant: Virtual Brazilian Anthropology* 17 (2020): n.p., <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-43412020v17d506>; Marcelo M. Mello, “Dutch Spirits, East Indians, and Hindu Deities in Guyana: Contests over Land,” *American Anthropologist* 124, no. 2 (2022): 370–82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13723>; Keith E. McNeal, “Doing the Mother’s Caribbean Work: On Shakti and Society in Contemporary Trinidad,” in *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West*, eds. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey John Kripal (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005): 223–48.

18 According to Hari Rambaran, the Arya Samaj arrived in Trinidad in 1904, in Guyana in 1910, and in Suriname in 1911 (Hari Rambaran, *Parivartan (Transformatie): Twee geloofslagen onder hindoes in de West door brahmanisering en sanskritisering van het volksgeloof: Een studie van antropologische en religieuze ontwikkelingen in de geschiedenis van hindoes in Suriname en van hen die daar vandaan naar Nederland kwamen* [Waddinxveen: HINFOR, 1995]: 48). I thank Ulrike Mühlshlegel and the “Fachinformationsdienst Lateinamerika, Karibik und Latino Studies” for making this reference available to me.

Hindu knowledge and practice.¹⁹ Furthermore, like other Hindu reform movements, the Arya Samaj rejected the caste system and promoted the equality of women.²⁰

The district of Nickerie received its first Arya Samaj *pandits* from British Guiana in the 1920s while remaining isolated from the Surinamese capital region until the second half of the twentieth century and oriented towards Guyana.²¹ The movement of people and ideas in this border region is likely to have influenced the development and transformation of specific socio-cultural and religious practices, including *godnas*. The tattoos and their related practices may have developed differently here than in other regions. These dynamics, combined with the struggle for socio-religious leadership among Sanatan and Arya Samaj *pandits*, influenced the practice of *godna*, especially during the 1930s and 1940s.

My female informants understood and interpreted their own *godnas* in different ways, and although *godnas* were usually framed and interpreted, at least initially, as marks of marriage and / or subordination, some interviewees provided me with additional explanations of their meaning. For example, my two oldest female informants, born during the 1930s and tattooed in the 1940s in Berbice and Nickerie, further elaborated on the meaning of *godna* during sequential ethnographic interviews. They interpreted the tattoos as marks of ritual purification and emphasized the link between *godnas* and Hindu baptism. Both Daro in Berbice, whom I introduced earlier, and 81-year-old Soenita from Nickerie related *godna* to the tattooee's "baptism" by a *pandit* or guru. They explained that their *godna* signified and indicated to themselves and others that they had acquired the status of being the "godchild" (*chela*) of a *pandit* or guru (Daro) or of being *gurmukh* (Soenita), of "having a guru." According to them, a *godna* portrayed and (re-)created a relationship between a guru and his disciple(s): the mark also facilitated the condition of having become guru-oriented.²²

From this perspective, in addition to serving her husband and in-laws, a woman with a *godna* could also conduct "service" (*sevā*) toward a guru and deities. Moreover, she could enter a relationship of direct exchange with a deity when making ritual offerings. This was revealed to me, for example, by Daro during the interview addressed in this chapter's introduction. After I had invited Daro to elaborate on who had encouraged her to get the *godna* and used the term husband (see quote in the introduction), she was reminded of a conversation with one of her daughters that had taken place the previous day. This daughter had converted to Christianity and has been a practising Christian for most of her life, an aspect to which Daro referred at the beginning of the following interview excerpt. Recalling the conversation with her daughter, Daro recounted:

19 Van der Veer and Vertovec, "Brahmanism Abroad."

20 Younger, *New Homelands*; Clem Secharan, *Mother India's Shadow over El Dorado: Indo-Guyanese Politics and Identity, 1890s–1930s* (Kingston, JM: Ian Randle, 2010).

21 Rambaran, *Parivartan*: 50.

22 Kloß, "Embodying Dependency": 607.

This [that a husband requested a *godna*], I never heard. Well yesterday now, [. . .] my daughter, (anonymized), well she follows our [Hindu] people and things [despite being a Christian], like, and talks about religion, . . . argues (incompr.). I do not argue with anybody. What I know, that I know. Because, I do not know to read and I will not read from another body's thing. You understand. So she said, "Ma," said, "You alone are at home?" So I said, "Yes, I alone am at home." Said, "Didn't Sinah say she would come?" [I] Said, "She will go, she wants to check more people's *godna*," said, "She wants to know what is the *reason*." So, she said, "Ma, you know, what I heard?" Said, "When you came to your mother-in-law's house, you're supposed to take *godna*. Because, they will have to eat from you, right? You will have to do w . . . (incompr.) in the kitchen." I said, "Well I've never heard that!" And what I have heard, that I tell you. And furthermore I did not come from India. My grandparents came from India. And then I did not know about all this, till I grew *big* and I got my husband, and I got . . . umm . . . I got mother-in-law, but she too did not have *godna* on her hand / arm. So I did not talk about *godna*.²³

Daro's explanation that I was looking for other people's *godnas* led her daughter to elaborate on what she had heard about the tattoos' meaning: the daughter recounted the popular discourse of parents-in-law and husbands who had requested *godnas* in the past. Explaining that she had never heard such an explanation before, Daro corrected her and then elaborated on her own experiences along with her reason for getting a *godna*. Shortly after providing the above quote, Daro narrated the following:

So, didn't I come here? [rhetorical question] And then, she [an old lady] did her wuk [annual household ritual]. So I said, I want . . . I would like to do god wuk, I would like to do it, just because. Well, that's how, the pandit knew me, by *she*, [. . .] that was her godfather, the old lady's godfather. [. . .] So when, when I got . . ., I told him then that I wanted to do one wuk. He said, "Beti,²⁴ [. . .] I will do your wuk, but you must take one *godna*." (pause) You understand? So that's one blessing (pause) to take a god's name on your hand / arm. So I did not put it for style, I put it directly for one *reason*! [. . .] And so I did not take this *godna* for nothing. I took this *godna*, as he said, that's one blessing. I took it.²⁵

²³ Daro, 84, Berbice, Guyana, September 2017; emphasis in original. Author's translation from Guyanese: "Suh, me nuh hear. Well yesterday now, [. . .] me daughta, (anonymized), well ee does follow our [Hindu] people an ting [despite being a Christian], like, and talk bout religion, . . . argue (incompr.) Me nuh argue wid nobody. Wuh me know, duh me know. Because, me nuh know fuh read and me nuh go read when from one nudda body ting. You understand. So ee say, 'Ma,' say, 'You alone deh home?' Suh me say, 'Yes, me alone deh home.' Say, 'Sinah been say ee nuh go come?' Say, 'Ee go go, ee want check more people godna,' say, 'Ee want to know wuh is de *reason*.' Suh, ee say, 'Ma, you know, wuh me hear?' Say, 'When you come by you mother-in-law house, you suppose to take *godna*. Because, dem ah have to eat from you, right? You go got to do w . . . (incompr.) in de kitchen.' Me say, "Well me never been hear duh!" And wuh me hear, duh me tell you. An fuddamore me nuh come from India. Me grandparents dem come from India. And den me nuh been know about all aduh, till me grow *big* and me get me husband, and me get . . . umm . . . me get mother-in-law, but she too nuh been get *godna* a she hand. Suh me nuh talk about *godna*."

²⁴ "Daughter" in Hindi; affective.

²⁵ Daro, 84, Berbice, Guyana, September 2017; emphasis in original. Author's translation from Guyanese: "Suh, me nuh come heh? And den, she [an old lady] ah do wuk. Suh me say, me want . . . me like do god wuk, me like do am, lil jus suh. Well, suh come by duh, de pandit know me, by *she*, [. . .]

According to Daro, after her mother had died, she moved to another village, where an “old lady” had conducted a “wuk” – in the Guyanese Hindu context, this usually referred to the household’s annual religious ritual. *Wuk* implied the concept of *sevā* and related ritual performances.²⁶ Daro explained how the *pandit* had asked her to get a *godna* so that she could act as a ritual’s *jajman* – the person who makes the relevant offerings to a deity during *wuk* (in her words, to ‘do god wuk’), based on the instructions and with the support of the *pandit*.

This is a surprising revelation: while today, these rituals are commonly planned and conducted by women (unless their husbands join them as the household’s head), in the past, women were restricted from actively partaking in the ritual and acting as *jajman*. Both Daro’s request to conduct *wuk* and the fact that the *pandit* did not reject her claim outright but instead suggested a means by which she could do so must be understood as highly subversive in the context of early twentieth-century Caribbean Hindu orthodoxy. It is indicative of the dynamic changes that Hindu traditions underwent at the time and illustrates the creative means of Sanatan and Arya Samaj *pandits*, who, due to contestations over leadership in various communities, actively challenged the orthopraxy and philosophy of “other” Hindus.²⁷ Indeed, as discussed above, during the first half of the twentieth century, annual household rites developed and were increasingly standardized as part of the consolidation of Hindu traditions in Guyana and Suriname.²⁸

I further suggest that the question of who was allowed to act as *jajman* became a site of contestation for the competing Hindu *pandits* of the various religious groups,

duh ee godfather, de ole lady godfather. [. . .] Suh when, when *me* get . . . , me tell am now fuh do wan wuk. Ee say, ‘Beti (daughter), [. . .] Me go do you wuk, but must take one godna.’ (pause) You understand? Suh duh one blessin (pause) fi take one god name pon you hand. Suh me nuh put am fuh style, me put am directly wan *reason!* [. . .] And suh me nuh take dis godna fuh nothing. Me take dis godna, as ee say, duh one blessin. Me take am.”

26 According to the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, the Guyanese *wuk* refers to a job, profession, and skill, as well as to a “domestic or private rite held either to honour (esp[.] in Indic belief systems) or propitiate (esp[.] in African belief systems) one or more deities.” (Richard Allsopp and Jeannette Allsopp, *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* [Kingston, JM: University of the West Indies Press, 2003]: 610).

27 Other (Hindu) reformist movements and groups very likely also influenced this development, for example the Kabir Panth and Satnamis. For 1930s Suriname, Rudolf Karsten mentions that there were around 4,000 Kabirpanthis in Suriname (Rudolf Karsten, *De Britsch-Indiërs in Suriname: Een Korte Schets Benevens Een Handleiding Voor De Beginselen van Het Hindi* [’s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1930]: 9). That *Rāmnām* became a prominent part of *godna* styles supports this hypothesis, as the spiritual recitation and repetition of the name Ram (a practice referred to as *Ramnam*) was popular among lower-caste groups and in Hindu reform movements in British India at the beginning of the twentieth century. (Ramdas Lamb, *Rapt in the Name: The Ramnamis, Ramnam, and Untouchable Religion in Central India* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002]). However, an in-depth analysis of this aspect goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

28 Rambaran, *Parivartan*: 63.

including Sanatan and Arya Samaj *pandits*. Challenging Brahmanic leadership and seeking followers, Arya Samaj *pandits* allowed people to act as *jajman*, who were otherwise denied this role. Consequently, they also won supporters from groups that were traditionally and, by comparison, subordinate, such as lower-caste people and women in general.²⁹ According to Hari Rambaran, one of his informants, who was born in the 1930s, remembered the following from 1940s Nickerie:

We are Brahmin, my father had the *janev-sanskâra* (initiation) performed for us. Our neighbors wished to have the same done for their children and had a *pandit* come. However, the latter refused to perform the ritual for their children because they were not brahmin or *chattri*.³⁰ Those people became angry. They had an *Arya Samâja pandit* come. This one did perform the required *sanskâra*. My neighbors then proceeded to the *Arya Samâja* with the whole family. Shortly thereafter a *Veda-yajnâ* was held in his yard by a preacher and his wife, both from India. The fact that a woman was allowed to recite *veda mantras*, perform the *havana* ritual and also give interesting lectures, like her husband, made a great impression on many in the Hamtoncourt polder (Nickerie). Several people on that occasion (and also afterwards) converted to the *Arya Samâja*.³¹

Daro did not specify whether the *pandit* to whom she referred or her later godfather was affiliated with the Arya Samaj. Therefore, his motivation for allowing her and other women to act as *jajman* cannot ultimately be determined. Nevertheless, the *pandit* may have challenged conservative ideologies by conceiving of or resorting to *godnas* to include and as part of his spiritual guidance of women. In the process, he may have resorted to *godnas* as a means of capacitating female bodies for ritual and discipleship.

Such ritual innovation may have been part of Arya Samaj reformism, or it may have been linked with the *gurmukh* ritual, commonly associated with (orthodox) Sanatan Hindu practices. According to Cornelis Johannes Maria de Klerk, in 1930s and 1940s Suriname, there existed a ritual referred to as the *gurmukh* – the same term used by Soenita when asked about the meaning of her *godna*. De Klerk refers to the ritual of

29 It must be noted that the Arya Samaj was successful in winning members of all strata and groups of Hindustani society, not only the subordinate groups (Cornelis Johannes Maria de Klerk, “De Britisch-Indiërs in Suriname,” *De West-Indische Gids* 24 [1942]: 114).

30 *Chattri* is the common spelling of *Kshatriya* (social order of warriors) in the context of Caribbean Hinduism.

31 Emphasis in original. Author’s translation from Dutch: “Wij zijn brahmaan, mijn vader liet voor ons de *janev-sanskâra* (initiatie) verrichten. Onze burens wensden dat ook voor hun kinderen te laten doen en lieten een *pandit* komen. Deze weigerde echter het ritueel voor hun kinderen te verrichten, omdat zij geen brahmaan of *chattri* waren. Die mensen werden boos. Zij lieten een *Arya Samâja pandit* komen. Deze voerde de verlangde *sanskâra* wel. Mijn burens zijn daarop met de hele familie overgegaan tot de *Arya Samâja*. Kort daarop werd op zijn erf een *Veda-yajnâ* gehouden door een prediker en diens vrouw, beiden uit India. Het feit dat een vrouw *veda-mantra*’s mocht uitspreken, het *havana*-ritueel mocht verrichten en eveneens interessante lezingen gaf, net als haar man, maakte op velen in de Hamtoncourt polder (Nickerie) grote indruk. Verschillende mensen zijn bij die gelegenheid (en ook daarna) overgegaan tot de *Arya Samâja*” (Rambaran, *Parivartan*: 53).

gurmukh in his doctoral thesis, published in 1951 at the University of Leiden and titled *Cultus en ritueel van het orthodoxe Hindoeïsme in Suriname (Cult and Ritual of Orthodox Hinduism in Suriname)*. For his dissertation, de Klerk conducted research in Suriname between 1946 and 1948 while also drawing on his experience as a Christian priest during a seven-year stay in Nickerie in the 1930s.³² He relates the *gurmukh* to the *upanayana*, describing the *gurmukh* as having a “complementary and substitute function” relative to the *upanayana*,³³ or, as it is popularly referred to, the *janeu* or *janneuw*, as was also the case in the above quote. De Klerk further elaborates that the *gurmukh* ritual became relevant, especially to groups traditionally restricted from conducting the *upanayana*: women and lower-caste Hindus. According to him, these groups were allowed to conduct the *gurmukh* as a “substitute” ritual, enabling them to gain spiritual education and possibly to achieve liberation from the cycle of reincarnation.

From this perspective, *godnas* must be understood as a means of capacitating bodies. They allowed women to act as *jajman* and thus to conduct “service” (*sevā*) toward a guru and deities, a role and religious task traditionally denied to them. They prepared and enabled bodies to enter a relationship of direct exchange with the divine, creating a bodily condition that was not “natural” even for men: upper-caste Hindu boys had to undergo *upanayana*, the Hindu rite of passage, also addressed in Rambaran’s quote, to achieve “twice-born” status after having performed the ritual.³⁴ A twice-born boy then became the disciple of the guru who officiated at the ritual and was thenceforth responsible for the boy’s spiritual education.

The emancipatory interpretation of *godnas* seems to have been specific to the historical context introduced here; Thus, it cannot be generalized. Even among those women who were tattooed in the 1930s and 1940s, interpretations may have varied. Daro and Soenita may have been especially self-conscious and strong-minded women. Indeed, the way they recounted their lives in ethnographic interviews left me with such an impression. For example, while discussing *godna* with me, Daro also elaborated on how she challenged a *pandit* during the 1980s on the question of who may or may not act as *jajman*. This incident occurred after her husband died, and the *pandit* wanted to discourage her from conducting her husband’s “dead wuk” (funerary rites). The religious leader suggested that “a boy” (her son) should do it instead. The following quote highlights how she directly challenged gendered hierarchies:

32 Foreword by Sandew Hira in Cornelis Johannes Maria de Klerk, *Cultus en ritueel van het orthodoxe Hindoeïsme in Suriname*, vol. 1, *De immigratie der Hindostanen in Suriname*, vol. 2 (The Hague: Amrit, 1951; repr. 1998): 10.

33 De Klerk, *Cultus en ritueel*: 116, author’s translation from Dutch. In original: “Ten opzichte van de *upanayana* (en de daarbij aansluitende *vedārambha*) heeft de *gurmukh* een *aanvullende* en *vervangende* functie.”

34 Christopher John Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*, rev. and exp. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

When my husband died, well you know, everybody does the wuk differently. But *I* desired (to do it), as I know a little bit. I told this pandit this thing then. Well, I did not know the pandit who came and asked me this. He said, how I could conduct the dead wuk (funerary rites) (of my husband). If not a boy should instead sit down (to do them). So I said, “No! Why would a boy come and sit down? At least . . . if my husband came first, then I come second, right? And then, my son came *third*.” So he said, “What do you mean? / What are you saying?” I said: “Yes, when my husband passes away, it is *me* who has to do this wuk. Really!” And so the branch / subordinate, is my son. And not *one* (boy) has to sit down, I have *four* sons, but girls do not sit down. But all four (sons) have to sit down with *me*. That makes *five*. But I am the head! Of the group. [. . .] So, he said, “Alright.” So that was when my husband died. I became the head, and my sons came after me. [. . .]³⁵

Statements like these support my argument that the stereotype of the suffering and helpless Indian woman did not inevitably apply to women, especially not to women with *godna*. Even if *godnas* were not considered to have been a means of subversion by all women and gurus at the time, at least some interpreted the tattoos in the way outlined here, challenging (conservative) Hindu orthodoxy and paving the way for more and more women to act as *jajman*.

The *gurmukh* ritual, therefore, was emancipatory or even subversive in relation to Hindu orthodoxy, for it enabled women’s spiritual birth and education and allowed them to act as *jajman*. Although my senior informants explained that their *godna* was not tattooed as part of any (*gurmukh*) ritual, they still linked their tattoo to the *gurmukh* ritual and the process of being accepted as a guru’s disciple, creating direct exchange relationships with deities. In this context, *godnas* further created a (devotional) bond between godfather and disciple. This interpretation of *godnas* already indicates their relevance in creating and recreating social relationships, an aspect which I emphasize in the last section of this chapter.

35 Daro, 84, Berbice, Guyana, September 2017; emphasis in original. Author’s translation from Guyanese: “When me husband dead, well you know allbody do de wuk different. But *me* desire, as me know lil bit. Me go tell dis pandit dis ting now. Well, me nuh know de pandit duh go come aks me duh. Ee say, how me go keep dis dead wuk. If-a one boy go sit dong. Suh me say, ‘No! How one boy go come sit dong? At least, me husband come first, me come second, right? And then, me son come *third*.’ Suh ee say, ‘How yuh mean?’ Me say, ‘Yes, if me husband pass away, is *me* got to do dis wuk. Really!’ And suh di branch, is me son. Suh nuh *one* got to sit dong, me get *four* son, but gyal nuh sit dong. But all four got to sit dong wid *me*. Make *five*. But me a de head! Fuh de group. [. . .] Suh, ee say, ‘Alright.’ Suh duh when me husband dead. Me come de head, and me son dem come after me. [. . .]”

3 Practices of Tattooing: (Re-)Creating Social Relations and Affective Bonds

As discussed above, *godnas* can be interpreted as marks of female subordination and of emancipation and subversion. Both perspectives are valid and legitimate. Assessment of which interpretation is more “authentic” would be a misleading endeavour and reproduce an overly narrow analysis of the subordination versus emancipation conflict, which is not only evidenced in (Caribbean) historiography but also in much tattoo research.³⁶ Indeed, interpreting tattoos as marks of resistance is a common theme in much contemporary anthropological tattoo research, prompting us to reflect on potential bias.³⁷

Moving beyond *godna* as either oppressive or subversive, in the following pages, I argue that it is also necessary to approach tattoos and tattooing through a performative lens. In contemporary tattoo research, the tattooing process and the social actors involved are seldom considered central. However, every act of tattooing involves a range of social, temporal, and spatial contexts and relations. Tattooing practices may become relevant in, for example, rites of passage and the construction of specific social statuses during the tattooing process. In *Wrapping in Images*, Alfred Gell suggests that sometimes “the making of visible marks on the skin” can be “quite secondary” to a tattoo’s relevance: indeed, in some Polynesian contexts, “tattooing was not a form of graphic art, but only an abiding trace which testified to the occurrence of socially salient blood-letting transactions.”³⁸ The important aspect was not the tattoo itself but the *process* of tattooing that eventually led to the mark’s creation. Gell suggests that tattooing must be understood as consisting of various moments or phases in a process “occurring over time,” including 1) wounding, bleeding, and insertion of pigments, 2) scarring and healing, and 3) acquiring a ‘permanent indelible mark.’³⁹ In different cul-

36 Fokken, “Beyond Stereotypes.”

37 Tattoos and tattooing as resistance is a prominent topic of tattoo research, particularly in social and cultural anthropology. For example, tattoos in colonial contexts and the related tattoo revitalization movements have received much scholarly attention (Alvarez, “Indigenous (Re)Inscription”; Peter Brunt, “The Temptation of Brother Anthony: Decolonization and the Tattooing of Tony Fomison,” in *Tattoo: Bodies, Art, and Exchange in the Pacific and the West*, eds. Nicholas Thomas, Anna Cole, and Bronwen Douglas [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005]: 123–44; Lars Krutak, “Sacred Skin: Tattooing, Memory, and Identity Among the Naga of India,” in *Tattoo Histories: Transcultural Perspectives on the Narratives, Practices, and Representations of Tattooing*, ed. Sinah Theres Kloß [New York: Routledge, 2020]: 191–217). Also, female tattooing practices in Euro-American contexts have been discussed as practices of female resistance (Margo DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000]; Margot Mifflin, *Bodies of Subversion: A Secret History of Women and Tattoo* [New York: pH powerHouse Books, 2013]).

38 Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, repr., 2004): 306.

39 Gell, *Wrapping in Images*: 304.

tural contexts, these phases may vary in importance. Focusing only on Gell's third tattooing phase – the mark itself – would obscure other relevant aspects of the process.

The significance of the tattooing *process* in the construction of a tattoo's multiple meanings can be illustrated via reference to the process involved in creating a *godna*. My informants unequivocally stated that *godnas* were not part of an auspicious ritual but inscribed during interruptions of everyday life, requiring rare occasions when a tattooist passed through the village. For example, Soenita – while confirming husbands, in-laws, and guru's relevance regarding *godnas* – referred to other social actors involved in the tattooing process and, furthermore, to people of whom the *godna* reminded her today. The following is excerpted from an ethnographic interview that took place in September 2018:

SINAH: I've seen the godna that you have. [. . .] What does it mean?

SOENITA: This, this. [*looks at godna*] From my mother. That Guyanese man came. Walked down the street. Said, "Godna godaile, godna godaile!" [Sarnami: Do you want to tattoo?!] And my bowjee [sister-in-law] said, my mother said, "Godaile!" [Sarnami: Tattoo! – *points at her godna*] The Sri-Ram-Nam, J. M. [*points at the inscription of Srirammam, then her husband's initials and says her husband's name*]. My husband's name. J. M. [*repeats name*].⁴⁰

SINAH: Okay. So, there was a Guyanese man, who did that godna?

SOENITA: Yeah, [he] did, yeah. In the old days.

SINAH: And he came . . . he came from Guyana with . . .

SOENITA: Yes, he came from Guyana, and he walked in the street. He yelled, with bicycle. He walked with bicycle. Said, "Mooi mooi [Dutch: Beautiful beautiful], Sita ki raso! Godna godaile." He said so, and he rode [by] bike. If you wanted, *then* you called him.

SINAH: Okay! And then you said, "Yes, come on!"?

SOENITA: Yes, "Come on, come on!" Then he would come.

SINAH: Ao! [Sarnami: Come!] (laughs)

SOENITA: Ao ao ao (laughs). He would come. And my mother . . . you didn't pay much! Maybe . . . two fifty, my mother paid.⁴¹

⁴⁰ I thank Radjnie Mungra-Mahabir, Bhulai Ramkaran, and Elsje Bhulai Harpal for their translations of these Sarnami expressions into Dutch.

⁴¹ Soenita, 81, Nickerie, Suriname, September 2018; emphasis in original. Author's translation from Dutch: SINAH: Ik heb die godna gezien, dat je hebt. [. . .] Wat betekent dat? / SOENITA: Dit, dit. Van mijn moeder. Die Guyanees man kom. Loop op straat. Zeg, "Godna godaile, godna godaile!" En me bowjee heeft gezegd, mijn moeder heeft gezegd, "Godaile." De Sri-Ram-Nam, J. M. Mijn man naam. J. M. / SINAH: Oké. Zo er was een Guyanees man, die die godna doet? / SOENITA: Ja, doet, ja. Vroeger. /

During the tattooing process, the first person whom Soenita recalled was her mother. Immediately and seemingly intuitively, she stated that the *godna* was “from my mother.” Only after referring to the Guyanese tattooist and briefly mentioning her *bowjee* (sister-in-law) did she reference her husband and explain his tattooed initials. Subsequently, in the interview, her *godna* seemed to remind her of her mother, whom she mentioned several times while speaking about it, pointing to and gently touching it during our conversation. Her recall reveals tattoos’ potential to remind one of others, possibly those present during the tattooing if not part of its design.⁴² This commemorative aspect is particularly relevant because newly married women had few occasions to see their families of origin due to their manifold chores in their new homes. Moreover, *godnas* were often tattooed after a wedding, during the time when a bride returned to her parental home prior to leaving for her husband’s residence a second and final time, making these tattoos – among other things – potential reminders of home. Usharbudh Arya attests to this phase, stating:

After the marriage, the bride accompanies her husband only for a few days and then returns to the parental home. It is then that the bride’s mother took her on to her lap and had a design tattooed on her right arm; on her return to the husband’s home the tattoo was done on the left arm. It was believed that if the mother has her daughter thus tattooed in her lap they would meet again in heaven.⁴³

Although my two senior informants did not recall a divided tattooing process as described by Arya, that the *godna* was tattooed in their mothers’ presence seemed to matter the most to them. For example, Soenita highlighted that the tattooing was conducted not only in the presence of her mother but *together* with her. On the same occasion, her mother also chose to have additional motifs added to her old designs, making it a shared tattooing experience. To my question of whether Soenita had been obliged to get a *godna*, she responded:

SOENITA: No, you did not need to have it. You didn’t have to. If you *wanted to*.

SINAH: Ah.

SOENITA: If you wanted to. Then you did.

SINAH: En hij kwam . . . hij was van Guyana met . . . / SOENITA: Ja, hij kom Guyana, en hij loop op straat. Ze schreeuw, met fiets. Ze loopt met fiets. Zeg, “Mooi mooi, Sita ki raso! Godna godaile.” Zeg, hij zeg, zo, en ze rijd fiets. Als je wil, *dan* je gaat he roepen. / SINAH: Oké! En dan zeg je . . . “Ja, kom maar!”? / SOENITA: Ja, kom maar, kom maar. Ze gaat komen. / SINAH: Ao! / SOENITA: Ao ao ao. Ze gaat komen. En mijn moeder . . . je betaalt niet veel! Misschien . . . twee vijftig, mijn moeder heeft betaalt.

⁴² Deborah Davidson, ed., *The Tattoo Project: Commemorative Tattoos, Visual Culture, and the Digital Archive* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2016).

⁴³ Usharbudh Arya, *Ritual Songs and Folksongs of the Hindus of Surinam* (Boston: Brill, 1968): 26.

SINAH Then you did.

SOENITA: Yes. If you didn't want to, you didn't have to do it.

SINAH: And did you say, "I want this [design]!" Or could you have another . . .

SOENITA: No, I said / chose. My mother was going to . . . have . . . flowers. She was going to make a lot of flowers.

SINAH: Uh-huh?

SOENITA: Big flowers.

SINAH: Big flowers?

SOENITA: I said I don't want much.

SINAH: No. [confirmative]

SOENITA: I want to have a little.

SINAH: Hmm [affirmative]. [Pause] Oh, that's how you did it, with your mother?

SOENITA: Yes.

SINAH: And . . .

SOENITA: My mother paid. My mother had it made for me.⁴⁴

She explained several times that her mother had paid for the tattoo, framing it as a motherly gift and suggesting that her mother had "made" the *godna* for her. Similarly, Daro's daughter explained to me during an informal conversation that she had also gotten her *godna* in the presence of and together with her mother, who had gotten an additional design.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Soenita, 81, September 2018, Nieuw Nickerie, Suriname; emphasis in original. Author's translation from Dutch: 'SOENITA: Nee, moet je niet hebben. Moet je niet. Als je wil. / SINAH: Ah. / SOENITA: Als je wil. Dan doe je. / SINAH: Dan doe je dat. / SOENITA: Ja. Als niet wil, je moet niet doen. / SINAH: En heb je gezegd, 'Ik wil dit hebben!' Of kan je ook een andere . . . / SOENITA: Nee, ik zeg, mijn moeder ging, hebben, bloemen. Ze ging veel bloemen maken. / SINAH: Eh-heh? / SOENITA: Grote bloemen. / SINAH: Grote bloemen? / SOENITA: Ik zei ik wil niet veel. / SINAH: Nee. / SOENITA: Ik wil een beetje hebben. / SINAH: Hmm. (Pause) Oh, zo heb je het samen met jouw moeder gedaan? / SOENITA: Ja. / SINAH: En . . . / SOENITA: Mijn moeder heeft ge . . . betaalt. Mijn moeder heeft voor me laten maken.'

⁴⁵ Unfortunately, her daughter could not recall the design added to her mother's already existing *godna*. On the contrary, Daro considered this to have been a false statement in our interview in September 2017.

While these examples reveal that tattoos “are a sort of visual archive of personal connections and achievements,”⁴⁶ tattooing can, on the one hand, be understood as an individual embodied act, but on the other, as an event that includes several people, (re-)creating interpersonal relationships and group identities in the process.⁴⁷ Getting a tattoo is often linked with visualizing and recreating bonds in social relations, especially in female friendships.⁴⁸ By being tattooed in others’ presence or by undergoing a shared pain experience, communities, social relationships, and networks may be (re-)created.⁴⁹ This has also been the case in colonial Mozambique, where tattoos and tattooing created “bonds of intragenerational female community” and a kind of “blood sisterhood.”⁵⁰ I thus conclude that modes of (female) bonding are also significant in the context of *godnas*.

4 Conclusion

Godnas relate to the notion and multiple levels of service (*sevā*). They are marks which represent and recreate women’s subalternized positionalities and experiences of dependency, especially in relation to husbands and in-laws. At the same time, however, they also subvert patriarchal hierarchy and orthodox Hindu structures: in the past, they provided female tattooees with the capacity to acquire spiritual knowledge, act as *jajman*, become a guru’s disciple, and enter a direct exchange relation with deities. Depending on when, where, how, in the company of whom, and by whom the tattoo was made, tattoos may (re-)create intimate and affective bonds with those who may or may not be represented in the tattoo’s image itself. As discussed in the second part of this chapter, additional interpretations and understandings may emerge from consideration of tattooing’s specific contexts and practices. Such reflection also allows us to consider *godnas* as means of female bonding and of (re-)constructing social relationships.

Godnas entail a multiplicity of understandings and can be interpreted in various ways. Both the marks and the tattooing processes facilitate a variety of sensory experiences, which may also influence their interpretation. To overcome an exclusive focus on tattoos’ visual characteristics, I suggest integrating tattooing practices and narratives

46 Alessandra Castellani, “Identity, Gender Roles, and Tattooing Among Italian Lesbian Women,” in *Tattoo Histories: Transcultural Perspectives on the Narratives, Practices, and Representations of Tattooing*, ed. Sinah Theres Kloß (New York: Routledge, 2020): 61.

47 Beverly Y. Thompson, “*Mi Familia*: Latina Women in the US Negotiate Identity and Social Sanctions Through Tattooing,” in *Tattoo Histories: Transcultural Perspectives on the Narratives, Practices, and Representations of Tattooing*, ed. Sinah Theres Kloß (New York: Routledge, 2020): 75.

48 Castellani, “Identity, Gender Roles, and Tattooing among Italian Lesbian Women.”

49 Gell, *Wrapping in Images*: 308.

50 Gengenbach, “Boundaries of Beauty”: 119.

of the tattooing process into social analyses and future research. Such approaches would highlight tattooing as an event or practice, drawing further attention to the under-researched area of tattooing's material culture and sensory approaches to tattooing. Inclusive approaches that address tattooing's performativity may reveal multiple layers within specific tattooing traditions, in which meaning is constructed not only through the tattoo's visual image but also through social relations, experiences, and memories of the tattooing process. This case study of *godnas* has already illustrated how diversified approaches can overcome simplified juxtapositions of tattoos' meanings and motifs, such as subordination versus emancipation and oppression versus resistance.

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Religion and the Dialectic of Overcoming and Creating Dependency

Julia Winnebeck

Serving God: Structures of Dependency in the Ecclesiastical Realm

1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the role of the late antique and early medieval Western Church in establishing and perpetuating structures of asymmetrical dependency. It is based on my understanding of penance as an ecclesiastical institution which not only regulated the spiritual practice of both clergy and laypeople but also served as a medium of social control and a gateway to dependency relations such as slavery and bonded labour.¹

The term “penance” usually refers to ecclesiastical sanctions awarded or undertaken for sin. This practice was first introduced in early Christianity as a means to repent for sins committed after conversion and baptism. The earliest Church Councils and Church father writings describe penance as a fairly regulated system with several tiers.² Within this system, the penitents likely underwent a public and humiliating process during which they were separated from the Christian community and expected to express their contrition in ritualized acts such as wailing, kneeling, and praying. On completion of their penance they were welcomed back into the Christian community which was symbolized through the imposition of hands and the participation in the eucharist. The whole process was understood to cleanse the penitents from sin, like baptism had done, so that they would be prepared to face God’s judgment in the afterlife.

From the late sixth century onwards, a supposedly different form of penance is conveyed to us through the existence of the so-called penitentials.³ These relatively

1 Cf. Julia Winnebeck, “Moving Late Antique and Early Medieval Penance (c. 550–800) into the Purview of Slavery and Dependency Studies”, *Journal of Global Slavery* 9 (2024): 129–65.

2 For example Tertullian, *De paenitentia* 7–12, Cyprian, *Epistulae* 15, 1; 16, 2; 17, 1, and Basil of Caesarea, ep. 217, 56; cf. Gustav A. Benrath, “Buße V. Historisch,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 7, *Epistulae* Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981): 453; Peter Gemeinhardt, *Geschichte des Christentums in der Spätantike* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022): 229–31.

3 It is not entirely clear, how exactly the practice of the penance envisioned in the earliest extant penitentials relates to the type known to us from the Early Church which is commonly referred to as “public penance”. Initially, the opinion prevailed that through the influence of insular (Irish) monasticism a more “private” (or tariffed) form of penance was introduced in the Western Church at the end of the 6th century. It was thought that this “newer” form of penance was allowed for the repentance of a variety of sins largely by means of extended periods of fasting while major sins still had to be atoned for through public penance. The principal witnesses for this traditional view on penance are Bernhard Poschmann, *Die abendländische Kirchenbuße im frühen Mittelalter*, *Breslauer Studien zur historischen Theologie* 16 (Breslau: Müller & Seiffert, 1930); Josef A. Jungmann, *Die lateinischen*

short handbooks elaborate on a range of different sins and recommend appropriate sanctions. According to the severity of the sin, these sanctions vary greatly in length and rigor: Whereas minor sins could, for example, be repented for by the singing of psalms, severe crimes required lengthy periods of fasting often socially isolated from the community and in connection to additional punishments like exile, confinement, compensation payments, and even enslavement.

Even though today only about 300–400 manuscripts containing penitential texts remain,⁴ it is thought that these handbooks for priests were widely circulated at the time and formed part of the basic equipment of the clergy in Francia and beyond. There is, however, an ongoing discussion about the penitentials' context of application:⁵ They can be read as witnesses for the pious practice of Christians in the form of the confession of ones' sins to a cleric and their subsequent remission via the process of penance. Alternatively, the penitentials can be perceived as evidence for the fact that local churches and monasteries acted as a sort of court of arbitration which handled civil as well as criminal matters. These two readings are of course not mutually

Bußriten in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung, Forschungen zur Geschichte des innerkirchlichen Lebens 3–4 (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1932), and Cyrille Vogel, *Les 'Libri Paenitentiales,' Typologie de Sources du Moyen Âge Occidental* 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978). More recently, researchers have challenged the traditional narrative of the history of penance and instead suggested to understand early medieval penance as a rather complex structure of coexisting norms and practices, cf. e.g. Sarah Hamilton, "Bishops, Education, and Discipline," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 533; Mayke de Jong, "What Was Public About Public Penance? *Paenitentia Publica* and Justice in the Carolingian World," *La giustizia nell'alto medioevo ii, Settimane di studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 44 (1997): 863–904; Mayke de Jong, "Transformations of Penance," in *Rituals of Power from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Frans Theuvs and Janet L. Nelson (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 185–224; Rob Meens, "The Historiography of Early Medieval Penance," in *A New History of Penance*, ed. Abigail Firey (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 89; Rob Meens, "The Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance," in *Handling Sin. Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller, York Studies in Medieval Theology 2 (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1998): 37; Rob Meens, "The Irish Contribution to the Penitential Tradition," in *The Irish in Early Medieval Europe – Identity, Culture and Religion*, eds. Roy Flechner and Sven Meeder (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016): 134.

At the same time, the authority of bishops and their monopolistic agency (Schlüsselgewalt) in the system of penance have been challenged in publications such as Steffen Patzold and Carine van Rhijn, eds. *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 93 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

4 Cf. Ludger Körntgen, *Studien zu den Quellen der frühmittelalterlichen Bußbücher*, Quellen und Forschungen zum Recht im Mittelalter 7 (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1993): 822; Meens, "The Frequency and Nature": 39.

5 Cf. Alexander Murray, "Confession before 1215," in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 3 (1993): 51–81; Franz Kerff, "Libri Paenitentiales und Kirchliche Strafgerichtsbarkeit bis zum Decretum Gratiani: Ein Diskussionsvorschlag," *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Kanonistische Abteilung* 75 (1989): 23–57; and Meens, "The Frequency and Nature".

exclusive and much can be said for an understanding of penance as both, pious practice and a means of social and legal control.

Regardless of the precise context of their application, the penitentials provide an invaluable source for both theological research and social history as they inform us – often unknowingly – about contemporary matters of ethical, legal, and spiritual concern.⁶ One particular area which benefits from the closer investigation of the penitentials are slavery and dependency studies.

After decades of pronounced disregard, this field of research has rediscovered late antiquity and the early middle ages as eras of interest.⁷ More recent studies have abandoned the focus on identifying continuities and discontinuities between the Roman form of slavery and newer forms of dependency,⁸ for example by trying to pinpoint the change from an agrarian and slave-based economy to feudalism or the transition from slaves to serfs. Instead, scholars like Alice Rio have argued for the continued existence and cultural relevance of traditional chattel-type forms of slavery alongside a variety of other forms of dependency in late antique and early medieval societies,⁹ and have based those claims, among other sources, on the penitentials.¹⁰

At the same time, the perception of the relationship between the Christian Church and slavery has changed. Most scholars today reject the ideological narrative of former generations according to which Christianity worked as a major force towards the aboli-

6 Accordingly, particularly the penitentials have recently received significant attention by scholars like Sarah Hamilton, Ludger Körntgen, and Rob Meens, cf. e.g. Sarah Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance, 900–1050*, Royal Historical Society Studies in History (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001); Körntgen, *Studien zu den Quellen*; Rob Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe 600–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

7 Cf. David Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800–1200*, *The Northern World* 45 (Leiden: Brill 2009): 2: ‘Until recently scholars of medieval history have rarely discussed slavery. Indeed, many medieval historians have chosen to ignore the subject altogether.’

8 Until ca. 1980, the narrative of the end of “proper” slavery with or shortly after the fall of the Roman Empire prevented further research into late antique and early medieval slavery, see Gerhard Horsmann, “Sklave,” in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, vol. 29, *Skárnismál – Stiklestad*, ed. Heinrich Beck (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005): 15.

9 Alice Rio, *Slavery After Rome: 500–1100*, *Oxford Studies in Medieval European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

10 Some of the penitential evidence on slavery has been considered as early as 1909 by the Dutch Historian and Theologian Frederik Pijper who argued against the former commonplace that the expansion of Christianity eventually ended slavery, Frederik Pijper, “The Christian Church and Slavery in the Middle Ages,” *The American Historical Review* 14, no. 4 (1909): 675–95. More recently, the studies of Stefan Jurasinski, *The Old English Penitentials and Anglo-Saxon Law*, *Studies in Legal History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); David A.E. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England: From the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century*, *Studies in Anglo-Saxon History* 7 (Rochester, NY: Bodydell & Brewer, 1995) and Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors*, have taken this body of sources into account.

tion of slavery¹¹ and instead accept the notion of the Church as a major ‘slave owning institution.’¹² The discussion on the extent of the Church’s *active* involvement with slavery and the theological rationale behind this, however, is ongoing and still requires further research.¹³

Against this backdrop, I will first present the penitential evidence which suggests that the practice of penance did have a fundamentally social dimension and could therefore be exploited as a medium of social control (2). Afterwards, I will evaluate the evidence suggesting a more direct involvement of ecclesiastical institutions with practices like penal enslavement and bonded labour via the system of penance (3). Finally, I will offer a conclusion regarding the character of late antique and early medieval penance and the role of the Church in establishing and perpetuating relations of dependency (4).

2 Penance as Medium of Social Control

For the scope of this paper I will focus on the first generation of penitentials which are those written or composed between the late sixth and the early eighth centuries. These penitentials are also sometimes called “small” or “simple” because, unlike later ones, they largely represent one tradition and only occasionally refer directly to conciliar legislation. The first generation of penitentials comprises altogether five Irish

11 On the current consensus among scholars that there was no general criticism of the institution of slavery in late antiquity or the early middle ages, cf. e.g. Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto, “Sklaverei,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 31, ed. Theodor Klauser (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 2021): 691–751; Martin Ritter, “Christentum,” in *Handwörterbuch der antiken Sklaverei*, vol. 1, ed. Heinz Heinen (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2017): 552–53.

12 Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors*: 29–30: ‘Within Christendom, the institution of slavery was accepted by the Church, which made every effort to ensure the master’s continuing domination, indeed the Church was a major slave owning institution.’

13 On the ongoing discussion on whether or not Christianity (owing partly to stimuli it had itself received from both antique culture and philosophy, and Judaism) did not in fact provide the necessary impulses which eventually led to abolitionism, cf. Adolf Martin Ritter, “Christentum”: 552–53; and Noel Lenski, “Spätantike,” in *Handwörterbuch der antiken Sklaverei*, vol. 3, ed. Heinz Heinen (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2017): 2884–85. According to Jurasinski, *Old English Penitentials*: 92, the majority of scholars still maintain that the best churchmen and bishops at least urged sympathy and compassion for those in bondage and promoted their manumission and kind treatment: ‘Thus has the Church retained its role in more recent scholarship as ultimately an agent of slaves’ liberation [. . .].’ Jennifer Glancy has presented a compelling study of the Church’s involvement with slavery in the Early Church, cf. Jennifer Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). More recently, Mary Sommar has evaluated the Church’s slave ownership, cf. Mary E. Sommar, *The Slaves of the Churches: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). However, a comprehensive study of the Church’s handling of slavery in legal, social, and theological terms for late antiquity and the early middle ages remains a desideratum.

penitentials,¹⁴ a closely linked group of eight Frankish penitentials,¹⁵ and the Anglo-Saxon penitential ascribed to the school of Theodore of Canterbury.¹⁶ These penitentials contain two types of evidence pertaining to the social dimension of penance: the first are hints to means of exercising pressure that could be and possibly were employed to enforce penance. The second type of evidence concerns the character of the penitential sanctions: a range of sins are sanctioned with compensation payments, corporal punishment, exile or even enslavement – all of which suggest an understanding of penance as a penal or legal measure rather than a purely spiritual exercise.

2.1 Means to Enforce Penance

Particularly the early Irish penitentials, most of which probably originated in a monastic context in the sixth and early seventh centuries, contain evidence to suggest that non-repentant sinners were put under significant pressure to undergo penance. In order to enforce certain behaviors or compliance with the designated penance,¹⁷

14 These are the *Paenitentiale Vinniani* (middle of the sixth century), *Paenitentiale Columbani* (late sixth century), *Paenitentiale Cummeani* (first half of the seventh century), *Paenitentiale Bigotianum* (between late seventh and late eighth centuries), all ed. Ludwig Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials. With an Appendix by Daniel A. Binchy*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963) and the *Paenitentiale Ambrosianum* (first half of the seventh century), ed. Körntgen, *Studien zu den Quellen*: 258–70.

15 These are also sometimes called *paenitalia minora* or *simplices*. The first generation Frankish penitentials comprise of the *Paenitentiale Burgundense*, the *Paenitentiale Bobbiense*, the *Paenitentiale Floriacense*, the *Paenitentiale Parisiense simplex*, the *Paenitentiale Sangallense simplex*, the *Paenitentiale Hubertense*, the *Paenitentiale Oxoniense I*, and the *Paenitentiale Sletstatense*, all ed. Raymund Kottje, *Paenitalia Minora, Francia et Italiae Saeculi 8–9*, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 156 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994). Most of these eight penitentials are only extant in one manuscript and were likely compiled between the late seventh and the ninth centuries.

16 The *Paenitentiale Theodori* (c. 700), also known as *Iudicia Theodori* or *Canones Theodori*, is extant in multiple versions. The historically most influential one is the so-called *Discipulus Umbrense* (U) which was compiled around 700 by one of Theodore's followers. It was edited by Paul W. Finsterwalder, *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis und ihre Überlieferungsformen* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1929): 285–334. A more recent, critical edition can be consulted online and will be used throughout this chapter, cf. Michael D. Elliot, "Paenitentiale Umbrense," University of Toronto, n.d., <http://individual.utoronto.ca/michael Elliot/manuscripts/texts/transcriptions/pthu.pdf>; [accessed 19.12.2022].

17 Cf. *P. Cummeani* III 13; *P. Theodori* (U) XI 5 (threat of being cast out of the church for frequently ignoring fasts), and XII 1–2 (reports Greek practice to excommunicate people who miss communion). In *P. Cummeani* IV 3 and *P. Bigotianum* IV 4, penance on bread and water itself is used to enforce a certain behavior.

sinner were not only to be excluded from the celebration of the eucharist, but were considered *anathema* to all Christians.¹⁸

The vast majority of evidence for this demand for social exclusion can be found in the *Paenitentiale Ambrosianum* and the penitential of Cummean within which the “casting out” of the sinner or a sort of staggered excommunication appears to be the first reaction to encountering sin.¹⁹ The notion of sin as a spreading infection, which needed to be cut out immediately in order to protect the rest of the body seems to have formed the background to this measure. For example, the penitential of Cummean demands that ‘[h]e, however, who will not confess to him who has incensed him, that pestilential person shall be cut off from the company of the saints; if he repents, he shall do penance for as long as he was recalcitrant.’²⁰

In practice this may have meant that other members of the respective Christian community were banned from any social interaction with the sinner who was – temporarily or permanently – considered socially dead.²¹ In most instances, the penitential canons in question seem to envision the context of a close-knit monastic community where the ‘disobedient’ were to ‘remain outside the assembly, without food’ and expected to ‘knock humbly’ to demonstrate their commitment to being readmitted.²²

One provision in the earliest extant penitential, the *Paenitentiale Vinniani*, goes a step further in demanding that the sinner ‘be driven from the bounds of his country and beaten with rods until he is converted, – if he has compunction.’²³

18 Cf. e.g. *P. Vinniani* 31. On penitential sanctions resulting in social exclusion cf. also Rob Meens, “Exil, Buße und sozialer Tod,” in *Sterben über den Tod hinaus. Politische, soziale und religiöse Ausgrenzung in vormodernen Gesellschaften*, eds. Claudia Garnier and Johannes Schnocks (Würzburg: Ergon, 2012): 117–31.

19 Cf. e.g. *P. Ambrosianum* III 6, IV 12, V; *P. Cummeani* III 3, III 14–15, V 3, VII 1; *P. Bigotianum* III 6 2. On this cf. Meens, “Exil”: 120, 124–25.

20 *P. Cummeani* IV 16, ed. and trans. Bieler, *Irish Penitentals: 120–21: Qui uero non uult confitete ei qui se commotauit, abscedatur pestifer ille a coetu sanctorum; si penitet, quanto tempore contradicit tanto peniteat*. Cf. *P. Ambrosianum* IV 12.

21 *P. Cummeani* IX 2 punishes people who “communicate” with cast outs, i.e., individuals who had been excommunicated, with 40 days of fasting. It is unclear whether *communicauere* in this instance refers to social interactions with cast outs or merely to celebrating the eucharist with them. The *P. Bigotianum* 36 elaborates on the reasons why sinners needed to be separated from the community of the righteous and, in reference to *Collectio Hibernensis* XL 1c, explains what the separation entailed: ‘There are three ways in which the just are separated from the unjust – by the Mass, the table, and the kiss of peace.’

22 *P. Cummeani* VIII 4, ed. and trans. Bieler, *Irish Penitentals: 122–23: Inoboediens maneat extra concilium sine cibo et pulset humiliter donec recipiatur quantoque tempore inoboediens fuit tanto in pane at aqua sit*. Cf. *P. Ambrosianum* VIII 2–4 and *P. Cummeani* VIII 5–6, which assign similar punishments for disobedience, blasphemy, and murmuring. Cf. also *P. Bigotianum* VIII 4–5.

23 *P. Vinniani* 31, ed. and trans. Bieler, *Irish Penitentals: 84–85: Si autem non conuersus fuerit, excommunicetur et anathema sit cum omnibus Christianis; exterminabitur de patria sua et uirgis uirgatur usquequo conuertatur si compunctus fuerit*. The context of this provision is formed by a series of canons that deal with the sin of defrauding churches and monasteries, cf. *P. Vinniani* 30.

As far as the laity were concerned, the penitential of Theodore indicates that, in addition to the imposition of the social stigma associated with exclusion from mass and the eucharist, the ecclesiastical institutions had further means of enforcing penance at their disposal. For repeated breaches of the Sunday observance, the penitential proposed flogging or the confiscation of part of the property.²⁴ Meanwhile adulterous women were offered penance in monastic confinement as a way to preserve some of their inheritance. The canon in questions states that '[i]f a woman is an adulteress and her husband does not wish to live with her, if she decides to enter a monastery she shall retain the fourth part of her inheritance. If she decides otherwise, she shall have nothing.'²⁵

2.2 Penance and Punishment

The second type of evidence pertaining to the social dimension of penance are the kinds of sanctions we find in the penitentials. Particularly the Irish and the Anglo-Saxon handbooks of penance contain a range of provisions in which the awarded penance comprises an extended period of fasting (which one might consider the actual penance) and one or more other sanctions which might rather be considered legal measures or punishments.²⁶

For instance, the penitentials occasionally prescribe corporal punishments either as a means to enforce penance or as a sanction for sin. Corporal punishments seem to have been largely reserved for lower clergy and adolescents though.²⁷

The same limitation of a set of punishments to a specific group of people applies to disciplinary measures like deposition, degradation or the ban from entering higher office,

24 *P. Theodori* (U) XI 1, ed. Elliot, *Paenitentiale Umbrense*: 14: *Qui operantur die dominico: eos Greci prima uice arguunt; secunda tollunt aliquid ab eis; tertia uice partem tertiam de rebus, aut uapulant, uel VII diebus peniteant.* Translation John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales and Selections from Related Documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938): 194: 'Those who labor on the Lord's day, the Greeks reprove the first time; the second, they take something from them; the third time [they take] the third part of their possessions, or flog them; or they shall do penance for seven days.'

25 *P. Theodori* (U) XXVII 11, ed. Elliot, *Paenitentiale Umbrense*: 28: *Mulier si adultera est et uir eius non uult habitare cum ea: si uult illa monasterium intrare, quartam partem suae hereditatis obteneat; si non uult, nihil habeat.* Translation McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*: 209.

26 Within the Frankish penitentials, I was only able to identify altogether eleven canons witnessing to sanctions other than fasting. These are *P. Burgundense 1 et par*, which sanction homicides perpetrated by clergy with exile and satisfaction or degradation, *P. Burgundense 30 et par*, which decree the excommunication and the exclusion from the Christian community of clergy refusing penance after taking a wife, *P. Hubertense 39* which orders exile for assaulting one's own parents, and *P. Hubertense 51*, which assigns the same punishment for fornication with one's Godparent.

27 Cf. *P. Columbani* A 9 (50 strokes or imposition of silence for contradicting someone), B 26–27 (strikes and blows as punishment for minor offences); *P. Theodori* (U) II 11 (whipping for boys who fornicate mutually). Corporal punishments are also prescribed to lower status groups in contempo-

which the penitentials could of course only impose on their own staff.²⁸ Reasons for these disciplinary sanctions include mainly sins of fornication but also office violations, such as stealing, failing to baptize sick people or newborns, and superstitious practices.²⁹

Most frequently, however, the punishment prescribed in addition to fasting consists of the demand for compensation (*satisfactio*).³⁰

Especially the penitentials of the Irish and Anglo-Saxon traditions frequently assign *satisfactio* for sins and crimes that were considered grave or disruptive, like bodily harm, fornication, theft or manslaughter. The term is predominantly used in the sense of an actual financial compensation for the harm done.³¹ If, for example, a layman physically hurt another, he was ordered to pay a certain amount (a *pretium*) to cover the doctor's bills and the financial loss the injured suffered due to being ill or disabled following the attack.³² A good example for this sort of compensation can be found in the penitential of Cummean which reads as follows:

He who by a blow in a quarrel renders a man incapacitated or maimed shall meet (the injured man's) medical expenses and shall make good the damages for the deformity and shall do his work until he is healed and do penance for half a year.³³

Compensation in the form of payments or sanctions resulting in financial loss are also required for sins of fornication. For instance, a man who had sexual intercourse with a married woman was expected to pay the betrayed husband her chastity price (*pretium pudicitiae*).³⁴ In case a man had sexual relations with an unmarried woman, the

rare conciliar legislation, cf. e.g. *Concilium Aspasii* 551, cn. 3, *Concilium Narbonense* 589, cn. 14 and 15, and *Concilium Matisconsense* II (585), cn. 1, all ed. Charles de Clercq, *Concilia Galliae A. 511–A. 695*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 148A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1963): 163–64; 256–57; 239–40.

²⁸ For examples on disciplinary punishments for clergy, cf. *P. Vinniani* 11 and 12; *P. Cummeani* II 1; *P. Bigotianum* I 1; *P. Theodori* (U) I 1 and V 1.

²⁹ Cf. *P. Theodori* (U) IX 1 (fornication), IX 2 (return to secular habit), IX 4 (marrying a strange / foreign woman), IX 6 (having a concubine as hindrance to ordination), IX 7 (failing to baptize a sick person), IX 8 (killing or fornication), IX 10 (remarriage as hindrance to ordination), XIV 28 (failing to baptize a pagan child who later dies), XV 4 (performing superstitious acts).

³⁰ On the sanction of *satisfactio* in the penitentials cf. extensively Rob Meens, "Penance and Satisfaction: Conflict Settlement and Penitential Practices in the Frankish World in the Early Middle Ages," in *Wergild, Compensation and Penance: The Monetary Logic of Early Medieval Conflict Resolution*, eds. Lukas Bothe, Stefan Esders, and Han Nijdam (Leiden: Brill, 2021): 219–30.

³¹ In *P. Cummeani*, however, I have found some examples for the term being used more in the sense of making an (official) apology. *P. Cummeani* IV 12, for instance, requires the penitent to make satisfaction, live secluded, and do penance for seven days for cursing a brother in anger. Cf. also *P. Cummeani* VIII 3, VIII 7; *P. Bigotianum* III 5 2, VIII 1, VIII 2 1.

³² Cf. *P. Cummeani* IV 9; *P. Vinniani* 9; *P. Columbani* B 21.

³³ *P. Cummeani* IV 9, ed. and trans. Bieler: 120–21: *Qui per rixam ictu debilem uel deformem hominem reddit, inpena in medicos curat et maculae pretium et opus eius donec sanetur restituat et dimedium anni peniteat.*

³⁴ Cf. *P. Columbani* B 14. For background on the *pretium pudicitiae* mentioned here cf. Law of Æthelberht ch. 31, *Leges Burgundionum* (Liber Constitutionum) XXXVI, and *Codex Theodosianus* 9 42 1. Cf.

male sinner was to either marry her or pay her legal guardians a fee to compensate them for the humiliation (*pretium humiliationes*).³⁵ The punishment for fornication with unfree dependents consisted of either the obligation to sell them or to set them free.³⁶

In the case of theft, the penitentials usually demanded the restitution of the stolen goods or the value thereof.³⁷ Sometimes the canons required the two- or even fourfold restitution.³⁸

Compensation payments could also reduce the length of the prescribed penance.³⁹ Conversely – and this is, where it gets really interesting – the penitentials provide information on what happened if the sinners were not able to meet the compensation claims. As an alternative to payments or restitution, they allowed for an extension of the fast.⁴⁰ A provision in the penitential of Cummean provides an example for this possibility in the context of the provision on bodily harm discussed above (p. 234). While canon nine imposes *satisfactio* for this offence, canon ten states that if the penitent ‘has not the wherewithal to make restitution for these things, he shall do penance for one year.’⁴¹ In cases where the Church itself was the injured party, it may have advanced the compensation. In other cases, the church may have paid the compensation on behalf of the penitents in order to settle the conflict. It is possible that this resulted in penitents being indebted to pay alms or to work in the Church’s service. At least this seems to be suggested, for instance, in a canon dealing with theft in the penitential of Columbanus:

If any layman has committed theft, that is, has stolen an ox or a horse or a sheep or any beast of his neighbour’s, if he has done it once or twice, let him first restore to his neighbour the loss which he has caused, and let him do penance for three forty-day periods on bread and water;

Meens, “Wergild”: 221–22; Theodore J. Rivers, “Adultery in Early Anglo-Saxon Society: Æthelberht 31 in Comparison with Continental Germanic Law,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 20 (1991): 19–25.

35 Cf. *P. Columbani* B 16; Meens, “Wergild”: 221–22.

36 Cf. *P. Vinniani* 39, 40; *P. Theodori* (U) XIV 12. The setting free of a slave is also required as part of the penitential sanctions for perjury, cf. *P. Vinniani* 22.

37 Cf. *P. Columbani* A 8, B 7.

38 Cf. *P. Vinniani* 25; *P. Theodori* (U) III 2.

39 Cf. *P. Bigotianum* IV 1 2; *P. Theodori* (U) III 3, IV 1, for the possibility to reduce penance through payments. *P. Cummeani* II 5 offers the possibility to undergo a severer form of penance in order to prepare for monastic vows after sinning. Furthermore, the penitentials frequently offer alternative punishments, cf. *P. Ambrosianum* I 4 (fasting or almsgiving for drinking too much); *P. Bigotianum* IV 1 2 (laying down arms and serving god or penance for seven years for killing a cleric or monk); *P. Theodori* (U) IV 4 (penance or laying down arms for killing someone), and VIII 11 (flogging or 20 days penance for boys who defiled themselves).

40 *P. Columbani* B 7, B 19; *P. Ambrosianum* II 2, III 3, IV 6; *P. Cummeani* IV 10; cf. *P. Bigotianum* III 2 1 and IV 3 1.

41 *P. Cummeani* IV 10, ed. and trans. Bieler: 120–21: *Si uero non habeat unde restituat haec, .i. annum peniteat.*

but if he has made a practice of stealing often, and cannot make restitution, let him do penance for a year and three forty-day periods, and further undertake not to repeat it, and thus let him communicate at Easter of the second year, that is, after two years, on condition that, out of his own labour, he first gives alms to the poor and a meal to the priest who adjudged his penance, and so let the guilt of his evil habit be forgiven.⁴²

That *satisfactio* could take the form of lasting financial and / or labour obligations is also indicated in the sanctions imposed for bodily harm or homicide in the *Paenitentiale Columbani* and several Frankish penitentials. For instance, the penitential of Columbanus decreed that homicides should undergo penance in exile for three years and thereafter render their services to the relatives of their victim:

Whoever has committed murder, that is, has killed his neighbour, let him do penance three years on bread and water as an unarmed exile, and after three years let him return to his own, rendering the compensation of filial piety and duty to the relatives of the slain, and thus after (making) satisfaction let him be restored to the altar at the discretion of the priest.⁴³

Similarly, other provisions in the Irish penitentials ordered sinners to offer themselves (i.e., their services) in place of their deceased or injured victims.⁴⁴ Provisions like these suggest that at least in some communities the penance for certain offences could entail lasting obligations to the injured party in the form of bonded labour.

⁴² *P. Columbani* B 19, ed. and trans. Bieler: 102–5: *Si quis laicus furtum fecerit, id est bouem aut aequum aut ouem aut aliquod animal proximi sui furauerit, si semel aut bis fecit, reddat primum proximo suo dampnum quod fecit et tribus xlmis in pane et aqua peniteat; si autem saepe furtum facere consuevit et reddere non potuerit, anno et .iii. xlmis peniteat et deinceps nequaquam facere promittat et sic in Pascha alterius anni communicet, id est post duos annos data tamen ante pauperibus de suo labore helemosina et sacerdoti paenitentiam iudicanti epula et ita abremittatur illi malae consuetudinis culpa.* Cf. also *P. Hubertense* 7 according to which the penance for *maleficium* included constant almsgiving, and *P. Theodori* (U) XVII 5, which I discuss below, p. 239.

⁴³ *P. Columbani* B 13, ed. and trans. Bieler, *Irish Penitentials*: 102–3: *Quicumque fecerit homicidium, id est, proximum suum occiderit, iii annis inermis exsul in pane et aqua paeniteat, et post iii annos reuertatur in sua reddens uicem parentibus occisi pietatis et officii et sic post satisfactionem iudicio sacerdotis iungatur altario.* On this provision cf. Rob Meens, “Penance, Shame, and Honour in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Shame between Punishment and Penance: The Social Usages of Shame in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, eds. Bénédicte Sère and Jörg Wettlaufer, *Micrologus’ library* 54 (Florence: Sismel, 2013): 90–91. This canon specifically refers to lay people committing homicide. The Frankish penitentials only include *P. Columbani* B 1, which refers to clerics committing the same crime. Only three of the Frankish penitentials (*P. Oxoniense*, *P. Floriacense*, and *P. Hubertense*) add *laicus* to their version of the canon and – at the same time – omit the demand for the sanctions of exile and *satisfactio*.

⁴⁴ Cf. *P. Vinniani* 23; *P. Columbani* B 1, B 21; *P. Cummeani* IV 9.

3 Penal Enslavement and Bonded Labour

As indicated above, the late antique and early medieval penitentials also occasionally assign sanctions that suggest a more direct involvement of ecclesiastical institutions with penal enslavement and bonded labour. In addition to ambiguous forms of *satisfactio*, the penitentials prescribe enslavement and forced (monastic) service to God as sanctions for certain sins.

3.1 Penal Enslavement

For example, severe forms of fornication, that is sexual trespasses such as adultery, were occasionally punished with enslavement or comparable dependency relations. The Irish penitential of Finnian, for example, ordered adulterous women to ‘serve [their] husband in the place of a slave’.⁴⁵ While the relevant canon in the *Paenitentiale Vinniani* is indeed the only extant penitential provision which recommends the degradation of an adulterous wife to the bottom of the social order within her own household, other penitential provisions and contemporary laws appear to confirm the practice of sanctioning certain crimes with penal enslavement. The Anglo-Saxon penitential of Theodore, for instance, lists fornication among the offences sanctioned with enslavement in a provision concerned with the right to remarry. It states that

[i]f a husband makes himself a slave through theft or fornication or any sin, the wife, if she has not been married before, has the right to take another husband after a year. This is not permitted to one who has been twice married.⁴⁶

While this canon does not order penal enslavement itself, it provides guidance on the remarriage of women whose spouses had been enslaved for committing an offence.

45 *P. Vinniani* 43–44 (S), ed. and trans. Bieler, *Irish Penitentials: 90–91: Si alicuius uxor fornicata fuerit et habitet cum alio uiro, non oportet adducere uxorem aliam quandiu fuerit uxor eius uiua* (44) *prima, si forte conuersa fuerit ad penitentiam, et decet suscipi eam, si satis ac libenter expeterit; sed dotem ei non dabit et seruiet uiro suo priori quandiu fuerit in corpore: uicem serui uel ancille expleat in omni pietate atque subiectione.* ‘(43) If a man’s wife commits fornication and cohabits with another man, he ought not to take another wife while his first wife is alive, (44) in the hope that, perchance, she be converted to penance, and it is becoming to take her back, if she fully and freely seeks this; but [she shall not give dowry to him OR he shall not give dowry to her.], and shall [serve] her former husband as long as he is in the body: she shall make amends in the place of a male(?) or female slave, in all loyalty and subjection.’ My alterations to the translation in [].

46 *P. Theodori* (U) XXVII 9, ed. Elliot, *Paenitentiale Umbrense: 28: Maritus si seipsum in furtu aut fornicatione seruum facit uel quocumque peccato, mulier, si prius non habuit coniugium, habet potestatem post annum alterum accipere uirum. Digamo non licet.* Translation by John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: 209.*

The fact that such cases required their own legislation suggests a certain frequency of the practice of condemning sinners or criminals to slavery.

One might argue, however, that so far, we have not seen any evidence that the Church ever enforced penal enslavement itself or that it was directly involved with the supervision of penally enslaved people. Rather, in the examples presented, the injured parties, i.e., the betrayed husband or the grieving relatives, were envisioned to enforce the submission of the offenders – even if they did so with the explicit sanction of the Church (and the law). The Anglo-Saxon penitential of Theodore, however, contains several provisions which indicate a more direct involvement of the Church with the practice of penal enslavement and related punitive measures.⁴⁷ For example, *P. Theodori* (U) III 1 sanctions the abduction of monks by laypeople with either “human servitude” (*humanum seruitium*) or forced monasticism.⁴⁸

This provision indicates that under circumstances in which the Church’s jurisdiction was indisputable, because it was itself the offended party, it would not only decree but possibly also enforce the appropriate sanctions. The noteworthy alternative between “human slavery” or entering a monastery further suggests a certain leeway for the priests adjudging penance that allowed them to take into account the circumstances of the offence such as the social status of the offender and the readiness of a monastery in the vicinity to take in another criminal.⁴⁹

47 *P. Theodori* (U) XXVIII, ed. Elliot, *Paenitentiale Umbrense*: 30–31, for instance, includes a section with the heading *De Seruis et Ancillis*. This section contains a collection of provisions regulating changes in legal status of people either entering or exiting slavery, i.e., through birth, marriage or to debt.

48 *P. Theodori* (U) III 1, ed. Elliot, *Paenitentiale Umbrense*: 7: *Si quis laicus de monasterio monachum duxerit furtim, aut intret in monasterium deo seruire aut humanum subeat seruitium*. Translation McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*: 186: ‘If any layman carries off a monk from the monastery by stealth, he shall either enter a monastery to serve God or subject himself to human servitude.’

49 On the alternative between monastic service and human servitude, cf. Julia Winnebeck, “Slaves and Slavery in the Late Antique and Early Medieval Penitentals,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 75 (2021): 142. The story of Libran in the *Vita Columbae* offers an interesting example of a sinner who, after having committed a crime, first fell into debt bondage to a wealthy secular man who had paid the compensation he owed for his crime and then escaped to choose “serving God” as alternative punishment. It appears as though the Church or Libran himself still had to compensate the secular lord for his loss. Cf. Adomnán, *Vita Columbae* II, 39, ed. and trans. Marjorie O. Anderson and Alan O. Anderson, *Life of Columba*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991): 154–63. Other translation by Richard Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St. Columba* (London: Penguin, 1995). Cf. on this story, Meens, “Penance, Shame, and Honour”: 91–94. On the duty of monasteries to take in penitents, cf. *P. Vinniani* 33, ed. Bieler, *Irish Penitentals*: 86: *Et basilicis sanctorum ministrandum est et ex facultatibus nostris omnibus qui sunt in necessitatibus constituti conpatiendum est nobis et in domibus nostris suscipiendi sunt nobis peregrini, sicut preceptum est a Domino; [. . .].* Translation and interpretation Pamela O’Neill, “Peregrinatio: Punishment and Exile in the Early Gaelic Church,” *Australian Celtic Journal* 9 (2010): 35: ‘[And] the churches of the saints are to be served and all who are in need are to be supported by us according to our ability; and exiles (*peregrini*) are to be received by us into our houses, as is commanded by the Lord.’

Finally, another provision in the penitential of Theodore offers a hint that in addition to acknowledging, decreeing, and possibly enforcing penal enslavement for certain offences, ecclesiastical institutions may have acquired criminals as slaves by paying or foregoing whatever compensation they owed. To this effect, *P. Theodori* (U) XVII 5 declared that “[a] bishop or an abbot may keep a criminal as a slave if he [sc. the criminal] has not the means of redeeming himself.”⁵⁰

This provision should be read against the backdrop of penitential provisions assigning *satisfactio* (see above 2.2) and understood in light of the fact that most legal codes of the Post-Roman era prescribed compensation payments rather than corporal punishments for the majority of offences.⁵¹ These compensations were, in all likelihood, difficult to pay for most individuals and, therefore, provided a slippery slope into debt bondage.⁵²

3.2 Forced “Service to God”

A second group of canons which indicates that sinners or criminals were inflicted with lasting obligations to individuals or ecclesiastical institutions via the system of penance are provisions that assign “forced monasticism” or nonspecific services to God as a punishment. Like penal enslavement, these punishments are exclusively awarded for grave offences such as theft, abduction, perjury, treason, and manslaughter. The severity of those sins probably required the penitent to be removed from their current social community for the duration of their penance.⁵³ As is still fairly palpable in some of these provisions, the punishments of forced monasticism and “service to God” probably developed out of the more traditional punishment of exile which the earlier penitentials also prescribed from time to time.⁵⁴ The Irish peniten-

50 *P. Theodori* (U) XVII 5, ed. Elliot, *Paenitentiale Umbrense: 20: Episcopus et abbas hominem sceleratum servum possunt habere si pretium redimendi non habet*. Translation McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*: 200.

51 Cf. Hermann Nehlsen, “Entstehung des öffentlichen Strafrechts bei den germanischen Stämmen,” in *Gerichtsglauben-Vorträge: Freiburger Festkolloquium zum fünfundsiebzigsten Geburtstag von Hans Thieme*, ed. Karl Kroeschell (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1983): 12.

52 Cf. Alice Rio, “Penal Enslavement in the Early Middle Age,” in *Global Convict Labour*, eds. Christian De Vito and Alex Lichtenstein, *Studies in Global History* 19 (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 90–91.

53 Cf. Meens, “Wergild”: 223.

54 For evidence on the punishment of exile in the penitentials, cf. *P. Vinniani* 24; *P. Columbani* B 1, B 2; *P. Cummeani* II 7, II 17, IV 6; *P. Bigotianum* IV 3 4; *P. Theodori* (U) II 16. For the ‘Irish tradition of becoming an “exile for God”’ (Isabel Moreira, *Heaven’s Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010]: 115–16), cf. Martin Leigh Harrison, “Penitential Pilgrimage,” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage*, eds. Larissa J. Taylor et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010): n.p., http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2213-2139_emp_SIM_00399; O’Neill, “Peregrinatio”: 34. On the origins and the development of the punishment of monastic confinement, cf. Guy Geltner, “Detrusio, Penal Cloistering in the Middle

tial of Cummean, for instance, sanctioned repeated stealing with ‘the yoke of exile under another abbot’ (*iugi exilio sub alio abbate*).⁵⁵ While this canon addressed monks, who were simply moved from one monastery to another, other provisions inform us, that the same punishment could be applied to laypeople, too.⁵⁶ As shown above, the abduction of monks was sanctioned with either “human servitude” or forced service to God in a monastery according to the penitential of Theodore.⁵⁷ The same penitential also condemned repeat offenders to life in a monastery. The relevant canon ordered that ‘[h]e who has committed many evil deeds, that is, murder, adultery with a woman and with a beast, and theft, shall go into a monastery and do penance until his death.’⁵⁸

The Irish penitential of Columbanus prescribed lifelong penance in a monastery for cases of perjury and further demanded that these penitents had their heads shaven – whether as a sign of their penitent status or as part of their forced consecration (*Mönchung*) remains ambiguous.⁵⁹ While all of the eight Frankish penitentials omitted this obscure punishment from their version of Columbanus’ provision, it later reappeared in Halitgar’s so-called *Paenitentiale Romanum* and another related penitential which is preserved in a ninth century manuscript in Düsseldorf. This provision stated that ‘[i]f any layman has perjured himself out of greed, he shall sell all his things, and give to the poor, and receive the tonsure [shall be shaved] in a monastery: and there he shall serve God until the day of his death.’⁶⁰

While not directly condemning the sinners to monastic detention or service, the prescribed penances of several other canons suggest that penitents were subjected to a similar fate and considered dependents of the Church. The *Paenitentiale Theodori*

Ages,” *Revue Bénédictine* 118, no. 1 (2008): 100; Julia Hillner, *Prison, Punishment and Penance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 281–341.

55 *P. Cummeani* I 12, ed. Bieler, *Irish Penitentials*: 112. Translation in the text according to McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*: 102. Cf. *P. Bigotianum* I 4.

56 Other known sources witnessing to monastic confinement or forced monasticism as a punishment, namely the council records, almost exclusively prescribe it for clerics. On this cf. Harold E. Mawdsley, “Exile in the Post-Roman Successor States 439–c.650” (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2018) https://www.academia.edu/45084297/Exile_in_the_Post_Roman_Successor_States_439_c_650 [accessed 15.10.2024].

57 *P. Theodori* (U) III 1.

58 *P. Theodori* (U) VII 1, ed. Elliot, *Paenitentiale Umbrense*: 11: *Qui multa mala fecerit – id est homicidium, adulterium cum muliere et cum pecode, et furtum – eat in monasterium et peniteat usque ad mortem*. Translation McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*: 190.

59 *P. Columbani* B 20, ed. and trans. Bieler, *Irish Penitentials*: 104–5: *Si quis laicus periurauerit, si per cupiditatem hoc fecerit, totas res suas uendat et donet pauperibus et conuertatur ex integro ad Dominum et tundatur omni dimisso saeculo et usque ad mortem seruiat Deo in monasterio; [...]*.

60 Manuscript Collection, University and State Library Düsseldorf, Ms B 113, 79 v: *Si quis laicus periurauerit per cupiditate, totas res suas vendat, et det pauperibus, et tond[e]atur in monasterio: et ibi d[e]o seruiat usque in diem exitus sui.* ‘Wenn irgendein Laie aus Gier einen falschen Schwur geleistet hat, soll er seinen ganzen Besitz verkaufen und den Armen geben und im Kloster die Tonsur empfangen und dort Gott dienen bis zum Tag seines Todes.’ Cf. Hermann J. Schmitz, *Die Bußbücher und die Bußdisciplin der Kirche. Nach handschriftlichen Quellen dargestellt* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1883): 465–89.

(U) and the Bigotian penitential, for example, decreed that sinners who had killed members of the clergy were to give up their arms and serve God (*arma relinquere et Deo servire*).⁶¹ The penitential of Cummean featured the curious addition that such penitents were considered ‘dead to the world’ (*mortuus mundo*) during their lifelong service to God which could either be interpreted as a reference to the remoteness of their service (e.g. in a monastery) or their social status as dependents: ‘He who commits murder through nursing hatred in his mind, shall [after having given up his arms, live unto God being dead to the world until (his own) death].’⁶² Another canon in this penitential awards the same sanction, i.e. nonspecific service to God as *mortuus mundo*, for treason.⁶³

Overall, the punishments of penal enslavement and monastic exile or forced service to the Church are fairly well attested as sanctions for severe crimes within penitential texts. In assigning these curious measures, the penitentials bear witness to a general shift within the penal system from classic forms of exile to forms of (monastic) confinement and penal servitude. In keeping even hardened criminals and sinners alive and under the supervision of Church representatives, these punishments served the core religious purpose of late antique and early medieval penance to redeem as many souls as possible while also providing a steady stream of dependent labourers for the Church.

4 Conclusion: Serving God – Serving the Church

The character of the penitential sanctions and the available means to enforce them show that late antique and early medieval penance can and should be understood as a fundamentally social institution. This is not to say, that it did not serve a deeply religious and spiritual purpose at the same time. But if one looks at penance from the perspective of social history, as I have done in this chapter, it appears rather obvious that the earliest penitential handbooks primarily aimed to uphold a certain social and ethical order and to settle conflicts within the local Christian community.⁶⁴ Particu-

61 *P. Theodori* (U) IV 5a, ed. Elliot, *Paenitentiale Umbrense*: 8: *Si quis occiderit monachum uel clericum: arma relinquat et deo seruiat, uel VII annos peniteat – in iudicio episcopi est.* Translation by McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*: 187: ‘If one slays a monk or a cleric, he shall lay aside his arms and serve God, or he shall do penance for seven years. He is in the judgment of his bishop.’ Cf. Big IV 1 2. On the giving up of arms as part of the penitential sanction of exile, cf. also *P. Columbani* B 13 and B 20. On *arma relinquere* as a punishment in connection with forced exile inside or outside a monastery, cf. Lotte Kéry, *Gottesfurcht und irdische Strafe. Der Beitrag des mittelalterlichen Kirchenrechts zur Entstehung des öffentlichen Strafrechts, Konflikt, Verbrechen und Sanktion in der Gesellschaft Alteuropas* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006): 128; Raymund Kottje, “‘Buße oder Strafe?’ Zur ‘iustitia’ in den ‘libri penitentiales’,” *Al giustizia nell’alto medioevo (Secoli V–VIII)* 1 (1995): 454.

62 *P. Cummeani* IV 5, ed. and trans. Bieler, *Irish penitentials*: 118–19; my alterations to the translation in []: *Qui homicidium odii meditatione facit, relictis armis usque ad mortem mortuus mundo uiuat Deo.*

63 Cf. *P. Cummeani* IX 13.

64 Meens, “Wergild”: 222.

larly the Irish penitentials and the Anglo-Saxon penitential of Theodore suggest a historical context in which penitentials were used in place of – rather than in addition to – other legal norms. Much like monastic rules (to which they bear significant similarities), the majority of their provisions postulate an environment, where lay people, too, were among the dependents of the ecclesiastical institution awarding penance – if not in an economical sense, then with respect to social conduct and legal proceedings.⁶⁵ In comparison, the Frankish penitentials contain barely any evidence pertaining to the social or legal purpose of penance. In fact, their compilers seem to have eliminated most references to punishments other than fasting from the Irish material they included.⁶⁶ The lack of direct evidence for penance taking the form of sanctions other than fasting might indicate a different *Sitz im Leben* of the Frankish penitentials compared to those of the Irish and Anglo-Saxon tradition: Perhaps, they were compiled and applied in contexts where ecclesiastical institutions did not have extensive legal authority and, accordingly, punishments of a more secular character could not be enforced.⁶⁷

Regardless of whether the penitential punishments, including the assignment of extended fasts, are understood as additional or the sole sanctions for the listed offences, their enforcement obviously required a significant degree of authority or power on the part of the ecclesiastical body awarding penance and the support of secular authorities. This is of course especially true for sanctions that entailed the permanent or temporary entry of individuals into dependency relations. Even though these punishments cannot exactly be regarded as an invention of the Christian Church, the imposition of slavery, bonded labour, and monastic confinement or service as means to sanction certain sins or crimes was certainly promoted within the system of penance. More importantly, the sources indicate that ecclesiastical institutions may have functioned as an administrative channel for these practices: Perhaps, local priests in charge of penance took on the role of modern-day notaries. Exchanges of workforce for debt resulting from civil or criminal proceedings were processed by and through the Church which not only had the financial means to pay out compensations but also the authority and the resources to draw up official documents to testify to these agreements and the capacities to hold

65 On the lay people addressed in the Irish and Anglo-Saxon penitentials, cf. Meens, “Exil, Buße und sozialer Tod”: 119. On the question who had access to penance, cf. Colmán Etchingham, “The Early Irish Church: Some Observance on Pastoral Care and Dues”, *Éiru* 42 (1991): 118; Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland, a.d. 650 to 1000* (Maynooth: Laigin Publications, 1999): 290–318; Winnebeck, “Moving Penance”: 149–153.

66 The only exceptions appear to be the canons dealing with homicide. However, only the oldest of the Frankish penitentials, the *P. Bobbiense*, preserves the demand for compensation in case of murder. By tracing the adoption of this canon throughout the later tripartite penitentials, Meens observes a ‘tendency to leave out the requirement to compensate the offended party’ (Meens, “Wergild”: 225).

67 The extant manuscripts of the Frankish penitentials do not support the hypothesis that most priests had access to more than one penitential or penitentials from different traditions. Thus, it seems more likely that the elimination of additional sanctions was due to the context of application.

and employ dependents. Unfortunately, the penitentials themselves do not provide much information on the practical implementation of penitential sanctions and neither do historiographic sources. Further research into the so-called *formulae*, which are model drafts of legal agreements between different parties, might offer more details on the process of assigning penal enslavement and bonded labour as punishments for sin.⁶⁸

Regardless of the uncertainty regarding the practical application of penitential rulings, we know for certain that the Church, or rather its higher representatives, ruled over several groups of dependents. Aside from the clergy these included slaves the ecclesiastical institutions had gotten hold of by way of donation, inheritance or as part of the properties it acquired.⁶⁹ The precise character of their “service” to the Church – in a monastery or elsewhere – remains ambiguous. We have no evidence that the social or legal status of slaves was altered on entry into the service of the Church. Neither do the provisions which inform us on the practice of forced monasticism or penal service to God indicate that the individuals subjected to these punishments were necessarily turned into “proper” monks and nuns. The assessment of the circumstances and living conditions of Church dependents, much like the assessment of any type of dependency, therefore needs to take into account other factors than merely the dependents’ legal status as free or enslaved or their association with a certain institution like the Church. These factors may be, for example the dependents’ gender, age, and – last but not least – the type of work they were assigned.⁷⁰ While this evidence is of course sparse and often rather hidden, put together, it should provide a better understanding of the Church’s handling of slavery and other dependency relations. For instance, the sources indicate that slaves did indeed work on monastic premises in all sorts of different functions, for example as personal servants or simply in the function of rural labourers.⁷¹ One particularly interesting canon in the records

68 Beta versions of editions and German translations of these collections can be accessed via the “Formulae – Litterae – Chartae”-project of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Hamburg in cooperation with the university of Hamburg: https://werkstatt.formulae.uni-hamburg.de/collections/formulae_col lection [accessed 30.08.2023].

69 Cf. e.g. John Chapman, *St. Benedict and the Sixth Century* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1929): 147–72, esp. 152–54; Jens-Uwe Krause, *Geschichte der Spätantike: Eine Einführung*, *Studium Geschichte*, 4761 (Tübingen: A. Francke, 2018): 291.

70 Cf. Rio, *Slavery After Rome*: 246–47.

71 These references can be found in several monastic rules, such as the *Regula Monachorum* by Isidor of Sevilla or the *Regula Magistri*, and in contemporary hagiography, for example the *Vitae Caesarii episcopi Arelatensis libri duo*. Cf. Heike Grieser, “Antike Sklaverei und entstehendes christliches Mönchtum: Facetten eines spannungsreichen Verhältnisses,” in *Theologie und Sklaverei: Von der Antike bis in die frühe Neuzeit*, eds. Heike Grieser and Nicole Priesching (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2016): 62–63, 72–73; Alexandra Hasse-Ungeheuer, “. . . weil die göttliche Gnade alle gleich aufnimmt” (Novellae Iustiniani 5, 2): Sklaven werden zu Mönchen. Der Umgang von Kirche und Staat mit der ‘Klosterflucht’ von Sklaven in der Spätantike,” in *Sklaverei und Zwangsarbeit zwischen Akzeptanz und Widerstand*,

of the council of Epao sanctioned the sale of slaves for the simple reason that it would be unfair on monks to perform hard agricultural labour while slaves enjoyed leisure time.⁷² Furthermore, there are several hints in the extant sources to slaves living and working in the households of members of the clergy, most notably in conciliar legislation concerned with the presence of female slaves and the temptation they provided.⁷³ The above-mentioned examples suggest, that the reality of “serving God” or, rather, the Church may not have differed much at all from dependency relations outside the ecclesiastical realm. Instead, the experience of Church dependents like that of other dependents was down to a range of different factors, the careful consideration of which should produce some interesting findings in the future.

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ed. Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto, *Sklaverei – Knechtschaft – Zwangsarbeit* 8 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2011): 149–50.

72 *C. Epaoense* (517), cn. 8, ed. de Clercq, *Concilia Galliae*: 26: *Mancipia uero monachis donata ab abbate non leceat manumitti; iniustum enim potamus, ut monachis cotidianum rurale opus facientibus serui eorum libertatis otio potiantur.* ‘Slaves who have been donated to the monks may not be freed by the abbot; for we consider it unjust that while monks perform the daily rural labour their slaves have the leisure of freedom.’ Cf. *C. Agathense* 9 (56), ed. Charles Munier, *Concilia Galliae A. 314–A. 506*, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 148 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1963): 226. On this peculiar provision, cf. Joseph Limmer, *Konzilien und Synoden im spätantiken Gallien von 314 bis 696 nach Christi Geburt: Teil 2, Zusammenschau wichtiger Themenkreise*, Veröffentlichungen des Internationalen Forschungszentrums für Grundfragen der Wissenschaften Salzburg 10 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2004): 178; Sommar, *Slaves of the Churches*: 375.

73 Cf. e.g., *C. Arelatense* II (442–506), cn. 4; *C. Agathense* (506), cn. 11 and 28; *C. Claremontanum seu Aruernense* (535), cn. 16; *C. Aspasii* (551), cn. 2.

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Michael Schulz

The Impact of Faith: Bartolomé de Las Casas' Cultural Turn in his Interpretation of Aristotle as a Resource for Overcoming Slavery in the West Indies

1 Introduction

*Consuetudo similis est naturae, ideo difficile est ipsam mutare.*¹ Or, in English, 'Consuetudo (habit or custom) is similar to nature, therefore it is difficult to change it.'

In the sixteenth century, the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566) refers to Aristotle's idea of *ethos*². The Dominican friar thus invokes Aristotle's notion of *consuetudo*, according to which habits, customs, ways of thinking and behaving either do not change at all or only do so with great difficulty. Differences in habit or custom can give the impression that they are fixed in human nature. Yet Las Casas argues instead that these differences between people should be attributed to cultural divergence.

At the core of their human nature, people are equal. Nevertheless, Las Casas does not deny differences in the natural realm. Indeed, following Aristotle, he describes variations in custom or habit as reactions to diverse climatic and environmental conditions.³ However, for Las Casas, such differences do not constitute a difference that would abolish human unity and equality. The Dominican essentially attributes the striking and provocative differences between peoples to the *consuetudines*, i.e., to people's different ways of life – to their respective *ethos*, as Aristotle says, or to culture, as we might say⁴.

1 Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria* II, c. 74, *Obras Completas* [abbr. OC], vol. 7, eds. Vidal Abril Castelló et al. (Madrid: Alianza Editorial): 648.

2 Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I, 11; 1370a: ὁμοιον γάρ τι τὸ ἔθος τῆ φύσει ('Similar is, in fact, [the] ethos to [the] nature.');

Nicomachean Ethics VII 10 (1152a): '[. . .] for habit [*éthos*] is easier than nature to change. Indeed, the reason why habit is also difficult to change is that it is like nature [. . .]'

(trans. Terence Irwin, *Aristotle – Nicomachean Ethics: Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999): 114.

3 Aristotle, *Politics* VII, 7 (1327b20); trans. Charles D.C. Reeve, *Aristotle – Politics: A New Translation with Introduction and Notes* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2017): 168. Cf. Bruno Rech, "Bartolomé de Las Casas und Aristoteles," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 22, no. 1 (1985): 39–68.

4 Neither does a differentiation between ἔθος / *éthos* (custom, habit) and ἦθος / *êthos* (way of thinking and acting, mentality, character, basic attitude) play a role for Las Casas, nor is he interested in the exact meaning of the word in the differentiation of pathos and logos in Aristotle. Cf. Eckart Schütrumpf, *Die Bedeutung des Wortes êthos in der Poetik des Aristoteles* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1970). In any

In this chapter, I will explain how Las Casas uses the term *ethos*, which he borrows from Aristotle, and how he formulates arguments to dispute the legitimacy of the enslavement of indigenous people in the Americas. In speaking to his own context, he uses Aristotle to argue against the Aristotle of his time. Against the Aristotle of the Renaissance, he must refute that the indigenous West Indian is a ‘natural slave’ (*physei doulos*⁵) because he allegedly has little mental power and therefore needs the guidance of the intellectually superior Europeans.⁶

In doing so, Las Casas develops a cultural view of human nature to accommodate Jesus’ commitment to charity, which in his understanding, fundamentally excludes slavery. Las Casas’ Christianity thus has immediate socio-political consequences. However, since he was writing in an era shaped by the Renaissance, the theological foundations of his approach had to pass through the medium of Greek philosophy.

2 Las Casas’ Conversion

Before discussing Las Casas’ argument against natural slavery, I would like to take a brief look at the life of this impressive Dominican.⁷ Born in Sevilla in 1484, he arrived in 1502 at the age of 18 on the island of La Española (Hispaniola, Hispaniola), where today Haiti and the Dominican Republic are located. He lived as a colonist and landowner. In 1507 Las Casas entered the priesthood, but initially his calling did not significantly impact his attitude towards slavery. Indeed, he held natives as slaves in both Hispaniola and Cuba.

While in Hispaniola, he heard of the first protest of the Dominicans against the exploitation of the aborigines. In his *Historia de las Indias*, which he started writing in 1527, Las Casas transmitted the famous sermon of Antonio Montesino, who cried out in Advent 1511, ‘You are all in mortal sin [. . .] Say, by what right do you hold those Indios in such cruel and terrible bondage? Are they not human beings?’⁸ These words made him think.

Finally, while preparing a sermon for Pentecost, a word from the Old Testament specifically from Jesus Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), struck him. Las Casas read in the Vul-

case, according to Schütrumpf, *Bedeutung des Wortes*: 13, it is correct to understand by ἦθος / *ethos* also a habit formed by habituation. According to Wolfgang Kluxen, “Art. ‘Ethos,’” *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 3 (1995): 939–40, under certain circumstances *ethos* can be understood as a synonym for culture.

5 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Charles David Chanel Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2017, kindle): 6. Kindle-Version, I 4, 1254a, p. 6.

6 Aristotle, *Politics* I, 3–5; 1253b–1254b: 5–7.

7 David Orique, “Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566): A ‘Brevisima’ Biographical Sketch,” *INTI, Revista de literatura hispánica* 85–86 (2017): 32–51.

8 Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, III, c. 4, OC, vol. 5 (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994): 1762.

gata, 'A meagre diet is the very life of the poor, to deprive them of it is to commit murder, is a *homo sanguinis*. To take away a fellow man's livelihood is to kill him, to deprive an employee of his wages is to shed blood.'⁹ Las Casas was driven to ask: was he such a *homo sanguinis*, a man of blood?

He had another life-altering experience when he was denied absolution in confession by a Dominican priest who belonged to Antonio Montesinos' community.¹⁰ The Dominicans proclaimed in their sermons that they would not absolve anyone in confession who did not renounce his slaves and set them free. In confession Las Casas sought to justify his ownership of slaves. Nevertheless, the experience prompted great introspection. Eventually, it motivated him to give up his landed property, dismiss his slaves, and defend the *Indios*. He organized a religious resistance to the colonial politics of slavery and became an advocate for legislation to protect the indigenous population. Eventually, in 1522, he also joined the Dominican Order.

3 Valeat Aristoteles!

In a 1519 debate about the humanity of indigenous people, three years before Las Casas entered the Order, he dared to proclaim, *Valeat Aristoteles! A Christo enim qui est Veritas Aeterna habemus: Diliges proximum tuum sicut teipsum*.¹¹ 'Farewell, Aristotle! For from Christ, who is the eternal Truth, we have received: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The conclusion of this declaration is obvious: if, in the context of the conquest and colonization of the Americas, Aristotle's political philosophy can be used to justify the slavery of Native Americans, it contradicts the charity that Jesus commands. Incidentally, Las Casas also reminds his audience that the Greek philosopher was only a heathen and is consequently burning in the fires of hell.

Despite the gravitas with which he advocated for his position, Las Casas had to learn that an argument that followed only the principle of *sola scriptura* was insufficient. In his numerous writings which defend the Indians, Las Casas quotes Aristotle more frequently than any other interlocutor. As the U.S. historian of colonial Latin America, Lewis Hanke, remarks in his book *Aristotle and the American Indians*, during his studies in the Dominican Order, Las Casas was forced to recognize that Aristotle was the 'dominant philosopher in Renaissance times [. . .] whose ideas had prepared the philosophical substratum of Catholicism.'¹²

⁹ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, III, c. 79, OC, vol. 5: 2081.

¹⁰ Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, III, c. 79, OC, vol. 5: 2082.

¹¹ Las Casas, *Apología*, OC, vol. 9 (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988): 100.

¹² Lewis Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians. A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959): 17.

In his *Apologética historia sumaria*, which Las Casas started writing in 1527, he develops an *anthropology of faith*, as the editor of Las Casas' works in German, Mariano Delgado, explains.¹³ On the one hand, this anthropology is based on the assumptions of the Christian faith and draws on the works of Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Thomas Aquinas. On the other hand, it draws on philosophical arguments and is distinguished by its rationality. Not only Aristotle but also other Greek and Roman Philosophers like Plato and, above all, Cicero, played a role in Las Casas' arguments.

4 Slaves by Nature

The reference point for all Christian discussions of slavery, whether in Europe or overseas, was Aristotle's treatise, *Politics*, and his thesis that there are people who are slaves by nature: φύσει δούλος/*phýsei doulos*.¹⁴ According to Aristotle, a particular set of indicators shows who is a natural slave. A natural slave, he says, has less mental power than a natural ruler. Those born to rule are those who know how to organize households and polities by virtue of their intellect and foresight. The slave, on the other hand, is to use his physical powers to serve the one who is born to rule.

Sixteenth-century Europeans somewhat predictably concluded that they belonged to the group of people with the capacity to rule and determine. In the indigenous peoples of the Americas, they saw a group of people with inferior mental capacities who, consequently, were slaves by nature and should serve the Europeans. Following Aristotle, they understood the peoples of the Americas as "uncivilized barbarians" who, due to their lack of mental power, were incapable of living a self-determined, free life in a polis.

To rebut these assertions, Las Casas shows that the indigenous populations of the Americas established civilized communities and consequently met the criteria Aristotle developed for identifying a functioning polis. Those particular aspects of indigenous life that seem "barbaric" and "inhuman" to Europeans, i.e., those points of argumentation used to undergird the notion that said ethnic groups possessed a "slave nature", Las Casas attributes to their culture rather than their human nature. However, Las Casas also defends their culture: in its otherness, he discovers a comprehensible *logos*, i.e., reason. Furthermore, he shows the Europeans that their own cultural and religious history is marked by many "abnormalities", which they now took as confirmation of the primitive human nature of indigenous people.

¹³ Mariano Delgado, "Einleitung: Las Casas als 'Anthropologe des Glaubens'," in *Bartolomé de Las Casas, Werkauswahl*, vol. 2, *Historische und ethnographische Schriften*, ed. Mariano Delgado (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995): 327–42.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, I 2, 1252a; p. 2; I 4, 1254a, p. 6.

5 Indigene Polis?

Las Casas agrees with Aristotle's conception of human beings, which asserts that all people by nature strive for the Good and for knowledge: *Omnes homines natura scire desiderant*.¹⁵ To this Aristotelian concept, the Dominican adds that the pursuit of knowledge and truth also includes the desire for knowledge of God. For Las Casas, the universal human pursuit of knowledge also includes a practical component. Drawing on Aristotle's and its reception by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), he states that this practical knowledge involves the virtue of prudence, which is useful for shaping human life and ensuring that it succeeds by doing good in its entirety.¹⁶ With prudence, human persons shape their lives as individuals, their private environment (family), and their societies. With understanding and prudence, humans also adopt and form the *ethos* that shapes their character and the realization of their nature.¹⁷

Las Casas focuses on proving that the indigenous peoples of the Americas also possess prudence, especially political prudence, with the help of which they organize their polity.¹⁸ Political prudence is so crucial for Aristotelian anthropology because it describes the human person as a social being, a ζῷον πολιτικόν / *zōon politikón*. Human life, therefore, succeeds not privately but through the organized coexistence of free people in the polis.¹⁹

Despite the discovery of the advanced civilizations in Mexico and Peru, namely, the Aztecs and Incas, various actors denied that the aborigines of America were capable of such an organized coexistence of free people in a polis. The humanist and translator of Aristotle, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490–1573), for example, passes a harsh judgment in his treatise *Democrates secundus* (1545). Sepúlveda claims that the fact that, prior to the European conquest, the Aztecs lived in an organized polity only masks their barbaric savagery and slave nature. According to him, it further demonstrates that they are not bears or apes who lack any use of reason. Their artistry reveals the same lack of distinctively human cleverness as other animals, for even bees and spiders demonstrate a more artificial talent when constructing honeycombs and

¹⁵ Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 40, OC, vol. 6: 465; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (*Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vols. 17, 18*), trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933, 1989): I 1, 980 a 21.

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (Rome: Editiones Paulinae, 1962): I–II q. 57, a. 3; 58: Virtues, so also prudence, are a 'habitus perficiens hominem ad bene operandum': Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 40, OC, vol. 6: 466.

¹⁷ Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 40–44, OC, vol. 6: 465–87.

¹⁸ Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 45–46, OC, vol. 6: 488–92; OC, vol. 7: 523–27.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253 a 1; 4: '[. . .] it is evident that a city is among the things that exist by nature, that a human is by nature a political animal, and that anyone who is without a city, not by luck but by nature, is either a wretch or else better than human [. . .]'.]

geometric webs.²⁰ Moreover, according to Sepúlveda, the degree to which even civilized indigenous people were mentally and physically inferior to Europeans was also evidenced by the fact that Cortes conquered Mexico with only a few men. Thus, Sepúlveda argues that the civilizations of the Aztecs are no exception, nor are those of the Maya and Incas; their peoples must be understood as slaves by nature.²¹

For Sepúlveda, above all, religion and cult prove the civilizational failure of the indigenous peoples. Idolatry and human sacrifice reveal the *impia religio*²² of indigenous peoples. They do not obey the natural law that forbids human sacrifice. Through their blasphemy and human sacrifices, they deprive their community of God's blessing and objectively harm it. A just war to redress this grievance and save the human victims is, therefore, for Sepúlveda, imperative and inevitable.

6 Las Casas' Application of Aristotle's Criteria of a Polis

Las Casas opposed Sepúlveda's arguments in a public dispute in Valladolid in 1550/51. In his *Apologética historia sumaria*, he consults Aristotle's treatise Πολιτικά/*Politiká* (Politics) and its reception in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*.²³ In his treatise, Aristotle lists six indispensable fields of activity that characterize a polity organized with political prudence. Six estates are assigned to these fields of activity: farmers, artisans, warriors, providers of capital, priests, and judges. Farmers, for instance, secure sustenance for the polis' inhabitants. The defence of the community was the task of the warriors. The priests' task was to perform service to the Divine for the good of the polis. In other words, religion manifests political prudence because practised religion guarantees divine benevolence towards the polis.

In his *Apologética historia sumaria*, Las Casas focuses most of his attention on the institution of the priesthood.²⁴ This is, of course, no coincidence, nor is it due only to the predilections of a Catholic priest. The special attention he pays to the institution of the Greek priesthood and, more specifically, to sacrifice and lived religion, is due to the critiques of indigenous religion.

²⁰ Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Democrates secundus*. *Zweiter Demokrates*, trans. and ed. Christian Schäfer (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 2018): lib. 1, 10; 64–65.

²¹ Sepúlveda, *Democrates secundus*, lib. 1, 10; 64–65.

²² Sepúlveda, *Democrates secundus*, lib. 1, 11; 66.

²³ Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 8, 1328 a 25–1328 b 20; 169–70; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 47, a. 11–12; Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 40, OC, vol. 6: 466–67.

²⁴ Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 71–74, OC, vol. 7: 633–50. Cf. the excellent explanations by Mariano Delgado, "III. Fünfter Teil des wohlgeordneten Gemeinwesens: Priesterschaft und Opfer," in *Las Casas, Werkauswahl*, vol. 2: 380–81, 388–89, 412–14, 431–32, 451–52.

Las Casas even adopts the demonological interpretation of indigenous religion, which traces its origin to demonic seduction; human sacrifice and ritual cannibalism are the devil's work. However, this traditional demonological interpretation of indigenous religion does not prevent Las Casas from discovering political wisdom in it. This is the extraordinary hermeneutical achievement of this sixteenth-century Dominican, which was possible because he understood the religion of the indigenous people to be a part of their *ethos*.

Incidentally, Las Casas understood the devil was not *only* at work in indigenous religions: the devil was even more present in the deeds of the conquerors and colonists because it was they who sacrificed the Indians as human victims to the god of gold and money, thus betraying their faith. So how does Las Casas discover reason and political prudence in polytheism, idolatry, and human sacrifice?

7 Sepúlveda's Position

For Sepúlveda, being human includes a natural knowledge of the one and only God, that is, a knowledge of the Divine based on human reason. The Apostle Paul affirms this in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans (1:20). And it is Aristotle who offers the philosophical proof of Apostle Paul's affirmation: in the twelfth book of his *Metaphysics*, he proves the existence of the Unmoved Mover, of the one God.²⁵ Due to Aristotle's knowledge of God,²⁶ Sepúlveda is convinced that the great philosopher does not burn in the fires of hell, as Las Casas suggests; rather, the Greek has found his place in heaven with the saints. Sepúlveda is persuaded that Aristotle and other Greek and Roman philosophers believed in Divine Providence and possessed a genuine knowledge of God as the Unmoved Mover. Nevertheless, those who believe in Providence also implicitly affirm all the means God provides to bring about people's salvation. The decisive means for the salvation of all people is Jesus, the Son of God. The conclusion is clear: whoever believes in the one God and his Providence also *implicitly* believes in Jesus Christ. Through this indirect faith in the Saviour, the philosophers of Greece and Rome are saved.²⁷

Therefore, if only the indigenous peoples believed in God the way Aristotle did, Sepúlveda would advocate for their protection from any use of violence. As God-believing pagans, he would even appreciate them.²⁸ In this respect, Sepúlveda develops modern-style thinking around the salvation of non-Christians, which we do not

²⁵ Sepúlveda, *Democrates secundus*, lib. 1, 12; 80–81.

²⁶ Sepúlveda, *Democrates secundus*, lib. 1, 13; 84–85.

²⁷ Sepúlveda, *Democrates secundus*, lib. 1, 14; 88–89.

²⁸ Sepúlveda, *Democrates secundus*, lib. 1, 12; 76–77.

even find in the same form or to the same degree in the works of Las Casas.²⁹ Despite the apparent openness of Sepúlveda's soteriology, however, for him, the indigenous peoples remain lost because they have not become disciples of Aristotle nor turned towards the Unmoved Mover. Instead, they continue following their polytheistic religion, which is contemptuous of humanity.

8 Las Casas' Response

Las Casas objects that Aristotle is an exceptional case. Not everyone is an Aristotle, neither in Europe nor the New World. Moreover, the philosophers of Greece had not been dissuaded from their belief in the gods of Olympus. In ancient Greece, the habit, i.e., the *ethos* of religious polytheism, was stronger than Aristotelian philosophical monotheism.³⁰ This preference for polytheism in ancient Greece was *a fortiori* the typical case for all peoples of Europe. Las Casas proves this through detailed accounts of European cultural and religious history. Consequently, the indigenous and European *ethoi* are remarkably similar in content, though they are far from one another from a temporal perspective.

According to Las Casas, this factual correspondence proves that the polytheism and idolatry of indigenous religions do not betray a barbarically degenerate human nature; instead, they are ordinary and widespread forms in which human nature presents itself. In Las Casas' estimation, Europe's distance in time from polytheism only shows that overcoming idolatry takes a long time and cannot be taken for granted. Once established, the *ethos* that perpetuates polytheism as the norm resists change as if it were *second nature*.³¹ On this point, Las Casas refers to the history of Israel as another striking example of the nature-like immutability of *ethos*. Although the one and only God revealed himself to Israel, even the people of God found it difficult to overcome polytheism; idolatry shaped the people of Israel so much through their sojourn in Egypt and the religious environment of the Promised Land that they, too, had to struggle to overcome it. It is not difficult to see that the way Las Casas portrays Israel's polytheism is not free of anti-Judaic connotations.³²

29 Mariano Delgado, "Glaubenstradition im Kontext. Voraussetzungen, Verdienste und Versäumnisse lascasianischer Missionstheologie," in Bartolomé de las Casas, *Werkauswahl*, vol. 1, *Missionstheologische Schriften*, ed. Mariano Delgado (Paderborn: Schöningh): 35–58, here 54–57.

30 Sepúlveda, *Democrates secundus*, lib. 1 c. 13; 82–85, interprets polytheism among the Greeks and Romans as a way of describing the different ways and forms in which the one God acts; the gods are personalized operational attributes of the one God. Las Casas obviously does not share this interpretation, but applies it in his interpretation of indigenous polytheism.

31 Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 74, OC, vol. 7: 648: 'otra natura'; c. 163, OC, vol. 8: 1135: 'otra naturaleza'.

32 Cf. Delgado, *Las Casas, Werkauswahl*, vol. 2: 431–32.

9 Polytheism as Natural Knowledge of God

Las Casas does not stop at these comparisons in the history of religion and culture. He goes further when he claims that it is plausible that polytheism represents a primal form of the knowledge of God rather than its failure. To justify his assertion, he invokes the most important theologian of his order, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), who in turn takes his cue from Aristotle. Aquinas adopts Aristotle's epistemological thesis that all human knowledge begins with the senses and argues that the senses are also the starting point for knowledge of God. In other words, he asserts that the knowledge of God is based on all accessible observations of the material world, which provide the conclusion that God exists. In Aquinas' *Summa contra gentiles*, which Las Casas quotes, the order in (or of) nature (*ordo naturae*), which everyone can observe, is the starting point of reason. This order of nature leads to the conclusion that an *ordinator naturae*, an Ordainer of nature, exists. Aquinas excludes the possibility that nature gives itself its order or has developed by pure chance.³³

Crucial for Las Casas is the following formulation, with which Thomas admits how unclear the knowledge of this *ordinator naturae* remains: *quis autem, vel qualis, vel si unus tantum est ordinator naturae, nondum statim ex hac communi consideratione habetur* – 'but who or how the Ordainer of the nature is and whether only one, one does not learn immediately from this general consideration'. Aquinas thus implies that it is not immediately recognizable whether the Ordainer of nature is only one agent. Las Casas takes up this formulation *vel si unus tantum* – 'or whether only one' and uses it to make an explicit claim; he writes 'or if one or if many are the ones who order the natural things',³⁴ remains an open question at the outset.

Building upon the authority of medieval theology, Las Casas thus succeeds in supporting his claim that it is plausible for one to recognize the *ordinator naturae* as a polytheistic reality, at least initially. He agrees with Aquinas' general consideration that the knowledge of God about the Ordainer of nature, which is accessible to all human beings, is, first, a *confusa Dei cognitio*, that is, a vague cognition. Even the natural *desiderium* for truth and happiness, which Aquinas attributes to every human being, does not lead with certainty to a clear knowledge of God, because for many the highest happiness lies elsewhere, for example in pleasure.³⁵

With an ironic twist, Las Casas cites Aristotle, who ascends to the knowledge of the One Unmoved Mover, only in the twelfth book of his *Metaphysics*, i.e., only after

³³ Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 71, OC, vol. 7: 634–35; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles. Pars prima tomi tertii, I–LXXXIII*, eds. Karl Allgaier and Leo Gerken (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990): III, c. 38; 138–39.

³⁴ Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 71, OC, vol. 7: 634: 'quién sea o cuál sea, o si uno o si muchos sean los que ordenan las cosas naturales no lo pueden luego cognoscer por sólo este universal y confuso cognoscimiento.'

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 2 a. 1 ad 1.

protracted intellectual toil.³⁶ Therefore, how can one, as Sepúlveda does, demand a monotheistic creed from philosophically untrained indigenous peoples?

Las Casas quotes at length the versatile Roman orator, politician, and philosopher Cicero (106–43 B.C.), who states in his treatise *De natura deorum* that all peoples of the earth have come to the conviction that there are gods.³⁷ In the fact that all peoples had come to a knowledge of gods or divine powers, Cicero recognizes a proof of God *e consensu gentium*. However, this *consensus* of the peoples about the existence of gods and divine powers remains, according to Las Casas, open regarding the conception and identity of the gods: as to which or how many gods there are, philosophers have manifold, different, and discordant ideas.³⁸

Consequently, the indigenous peoples of the Americas, in their polytheistic religions, likewise possess a vague knowledge of God, which as such, is not false but imperfect, as measured by Aristotle and monotheistic religions. Las Casas' argument here represents a tremendous interpretive step.

The polytheism of the religion and culture (*ethos*) of indigenous peoples in no way indicates that they have a poorly endowed human nature that fails to know God. Rather, their religion and culture manifest an imperfect knowledge of the Divine. Therefore, indigenous polytheism must be considered a sure indicator of the intellectual capacity of humanity to know the Divine and thus also of political prudence. This political wisdom determines the religious cult of the indigenous peoples, namely their concern for the welfare of their community.

10 Can the Indigenous People be Saved Without Baptism?

From the standpoint of Christianity, Las Casas apparently understands this positive interpretation of indigenous religion as theological truth. He asserts that all peoples sacrificed to what they believed to be God, thereby performing true worship that is, in effect, directed towards the one and true God. Indeed, for him, it is only on this One and True God that the welfare of the polity can actually depend.³⁹

³⁶ Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 71, OC, vol. 7: 635.

³⁷ Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 71, OC, vol. 7: 636.

³⁸ Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 71, OC, vol. 7: 636: 'pero cuáles eran o cuántos los dioses varias y diversas y no conformes son las opiniones de los filósofos.'

³⁹ Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 72, OC, vol. 7: 642: 'a Dios como causa primaria y universal de toda criatura y autor de todos los bienes, pero nunca a los hombres, se ofreció jamás sacrificio, porque ninguna cosa tan propiamente [sic] a Dios compete como es el sacrificio, y esto ninguna nación jamás lo ignoró y así ninguno jamás estimó que sacrificio se debía ofrecer sino a aquel que tenía por Dios o fingía tener por Dios.'

All this means that Las Casas is on the verge of saying that the religions of the Indigenous Americans could become the medium through which they receive the grace of Christ. However, he does not explicitly state the possibility of salvation for the unbaptized, which Sepúlveda took for granted in the case of the monotheistic philosophers of antiquity. In the School of Salamanca, the question was discussed by Juan Luis Vives, Francisco de Vitoria, and Domingo de Soto. They considered whether or not people born after Christ's appearance were *implicitly* aligned with God in their orientation toward the Good⁴⁰ and whether or not this opened a chance of salvation for them (*facienti quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam*). Las Casas did not participate in these discussions.⁴¹ He quotes the principle *facienti quod in se est . . .*, but, as Mariano Delgado explains, Las Casas does not affirm the thesis of the School of Salamanca that a *fides implicita* could save the indigenous peoples.⁴²

In the place of a theory of *fides implicita*, Las Casas develops a provocative Christology and "iconography" according to which Christ identifies himself with the oppressed, beaten, and murdered Indians by giving his life for them ("for whom Christ gave his life").⁴³ This "Christological iconography" is manifested in the words Las Casas wrote when leaving for a colony in the territory of present-day Venezuela, which was directed only by religious brothers. He writes: 'I leave in the West Indies Jesus Christ our God, scourged and afflicted, slapped and crucified, not once but thousands of times, inasmuch as the Spaniards are putting down and destroying the people there.'⁴⁴

One could interpret Las Casas' statement about the presence of the suffering Christ in the suffering Indios as an indication of a hope for a salvific presence of Christ in the maltreated Natives.

In any case, Las Casas was interested in defending the living aborigines. The demonstration of their political prudence served this goal, but it also buttressed his radical eschatology. Las Casas was wont to say that nobody should die 'before the time'.⁴⁵ Everyone should have enough time to hear the proclamation of the Christian faith and to be baptized. Therefore, the indigenous people must be given the necessary time to

40 Cf. Francisco de Vitoria: "De eo, ad quod tenetur homo, cum primum venit ad usum rationis," in *Francisco de Vitoria, Vorlesungen II (Relectiones)*, eds. Ulrich Horst, Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven, and Joachim Stüben (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1997): 92–187, here 148; Thomas F. O'Meara, "The School of Thomism at Salamanca and the Presence of Grace in the Americas," in *Angelicum* 71 (1994): 321–70.

41 Delgado, "Glaubenstradition im Kontext," in *Las Casas, Werkausgabe*, vol. 2: 52–57.

42 Mariano Delgado, "Glaubenstradition im Kontext," in *Las Casas, Werkausgabe*, vol. 2: 55–56.

43 Las Casas, *Apología*, 252v, OC, vol. 9: 664: 'Indi fratres nostri sunt, pro quibus Christus impendit anima sua.'

44 Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* III, c. 138, OC, vol. 5: 2366: 'Yo dexo en las Indias a Jesucristo, nuestro Dios, azotándolo y afligiéndolo y abofeteándolo y crucificándolo, no una sino millares veces, cuanto es de parte de los españoles que asuelan y destruyen aquellas gentes.' Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Dios o el oro en las Indias. Siglo XVI* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1989): 156.

45 Las Casas, OC, vol. 5: 2366: 'Les quitan la vida antes del tiempo.'

authentically learn about the Christian faith: the use of violence and forced baptism prevent this. In his work *De unico vocationis modo omnium gentium ad veram religionem*, he claims to show that only with comprehensible arguments can indigenous people be led to the knowledge of the true God.⁴⁶ This kind of mission requires wisdom and prudence. Thus, since baptism alone opens the door of heaven and because the reception of baptism presupposes explicit faith, the Spaniards are called upon to change their behaviour. Unless they do so, Las Casas is convinced, the eternal fate of these baptized Christians will be more abysmal than that of the unbaptized indigenous people.⁴⁷

Las Casas' eschatology, which seems rigorous by today's standards, must be viewed through the lens of its parenetic function. As is well known, Jesus also speaks of hellfire, but does not give precise descriptions of the afterlife or announce the number of the redeemed. It is traditionally believed that he chose to remain silent on these questions to make people aware of their responsibility, i.e., to shake them awake. Las Casas similarly expresses himself: he wants to make the Spaniards aware of their responsibility for their eternal destiny in order to bring about a change in their behaviour toward indigenous people. Explicit reflection on the eternal salvation of the unbaptized indigenous population would have weakened this paraenesis.

11 European and Indigenous Gods

The extent to which indigenous religions were characterized by reason and prudence is demonstrated by Las Casas through another consideration. He not only compares the polytheistic beliefs native to Europe with those of the Americas to make it comprehensible that both are indications of human reason and political prudence. He also

⁴⁶ Las Casas, *De unico vocationis modo*, c. 5 § 1, OC, vol. 2: 17: 'Unus et idem modus et solus docendi homines veram religionem fuit per divinam Providentiam institutus in toto orbe atque in omni tempore, scilicet, intellectus rationibus persuasivus et voluntatis suaviter allectivus vel exhortativus.'

⁴⁷ Las Casas cites the Second Synod of Braga in Portugal (celebrated in 572) to illustrate this: 'If some went out of this life without the grace of baptism, it is necessary that an account of their perdition be asked of those who by their violence instilled fear in them, causing them to subtract themselves from the grace of baptism.' Las Casas, *De unico vocationis modo*, c. 6, § 6, OC, vol. 2: 453: "Qui [. . .] si sine gratia baptismi de hac vita recesserint, necesse est ut ab illis eorum perditio requiratur, quorum spolia pertimescentes, a baptismi gratia se retraxerunt." Para que la pobreza y la falta de ofrendas no impidan el bautismo, y para que las donaciones de los pobres no sean obligadas, el Sínodo de Braga declara lo que se recoge en la colección de derecho canónico en el Decretum Gratiani C. 1, q. 1. C. 103: "Nam multi pauperes, hoc timentes, filios suos a baptismo retrahunt, qui forte, dum differuntur, si sine gratia baptismi de hac vita recesserint, necesse est, ut ab illis eorum perditio requiratur, quorum spolia pertimescentes a baptismi gratia se subtraxerunt." Cf. José Orlandis and Domingo Ramos-Lisson, *Die Synoden auf der Iberischen Halbinsel bis zum Einbruch des Islam (711)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1981): 90; Delgado, *Las Casas, Werkauswahl*, vol. 1, 292, footnote 38.

ventures to make comparisons between the moral qualities of the gods on the two sides of the Atlantic. Unsurprisingly, he concludes that the indigenous peoples worship morally superior gods than did the pre-Christian Europeans.⁴⁸ The European gods were no strangers to human vice: drunkenness, jealousy, adultery, hatred, and murder – they practised all of them in abundance. The Greeks and Romans, so highly esteemed by Sepúlveda, are given even lower scores than their deities: who cultivates the intoxicating wine cult of Bacchus makes a fool of himself.⁴⁹ In contrast, the Andean myth of Viracocha, the creator of all reality, appears to Las Casas to be more rational.⁵⁰

12 The Rationality of Human Sacrifices

After establishing the cultural naturalness of polytheism, Las Casas addresses the practice of human sacrifices, which was considered the epitome of religious perversion and proof of the barbarically underdeveloped humanity of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.⁵¹ In contrast to these interpretations, Las Casas identifies a logic in the practice of human sacrifice found in many cultures and religions and is part of the respective cultural *ethos*. He invokes Aristotle, who explains in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that humans must honor the gods to the best of their ability.⁵² However, it is impossible even to give sufficient honor to one's own parents because one owes them so much.⁵³ Based on this reference, Las Casas concludes that the offerings with which one seeks to honor the gods are always insufficient. People, therefore, logically offer their most valuable possessions to deities. The most valuable thing one can offer is undoubtedly human life, even to the extreme of offering the life of one's own chil-

48 Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 127, OC, vol. 7: 896: '[. . .] en la elección de los dioses tuvieron más razón y discreción y honestidad que las más de todas cuantas naciones idólatras antiguamente hubo, bárbaros, griegos y romanos [. . .]'.
49 Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 78, OC, vol. 7: 665–68.

50 Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 121, OC, vol. 7: 874–77; c. 126, OC, vol. 7: 892: Las Casas is also able to make sense of the idea that Viracocha brought forth a son, who, however, turned away from his divine father and interspersed negative elements into the creation of man: this myth refers to the sin of the angels who seduce man.

51 A very good orientation to the topic of human sacrifice and its controversial evaluation is given by Delgado in *Las Casas, Werkausgabe*, vol. 2: 412–14.

52 Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 143, OC, vol. 7: 968–67; c. 183, OC, vol. 8: 1215.

53 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 16; 1163b: 'For friendship seeks what is possible, not what accords with worth, since that is impossible in some cases, as it is with honor to gods and parents. For no one could ever make a return in accord with their worth, but someone who attends to them as far as he is able seems to be a decent person.' IX, 1; 1164b: 'For its worth is not measured by money, and no equivalent honor can be paid; but it is enough, presumably, to do what we can, as we do toward gods and parents.'

dren.⁵⁴ That is why a wide variety of cultures have practised human sacrifice, even in Europe. The Greeks on Rhodes are said to have sacrificed humans to Saturn. Human sacrifices were also offered to Zeus and Diana.⁵⁵ The Carthaginians sacrificed children.⁵⁶ Human sacrifices among the indigenous peoples of the New World are thus to be placed in the context of a broader cultural history of humankind. Human sacrifice belongs to the cultural *ethos* and is as culturally natural as the natural knowledge of God in the form of polytheism. The presence of human sacrifice in a culture, therefore, proves its political prudence and, thus, the full humanity of those involved.

In the context of valuing human sacrifice, Las Casas provokes his Spanish audience with another consideration: he recommends to his countrymen the indigenous *ethos* expressed in the willingness to offer human sacrifice. If one adopts this virtue of willingness, he says, one can also live the Christian religion authentically.⁵⁷ For Las Casas, the *despicable* Indios thus became shining examples of genuine religiosity.

Las Casas' positive evaluation of indigenous polytheism and human sacrifice does not imply an endorsement of the phenomena. As a Catholic, he naturally welcomes the overcoming of polytheism and the practice of human sacrifice. The *ethos* – the culture has changed in this regard, although Las Casas, with Aristotle, sees it as virtually unchanging. With his deployment of the concept of the persistence of *ethos*, Las Casas wants, above all, to gain time – time for the advent of the cultural change that is also destined to take place in the New World. His confident hope in the possibility of cultural change does not rely primarily on the mission of the Church. Rather he relies on an intrinsic dynamic for change that is present within the indigenous culture itself.

Las Casas even cites an example from Aztec culture as an alternative to the practice of human sacrifice. The Dominican invokes the worship of the deity Quetzalcóatl among the Toltecs, Aztecs, and Maya, as well as the Toltec priest-king of the same name. Las Casas notes that Quetzalcóatl wanted to know nothing of wars and human sacrifices.⁵⁸ Just as Europeans overcame the practice of human sacrifice, Las Casas predicts the same for indigenous cultures. It is, therefore, essential that Europeans do not destroy this culture – this *ethos* – but rely on its innate dynamism: they must promote, support, and partner with it in a shared mission.

54 Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 161, OC, vol. 8: 1123, c. 183, OC, vol. 8: 1217.

55 Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 161, OC, vol. 8: 1125.

56 Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 161, OC, vol. 8: 1125.

57 Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 191, OC, vol. 8: 1255–56.

58 Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, c. 127, OC, vol. 7: 898.

13 Conclusion

Las Casas was fundamentally a missionary, convinced of the truth of Christianity. He was neither an ethnologist nor a religious scholar nor did he study or describe indigenous cultures and religions of the “New World” from a “neutral point of view”. He wanted to lead indigenous peoples to Christ, who revealed not only God but also the true image of the human person. From this image of humans in Christ, Las Casas derived his understanding of the determination of human nature, its equality and unity in Adam and before God. Due to his historical context, he had to begin by questioning the inequality asserted by Aristotle as a natural distinction between rulers and “slaves by nature”. Using and freely adapting Aristotle’s concept of *ethos*, Las Casas ascribes differences and inequalities between people on both sides of the Atlantic to the formative force of different cultures. By comparing European and indigenous religions, the differences are shown to exist only in time and not in substance. Polytheism, idolatry, and human sacrifice are understood as normal, rationally comprehensible phenomena. Las Casas describes the polytheism of indigenous religion as the first form of natural knowledge of God, which can be justified philosophically with the help of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. The Dominican thus succeeds in making the possibility of further developments within a given *ethos* comprehensible. By applying the borrowed concept of *ethos* to the cultures and religions of the Americas, Las Casas initiates a cultural turn in understanding the characteristics of a polity. By applying Aristotelian criteria, he attributes political prudence and, thus, full humanity to indigenous peoples. Motivated and committed by Jesus’ commandment to love one’s neighbor, Bartolomé de Las Casas uses Aristotle’s concept of *ethos* to argue against Aristotle’s thesis of the slave by nature. Who would have thought that in this way, the Dominican could turn the Greek philosopher into a *defensor de los Indios*?

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Martin Schermaier

***Dominium in se ipsum* in Antique and Medieval Discourses on Liberty**

This chapter provides a glimpse into the history of human freedom. Its aim is to focus on a barely tapped relationship between late antique and medieval discussions of freedom, namely, the relationship between freedom of will as a basis of *dominium in se ipsum* and contemporary conceptions of slavery.

1 Freedom in John Locke: From the End to the Beginning

Among the commonplace statements that are repeatedly uttered in debates about slavery, these two are probably the best known: (1) slavery is the most extreme form of unfreedom, and (2) slavery is characterized by one person owning another. Both propositions, though popular, are useless for research on both historical and modern forms of slavery because they each rely on a vague conception of freedom. Freedom, like property, can be defined in many ways. Those who narrowly define freedom also tend to exclude diverse forms of extreme dependency from their concepts of “slavery”.

It is little known that the very terms “freedom” and “property” have been intimately related on a conceptual level since late antiquity. The fact that slavery studies in particular, and modern research in general, usually do not address the intricate relationship between freedom and property may be due to the fact that, in its source work, most researchers usually penetrate the historical record only so far as the ominous language boundary that divides early modernity from the Age of Enlightenment: what was discussed before the advent of the latter can only be learned from Latin sources. Therefore, in the search for the ideological roots of the theory of freedom or property, one rarely encounters studies that stretch back to a time before Thomas Hobbes or John Locke, both of whom have already been published (at least in part) in English.¹

Before looking back past the European Enlightenment, it is helpful to revisit how Locke, as one of its key figures, defined the terms under evaluation in this chapter.

1 Cfr., for example, Laura Brace, *The Politics of Property: Labour, Freedom, and Belonging* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

Note: I am deeply grateful for the help of Jolanda Müller and Imogen Herrad for their help in translating the text into English and especially for the corrections and observations made by David B. Smith and Wolfram Kinzig.

After all, in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), Locke treats “liberty”, “slavery”, and “property” in the same breath but in different respects:

a. “Freedom” (or “liberty”) and its restriction by natural law and legal regulations is the guiding theme of Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*. By “freedom”, Locke means freedom of action, which can only be affected by natural law, but not by the will of third parties: ‘[. . .] all men are naturally in [. . .] a *state of perfect freedom*, to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man.’²

b. For Locke, slavery is diametrically opposed to freedom. Therefore, he begins his chapter on slavery with yet another definition. This time, it is not self-determination that matters, but rather the absence of domination: ‘The *natural liberty* of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule.’³

c. The chapter following the one on slavery deals with property and the justification for the acquisition of individual property. Here, Locke formulates the proposition of ‘possessive individualism’,⁴ which deals with the concept of ownership of man by himself: ‘Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a *property* in his own *person*: this no body has any right to but himself.’⁵ Locke does not explain why man has ‘property in his own person’. Thus, the connection between freedom and property is, at best, recognizable if one reads between the lines. One might look, for instance, at his statements about the appropriation of goods which initially were common to all men: ‘The *labour* of his body, and the *work* of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *labour* with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *property*.’⁶ With some imagination, therefore, one can understand that ‘the labour of his body, and the work of his hands’ refer to self-determination.

However, in Locke’s account, this connection between “freedom” and “property” remains diffuse. One can recognize it,⁷ but one can also easily overlook it. The connection

2 John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, cited according to: *Two Treatises of Government. In the Former The False Principles and Foundation of Sir Robert Filmer and his Followers Are Detected and Overthrown. The Latter Is an Essay Concerning The True Original Extent and End of Civil Government* (Dublin: J. Sheppard and G. Nugent Bookfellers, 1779): 155, ch. 2, § 4 (original emphasis).

3 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chap. IV, § 22 (p. 168 f.; original emphasis).

4 The term was coined by Crawford Brough Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism. Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

5 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chap. V, § 27 (p. 171; original emphasis).

6 Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chap. V, § 27 (p. 171 f.; original emphasis).

7 As e.g. Ulfried Reichardt, “Sklaverei, Freiheit und Eigentum: Zur Auseinandersetzung über die Sklaverei in der US-amerikanischen Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts,” in *Sklaverei und Recht. Zwischen römischer Antike und moderner Welt*, eds. Iole Fargnoli and Thomas Späth (Zurich: Haupt, 2018): 159.

between “property” and “slavery” is perhaps even more blurred. Although slavery is described as being ‘under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law’⁸, Locke does not say that the ownership of things equates to man’s ‘property in his own person’. The reason for this may be that Locke does not close the circle of definitions: man is the owner of himself insofar as he wills and acts, but not insofar as he can dispose of himself. The theological proposition that man does not owe his existence to himself but to God and, therefore, may neither kill nor sell himself has an effect herein.⁹

The two missing links between freedom and property can only be found by engaging with the predecessors of Locke’s concept of freedom, i.e., those developed within Christian moral theology. Centuries before he penned his treatises, various Christian theologians advanced the concepts Locke uses. Indeed, as matters of course, they articulated concepts of freedom based on freedom of action and of property based on freedom of will.

In this chapter, I aim to uncover the conceptual roots of both freedom and property in the history of ideas, at least to some extent. This approach might appear rather strange: a jurist explaining the theological sources of our modern concept of freedom. But both freedom and property are key concepts in modern jurisprudence as well as in other disciplines. I hope to show that it was not Locke, who is often praised for such innovations, nor other contemporary thinkers who shaped the modern concept of freedom and thus laid the foundations for the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement. Instead, theologians and jurists whose names are hardly known to any modern slavery researcher are responsible for laying these important conceptual foundations.

At first glance, this project does not seem to fit well under the title of the present volume: ‘Control, coercion, and constraint’ are the three key terms attributed to religion as a creator of dependency structures. Nevertheless, the subtitle also points to the role of religion in overcoming such structures. Thus, I would like to emphasize this “light side of the force”. In the process, the ambivalence of the modern concept of freedom will become visible. Though the abolitionist movements of the modern era would be unthinkable without them, the normative concept of freedom is still used to justify slavery-like forms of strong asymmetrical dependency. The concept of “freedom of contract” for example stresses the legal freedom to conclude or to terminate a working contract. But it neglects that frequently for economic or social reasons termination is not an option. With the prevailing notion of freedom, as with other constructs, the normative conceptualization is Janus-faced.

⁸ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*: 168–69, ch. 4, § 22.

⁹ For example, in Domingo de Soto, *De iustitia et iure libri decem*, lib. 4, quaest. 2, art. 2 (Venice: Apud Minimam Societatem, 1594): 294–97, esp. 295.

2 Concepts of *libertas* in Antiquity

As we have already seen, Locke employed two concepts of freedom in his *Treatises of Government*:¹⁰ with freedom from external determination on the one hand and freedom to act in a self-determined manner on the other. The concepts of negative and positive freedom used in modern discourses¹¹ have their roots here.¹² In Locke, these terms still seem to partly converge: he who – within the limits of the law – can act as he pleases is at the same time free from external determination. Nevertheless, the two concepts have quite different foundations.

2.1 Freedom in Philosophy

In ancient philosophy and political theory, “freedom” is mostly understood in the negative, i.e., as freedom from something or from someone.¹³ The beginnings of this understanding of freedom, *eleuthería*, stretch far back into Greek history.¹⁴ In philosophy,

10 Whereas in his famous *Essay on Human Understanding* he concentrates on positive liberty, i.e., the liberty to act: John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, book 2, ch. 21, § 8 (London: Thomas Basset, 1690), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/10615/10615-h/10615-h.htm#link2HCH0024> [accessed 25.03.2024]; original emphasis: ‘All the actions that we have any idea of reducing themselves, as has been said, to these two, viz. thinking and motion; so far as a man has power to think or not to think, to move or not to move, according to the preference or direction of his own mind, so far as a man *free*. Wherever any performance or forbearance are not equally in a man’s power; wherever doing or not doing will not equally *follow* upon the preference of his mind directing it, there he is not free, though perhaps the action may be voluntary.’

11 Esp. Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Four Essays On Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969): 118–72; on this Alan Ryan, “Isaiah Berlin: Four Essays on Liberty,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Contemporary Political Theory*, ed. Jacob T. Levy, Oxford Academic, 10.12.2015, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198717133.013.8>; Ian Carter, “Positive and Negative Liberty,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (spring 2022 edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/liberty-positive-negative/> [accessed 23.08.2022]).

12 According to its content we later find the division in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Die philosophischen Schriften* ed. Carl Immanuel Gerhardt, vol. 7 (Berlin: Weidemann, 1890; repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1978): 109. It is heavily disputed if Kant used the dichotomy, as well; cfr. Manfred Baum, “Positive und negative Freiheit bei Kant,” *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik / Annual Review of Law and Ethics* 16 (2008): 43–56; Bernd Ludwig, “‘Positive und negative Freiheit’ bei Kant? Wie begriffliche Konfusion auf philosophi(e)historische Abwege führt,” *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik / Annual Review of Law and Ethics* 21 (2013): 271–305.

13 An overview is provided by Walter Warnach, “Freiheit (I),” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie (HWPh)*, vol. 2, ed. Joachim Ritter (Basel: Schwabe, 1972): 1064–74; Orlando Patterson, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991) (telling a history of freedom as opposite of slavery or domination).

14 Kurt Raaflaub, *Die Entdeckung der Freiheit: Zur historischen Semantik und Gesellschaftsgeschichte eines politischen Grundbegriffes der Griechen* (Munich: C.H. Beck 1985).

however, there were also approaches that constructed positive concepts of freedom, for example, in the *prohairesis* of the Aristotelian doctrine of imputation.¹⁵ *Prohairesis* can be translated as “free choice” and means the selection of a reasonable action that achieves the set goal or the purpose pursued.¹⁶ Such a choice justifies imputation only if it is made voluntarily (*ekousios*), that is, without error or external coercion. This sounds like “voluntariness” in the modern sense, but Aristotle’s theory of action has still some distance from what the Christian doctrine of imputation later came to mean. But Aristotelian ethics offers us the first approach to understanding freedom as a precondition of human action, that is, as freedom “to” something.

Similar, but different in approach, is the Stoic concept of human freedom. Although, according to the Stoic view, man is predetermined by the natural order (one could also say: by the deity which ordered nature), unlike animals, he is capable of acting not only out of affect, but out of reason. Here, a free space opens for deliberate and desired conduct.¹⁷ This *ekousia autopraxias*, allegedly already mentioned by Chrysippus,¹⁸ does not equate to voluntary action in the modern sense. Rather, it indicates deliberate action based on one’s own decision. The design of one’s own life, however, cannot exceed the limits that nature or God has set for this life.¹⁹ For example, in the Late Stoa, in Seneca and especially in Epictetus, the freedom of decision, therefore, turns inward: even if one’s own decision cannot influence the external course of events, the salvation of the soul depends on moral action.

The *tranquilitas animi*, the goal of the wise man’s life, can only be achieved by those who retain the freedom to make their own morally correct decisions. For Epictetus, in particular, this freedom of the will consists in making correct decisions.²⁰ Frede, therefore, sees Epictetus as the first of the ancient philosophers to acknowledge what Western philosophy later called “free will”. Interestingly, however, Epictetus’ version of free will is not part of a general theory of action or attribution. Therefore, it does not indicate a freedom *to* something but is rather a freedom *from* something; namely, it is freedom from external constraints that nature or deity imposes on the

15 Cfr. Alfons Fürst, *Wege zur Freiheit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022): 62–73; Michael Frede, *A Free Will. Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011): 19–30.

16 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III, 1–7 (1109b–1115a), esp. III 3 (1111a–b).

17 On the coincidence of volition and predestination in the Elder and Middle Stoa Warnach, “Freiheit (I)”: 1069–70; Maximilian Forschner, “Epiktets Theorie der Freiheit im Verhältnis zur klassischen stoischen Lehre (Didd. IV, 1),” in *Epiktet: Was ist wahre Freiheit?* eds. Samuel Vollenweider, Manuel Baumbach, Eva Ebel, Maximilian Forschner, and Thomas Schmeller (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013): 97–118; Fürst, *Freiheit*: 73–91.

18 Diogenes Laertius 7,121; on this Frede, *Free Will*: 67.

19 Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* 2, 38, 3: ‘cum de ista re agetur, dicam quemadmodum manente fato aliquid sit in hominis arbitrio; [. . .].’ Cfr. Aldo Setaioli, “Ethics III: Free will and Autonomy,” in *Brill’s Companion to Seneca. Philosopher and Dramatist*, eds. Andreas Heil and Gregor Damschen (Leiden: Brill 2014): 277–99.

20 Frede, *Free Will*: 76–78.

individual.²¹ Epictetus' "free will" is not a means or standard for moral action but an inner state, a state of the soul, which only the wise attain. In contrast, anyone who succumbs to the constraints of nature is its slave.

It seems understandable that Epictetus, himself a slave who was later freed, conceives of *inner* freedom as the form of freedom which is to be most ardently desired. Yet, this internalist view can also be explained via reference to Stoic metaphysics, which understands nature to be as immutable as it is normative. In Stoicism, freedom is conceivable only in the open realms that are not predetermined by nature, including reason, which is a realm peculiar to man.

The philosophical designs find a clear echo in the legal sources. In texts from the Roman Republic, *libertas* always means being free "from" something. We see this in the concept of *libera res publica*, but we also see it in private law figures. As stated in the Twelve Tables, the emancipation of the son of the house makes him *a patre liber*.²² At the same time, the freedman is called *libertus*, that is, the one freed from the power of another. In the classical sources of the second century, however, one also finds (though rarely) texts like that of Florentinus (*Digest* 1, 5, 4 pr.), which asserts, 'Libertas est naturalis facultas eius quod cuique facere libet, nisi si quid vi aut iure prohibetur'.²³ Here, in a way that almost parallels its use in Stoic philosophy, *libertas* is described as the capacity to act. Nevertheless, this definition does not tell modern readers anything about the concept of *libertas* as it was employed in, for example, republican times.²⁴

2.2 Libertas in Cicero: *dominum in se ipsum?*

A thoroughly modern-sounding, though Stoic, definition of "freedom" has been handed down to us by Cicero. Like Florentinus, he describes *libertas* as *potestas vivendi, ut velis* (Cicero, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 34).²⁵ If one reads the text further,²⁶ however, one realizes

21 Epictetus 1, 1, 23; 1, 12, 9; further references in Frede, *Free Will*: 76; cfr. as well Fürst, *Freiheit*: 108–19.

22 XII tab. 4, 2 b; cfr. Gaius, *Institutes* 1, 132; *Ulpiani liber singularis regularum* 10, 1.

23 Transl. Watson: 'Freedom is one's natural power of doing what one pleases, save insofar as it is ruled out either by coercion or by law.'

24 However, Valentina Arena, *Libertas and the Practice of Politics in the Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 14–15 quotes Florentinus as a witness for "Roman *libertas*" in general.

25 Similarly, Cicero, *De officiis* 1, 17 and 20.

26 The whole chapter runs as follows: 'Quid est enim libertas? Potestas vivendi, ut velis. Quis igitur vivit, ut volt, nisi qui recte vivit? qui gaudet officio, cui vivendi via considerata atque provisa est, qui ne legibus quidem propter metum paret, sed eas sequitur et colit, quia id salutare esse maxime iudicat, qui nihil dicit, nihil facit, nihil cogitat denique nisi libenter ac libere, cuius omnia consilia resque omnes, quas gerit, ab ipso proficiscuntur eodemque referuntur, nec est ulla res, quae plus apud eum polleat quam ipsius voluntas atque iudicium; cui quidem etiam, quae vim habere maximam dicitur,

that Cicero is not describing what we today call “free will”, i.e., the freedom to make a decision and therefore be held responsible for it. According to Cicero, free is the one who voluntarily chooses what is right, what is reasonable, without being forced to do so by laws. Therefore, only the wise man is free;²⁷ the stupid man is a slave to what drives him to his actions. Two things need to be commented on here: first, the ideal of the Stoic wise man, who makes decisions free of external constraints, also underlies the early Christian image, according to which one who does not follow Christ remains a slave to sin.²⁸ Second, Cicero makes it clear that he does not go beyond the concept of *ekousía autoprágias*²⁹ in his Stoic description of freedom.

Nevertheless, when viewed from a different perspective, Cicero’s insights can be seen in a fresh light. In his writings on political philosophy, Cicero also poses the question of *libertas* and its essence. Valentina Arena has pointed out in her writings that Cicero compares the freedom of the *res publica* with that of a human being: free is he who does not have to obey the orders of others.³⁰

That the Roman concept of freedom starts from the negative vantage of being “free from something” has been common knowledge since Rudolf von Jhering³¹ or, at the latest, since Fritz Schulz.³² However, Arena’s observation is not based on them but on Pettit and Skinner,³³ who describe Roman *libertas* as “non-domination”. Without

Fortuna ipsa cedit, si, ut sapiens poeta dixit, “suis ea cuique fingitur moribus.” Soli igitur hoc contingit sapienti, ut nihil faciat invitus, nihil dolens, nihil coactus.’ – Transl. Loeb and Horace Rackham: ‘For what is freedom? The power to live as you will. Who then lives as he wills except one who follows the things that are right, who delights in his duty, who has a well-considered path of life mapped out before him, who does not obey even the laws because of fear but follows and respects them because he judges that to be most conducive to health, whose every utterance and action and even thought is voluntary and free, whose enterprises and courses of conduct all take their start from himself and likewise have their end in himself, there being no other thing that has more influence with him than his own will and judgement? to whom indeed Fortune, whose power is said to be supreme, herself submits – if, as the wise poet said, she is moulded for each man by his manners. It therefore befalls the wise man alone that he does nothing against his will nor with regret nor by compulsion.’

27 Cfr. Cicero, *De officiis* 1, 66–70; on that and similar texts Arena, *Libertas*, 262; Valentina Arena, “Invocation to Liberty and Invective of Dominatus at the End of the Roman Republic,” in *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 50 (2007): 49–74.

28 John 8:34; Romans 6:16–23.

29 Above, at fn. 17.

30 On these texts Valentina Arena, “Popular Sovereignty in the Late Roman Republic: Cicero and the Notion of Popular Will,” in *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, eds. Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 73–95, esp. 74–79.

31 Rudolf von Jhering, *Geist des römischen Rechts auf den verschiedenen Stufen seiner Entwicklung*, vol. 1.2 (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1854): 134–320.

32 Fritz Schulz, *Prinzipien des römischen Rechts* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1934): 95–111; since 1936 available in an English translation: Fritz Schulz, *Principles of Roman Law*. Translated by Marguerite Wolff (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936).

33 Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 74–77 and 103–6; Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni-

negating later contributions, it should be noted that Schulz had already succinctly argued,³⁴

Thus, the individual was not free when he was a slave, a whole nation was not free when at its head was an absolute monarch or when it was subject to a foreign yoke. Where there was no “master” in this sense the Romans as individuals or as a people were free, however the degree of *libertas* might vary.

Cicero turns this negative approach into a positive one in *De re publica*: he has Scipio Africanus describe the free republic as *res populi*, i.e., a matter of the people.³⁵ This *genetivus possessivus (populi)* is borrowed from the terminology of property law. One could, therefore, also translate the frequently quoted phrase as ‘The government is a thing that belongs to the people’. The possible connection between the rhetoric of freedom and the terminology of property law becomes even more evident when one encounters Scipio’s subsequent characterization of the republic: he asserts that, within it, everything (*omnia*) belongs to the people.³⁶ It is no coincidence that *res publica* is a private law term as well. In that context, it describes things that are accessible to all people and can therefore be used by all.³⁷ Metaphorically, then, one could say that in a free republic, the people belong to themselves and are, therefore, their own masters.

The Ciceronian construction thus sounds seductively like Locke’s formulation that the free man has “property in his own person”. Indeed, this is precisely the con-

versity Press, 1998); cfr. Valentina Arena, “Libertas and Virtus of the Citizen in Cicero’s De Re Publica,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 26 (2007): 29–30, 52.

³⁴ Schulz, *Principles*: 140–41; Schulz, *Principles*: 95: ‘So ist der einzelne unfrei, wenn er Sklave ist, ein ganzes Volk, wenn an seiner Spitze ein absoluter Monarch steht, oder wenn es dem Dominat eines fremden Staats unterworfen ist. Fehlt aber der “Herr” in diesem Sinne, so ist für den Römer der einzelne wie die Volksgesamtheit frei, so verschieden groß auch das Maß der libertas sein mag.’

³⁵ Cicero, *De re publica* 1, 39: ‘Est igitur, inquit Africanus, res publica res populi, [. . .]’ 41: ‘[. . .] omnis res publica, quae ut dixi populi res est, [. . .].’ Transl. in Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Republic. On the Laws*, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes, Loeb Classical Library 213 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959): 41: ‘Well, then, a commonwealth is the property of a people’; ‘. . . every commonwealth, which, as I said, is the “property of a people”’. An extensive study on this topos has been published by Claudia Moatti, *Res publica. Histoire romaine de la chose publique* (Paris: Fayard, 2018); Moatti, Claudia, “The Notion of Res publica and Its Conflicting Meanings at the End of the Roman Republic,” in *Libertas and Res Publica in the Roman Republic. Ideas of Freedom and Roman Politics*, ed. Catalina Balmaceda (Leiden: Brill, 2020): 118–37.

³⁶ Cicero, *De re publica* 1,42: ‘Illa autem est civitas popularis – sic enim appellant – in qua in populo sunt omnia.’ Somehow different (“all the power”) is the Engl. transl. by Loeb and Keyes: ‘But a popular government (for so it is called) exists when all the power is in the hands of the people.’

³⁷ Cfr. Maria Gabriella Zoz, *Riflessioni in tema di res publicae* (Turin: Giapichelli, 1999); Martin Schermaier, “Private Rechte an res communes?” in *Carmina iuris. Mélanges en l’honneur de Michel Humbert*, eds. Emmanuelle Chevreau, David Kremer, and Aude Laquerrière-Lacroix (Paris: De Boccard, 2012): 773–92.

clusion Arena draws in her reading of the Roman concept of freedom. After referencing Florentinus' definition (*Digest* 1,5,4 pr.),³⁸ she asserts, 'It follows that, according to the *Digest*, one is free when he is under his own *dominium*'.³⁹ This conclusion may seem obvious, but it is wrong.

First, it should be noted that Cicero's borrowings from private property law do not go beyond the attribution of a thing to a person. He does not fill out his definition with considerations of how an owner may deal with his things. Florentinus' *quod cuique facere libet*, in turn, has nothing to do with the *dominatio* of others. *Dominatio* and *libertas* touch each other in political discourses (including in Cicero) but not in private law. After all, there are also persons described as *alieni iuris*, i.e., those who are subject to domination even though they are free (*liber*). With *dominium*, again, only the right to demand a thing from another with the *rei vindicatio* is enshrined. We do not find a definition of property in the legal sources because Roman property is conceived procedurally, not materially, i.e., not from the powers it grants.

Conversely, it is true that one is not free if one belongs to the *dominium* of another. This is shown by Cicero's characterization of the *res publica* as well as the Roman jurists' description of the status of a slave.⁴⁰ However, the idea of *dominium in oneself* is alien to Roman thought. The lack of an independent conception of ownership is made clear by the structure of the classical trial of freedom, the *status quaestio* in the context of the *vindicatio in libertatem*: it is true that freedom (of the supposed slave) and property (of the master) are opposed here, and indeed the trial follows the structure of the (old) *rei vindicatio*, which was created so that one could pursue one's own cause. However, the *adsertor libertatis*, who appears on behalf of the slave, does not claim that the latter has property in himself but asserts his status as a freeman.⁴¹ When a Roman jurist wants to express that someone is "his own master", he speaks of *sui iuris esse*.⁴² This expression can be taken quite literally: To be *sui iuris* means that all legal relationships concerning this person are borne and regulated by him or her. A *sui iuris* person is not mediatized in legal relations by a *dominus*, a guardian, or a *pater familias*.

In light of this background and the developments outlined in the next section, one can conclude that the *dominium in se ipsum* only became a description of personal freedom through the justification of "dominion" by a new concept of the will that emerged in moral theology, which at the same time captured the private-law con-

38 Cfr. above at n. 23.

39 Arena, "Libertas": 15.

40 Cfr. *Digest* 1, 5, 4, 2 (Flor. 9 inst.): 'Servitus est constitutio iuris gentium, qua quis dominio alieno contra naturam subicitur.' Engl. transl., Watson: 'Slavery is an institution of the jus gentium, whereby someone is against nature made subject to the ownership of another.'

41 In detail Miriam Indra, *Status quaestio. Studien zum Freiheitsprozess im klassischen römischen Recht* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2011).

42 Cfr. David Johnston, *Roman Law in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 30–52.

cept of property. The one who can decide of his own free will whether and how to act thereby dominates himself and the things he brings into his possession. Through the convergence in reasoning, “dominion” and “property” come together here and become interchangeable in content.

Ancient philosophy, when speaking of “dominion” over oneself, used an image that is as simple as it is obvious: he alone, who does not have to obey that which is foreign, commands himself. However, in the history of ideas, this image became a theoretical topos only when the command to perform a certain action is recharged with the concept of free will, which makes man responsible before God. Only then do the concepts arrange themselves in the way Locke presents them to us: freedom establishes property, and this, in turn, characterizes the freedom of the person. The stirrings of a Lockean conception of “free will” are evidenced in the philosophy of the Middle and Late Stoa. However, even the Stoa did not achieve a concept of the will that was free of all determination and teleology. This was only achieved in the Church Fathers’ doctrine of attribution.

2.3 Freedom in the Church Fathers

The Stoic concept of freedom comes to the fore in early Christian theology even more clearly than it does in the works of Florentinus. Like the Stoa, Christian thinkers are confronted with the problem of how human freedom is possible in an order created by God. However, theology approaches this paradox differently than Stoic philosophy.⁴³

Paul formulates his concept of freedom in a rather traditional way: like Cicero’s idea (*Paradoxa Stoicorum* 34), it is turned inward and is thus not conceived as freedom of action. Instead, Paul proclaims a freedom in Christ, a freedom from sin and the law, but not a freedom to shape the external world. Vaucher has recently made this point clear regarding early Christianity’s attitude toward slavery.⁴⁴ Paul’s freedom is soteriologically based; it understands Christ’s redemptive death as a renewal of liberation from Egyptian servitude. Thus, Paul is not concerned with freedom of will in the Stoic sense.

The early Church Fathers, in contrast, start with the Stoic conception and the Aristotelian doctrine of *prohairesis* in their efforts to substantiate human freedom in the order of creation. Irenaeus of Lyon (d. ca. 200) is probably the first to consistently succeed in this task by positing a gradation of divine and human will.⁴⁵ According to Ire-

⁴³ On the differences between Stoic and early Christian concepts of freedom esp. Fürst, *Freiheit*: 139–86, esp. 161–86.

⁴⁴ Daniel Vaucher, *Sklaverei in Norm und Praxis. Die frühchristlichen Kirchenordnungen* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2017).

⁴⁵ Cfr. Walter Warnach, “Freiheit (II),” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter, vol. 2 (Basel: Schwabe, 1972): 1077; Fürst, *Freiheit*: 152–61 argues that Justin Martyr was the first to link freedom and decision in the concept of *prohairesis eleuthera*.

naeus, God created man in his own image, thus endowing him with free will. Human will cannot reach beyond creation, but because it is free, man is also free to decide for or against God's order. In this, Irenaeus sees the core of human freedom. At this point, Origen takes up the proverbial baton and defines sin as a decision of the free human will against God (and thus against the good).⁴⁶ In both Irenaeus and Origen, however, human freedom stands within the dialectic of good and evil, light and darkness, being and non-being. The concepts and arguments brought forward by the theologians are motivated to exonerate God's creation from evil.⁴⁷ Thus, it is not yet coordinated with the grace of God on the one hand and the redemptive act of Christ on the other.

The notion of the reconciliation of free human will with divine omniscience arrives on the theological stage in the works of Augustine of Hippo. According to him, man has voluntarily turned away from God (in Adam's Fall) and therefore needs grace and redemption. In his earthly life, the sinful man is indeed unfree, but through the grace of God, he can decide for good and against evil. Therefore, even after the Fall, man has a free decision (*liberum arbitrium*) about his actions.⁴⁸ This *liberum arbitrium* seems closely related to what Epictetus called "free decision",⁴⁹ but in Augustine, it is – unlike in Epictetus – the basis for a moral judgment. Actions are not good or evil *per se*, but their moral quality results from the volition of the acting subject. Augustine's understanding of the will is similar to the Aristotelian theory of action, in which the choice of what is reasonable (*prohairesis*) determines imputation. In Augustine, however, the freedom to decide which action is right and suitable is joined in the *liberum arbitrium* by the free choice to choose the wrong action despite knowing better. The decision for the wrong option, i.e., the evil, is, in each case, a turning away (*aversio*)⁵⁰ from God. The *prohairesis*, the reasonable choice of the means to achieve an end, thus receives in the *liberum arbitrium* a kind of controlling instance, which examines whether it responds to God's grace or not.

Evaluating this Augustinian doctrine from a theological standpoint is beyond my competence.⁵¹ Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that his doctrine subsequently became the basis of Christian moral theology in scholasticism.⁵² The philosophy of

46 On him extensively Fürst, *Freiheit*: 187–290.

47 Cfr. Fürst, *Freiheit*: 169–75 (concerning Tertullian); Warnach, "Freiheit (II)": 1081.

48 Cfr. *in extenso* Frede, *Free Will*: 167–170; in addition, Warnach, "Freiheit (II)": 1081–82.

49 Vgl. Frede, *Free Will*: 168–69.

50 Augustine, *De civitate dei*: 12, 6; cfr. Warnach, "Freiheit (II)": 1081.

51 Still important is Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982): 123–44.

52 Concerning Early Scholasticism Otto Hermann Pesch, "Freiheit (III)," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 2, ed. Joachim Ritter (Basel: Schwabe, 1972): 1083–84; concerning High Scholasticism, Thomas Hoffmann, *Free Will and the Rebel Angels in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: California University Press, 2020): esp. 11–160.

Thomas Aquinas, to name a prominent example, utilizes the Augustinian perspective as a core concept of moral philosophy,⁵³ though there is a vivid dispute to what extent *liberum arbitrium* is determined by God's creation in the latter's works.⁵⁴ Since then and until today, it is common to define freedom as freedom of action, as freedom "to do something", or as agency. Thus, it is not only our modern concept of freedom that has its roots in this concept of agency. Agency, or freedom to do something, is also the basis of important legal institutions, including both property and slavery. The arrival of freedom of action on the stage of conceptual history now brings me to the second focus of my paper: medieval discourses on freedom.

3 From Thomas Aquinas to Spanish Scholasticism

3.1 The Christian Doctrine of Imputation

The construction of *liberum arbitrium* did not solve all the theological problems about the freedom of the sinful man. Is *liberum arbitrium* a freedom to sin? Or is it a freedom to turn to God? In his reference to Aristotle's doctrine of action, Thomas succeeded in separating the question of imputation (i.e., the doctrine of sin) from the doctrine of grace, thus mobilizing the *liberum arbitrium* only for the doctrine of sin. As is known, Martin Luther tried to reverse this separation.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Protestant jurisprudence has held onto the Thomistic terminology and systematics.

Back to Thomas: *voluntas* and *liberum arbitrium* belong to the same *potentia*, but they differ in their function when it comes to the attribution of actions: *voluntas* chooses an action to bring about a certain success, *liberum arbitrium* gauges whether the

⁵³ Dorothee Welp, *Willensfreiheit bei Thomas von Aquin* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1979); Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas's Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will," in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter? Qu'est-ce que la philosophie au moyen âge? What is Philosophy in the Middle Ages?* eds. Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998): 1034–44; Jamie Anne Spiering, "'Liber est causa sui': Thomas Aquinas and the Maxim 'The Free is the Cause of itself,'" *The Review of Metaphysics* 65 (2011): 351–76; Luise A. Mitchell, "Free to Be Human: Thomas Aquinas's Discussion of *Liberum Arbitrium*," *New Blackfriars* 96 (2015): 22–42.

⁵⁴ Brian Shanley, "Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998): 99–122; Lawrence Dewan, "St. Thomas and the Causes of Free Choice," *Acta Philosophica* 8 (1999): 87–96; Tobias Hoffmann and Cyrille Michon, "Aquinas on Free Will and Intellectual Determinism," *Philosopher's Imprint* 17 (2017): 1–36; Steven A. Long, Roger W. Nutt, and Thomas J. White, eds., *Thomism and Predestination. Principles and Disputations* (Ave Maria: Ave Maria University Press, 2016).

⁵⁵ Briefly on this Pesch, "Freiheit (III)": 1087; more detailed Hans Vorster, *Das Freiheitsverständnis bei Thomas von Aquin und Martin Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965); Matthew Knell, *Sin, Grace, and Free Will: A Historical Survey of Christian Thought*, vol. 2, *From Anselm to the Reformation* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2018): 158–79 and 180–217.

action corresponds to the good (= God's will). Apart from this differentiation, Thomas can rely entirely on Aristotle's theory of action and join him in distinguishing between recognizing (*intelligere*), deliberating (*ratiocinari*), and choosing (*velle*).⁵⁶ Only the *velle*, the natural will, is complemented by the *liberum arbitrium* (*eligere*). Sometimes Aquinas combines both aspects of the will and speaks only of *libera voluntas*; other scholastics distinguish between *voluntas naturalis* and *voluntas eligentiae*.⁵⁷

We need not concern ourselves with the individual terminological differences here. What is crucial is that this terminological differentiation lays a solid foundation for a Christian doctrine of imputation. It determines the medieval and modern doctrine of sin and is the *leitmotif* of medieval jurisprudence of confession. Through the Age of Enlightenment, which replaced the concept of "sin" with that of "crime", it still essentially determines modern criminal law theory.⁵⁸

The emphasis on the doctrine of action in Thomistic hamartiology can also be interpreted as the culmination of a tendency towards regulation and control of the lives of believers that has persisted since late antiquity. Although the *liberum arbitrium* leaves the judgement between good or evil to the individual, the doctrine of action creates a dogmatic framework for judicially reviewing this judgement in confession, thus before the *forum internum*. Therefore, I could also have given my contribution the title: "Freedom as a pretence for control."

3.2 Free Will and Freedom

However, I am more interested in the anthropological embedding of free will, which eventually becomes the pivotal point of a new, ultimately enlightened understanding of freedom. The development of this conception is evidenced by the Thomistic assertion, *liberum sit quod sui causa est*,⁵⁹ borrowed from Aristotle, for whom it is a rule of metaphysics. Thomas, however, does not relate it to man's existence but to his freedom of action: 'The free is not the cause of itself in being, but the cause of itself in acting.'⁶⁰ Man is free because he can freely choose the goal and purpose of his action. In short, as an agent, he is free. Thomas does not say: 'I act (or I will); therefore, I am.'

⁵⁶ *Summa theologica* I, qu. 83 art. 4 resp.

⁵⁷ On that, see Tilman Anselm Ramelow, "Der Begriff des Willens in seiner Entwicklung von Boethius bis Kant," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 40 (2004): 42–43 (concerning Bonaventura); Anselm Ramelow, "Wille (II)," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 12, eds. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Gottfried Gabriel (Basel: Schwabe, 2005): 772; but see already Johannes Verweyen, *Das Problem der Willensfreiheit in der Scholastik. Auf Grund der Quellen dargestellt und kritisch gewürdigt* (Bonn: C. Winter, 1909).

⁵⁸ See, for example, Pascal Gläser, *Zurechnung bei Thomas von Aquin: eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung mit Bezug auf das aktuelle deutsche Strafrecht* (Munich: Alber 2005).

⁵⁹ Thomas, *Summa Theologica*: I qu. 83 art. 1 ad 3: 'Free is what has its cause in itself.'

⁶⁰ Spiering, "Liber est causa sui": 352.

Man owes his existence to God's creation; his being has its *causa* in God. Likewise, the freedom of his will flows from the same source. That said, divinely prompted free will enables man to freely conduct his earthly life. To this extent, he is *causa* to himself. Thus, man is his own master, which alone makes him responsible to God.

This Thomistic construct sounds similar to that of Cicero, but in its metaphysical justification, it goes beyond the thought of the Roman philosopher. To be *causa* of oneself is an attribute of God, the creator, who is not himself created. Thomas transposes this image of the unmoved mover to the human being capable of sin: he is not predetermined by anything in his decisions and wills, is entirely free, and for that very reason, responsible. If he were not himself the *causa* of his will, his actions and wills could not be imputed to him as sin: that is why man is not simply master of himself but of his actions.⁶¹

Nevertheless, free will constitutes man in his humanity. Since man can freely decide on his actions, Thomas calls him *dominus sui actus*, the master of his actions.⁶² This concept, which Thomas shares with Bonaventura⁶³ (it is impossible to say which of the two was the first to formulate it), has two meanings that are deliberately not delineated from one another in the scholastic discussion: one meaning, which constitutes its anthropological-philosophical aspects, is that man is his own master and therefore does not have to follow any orders except those derived from natural law and legitimate public laws.⁶⁴ Incidentally, we can see from this outline that Locke built on Thomas. The other meaning of *dominus sui actus* derives from Roman law sources, where *dominus* does not only mean “master” but also includes the concept of an “owner”. Bonaventura expressly refers to these dual meanings. Indeed, he applies both *imperium* and *dominium* to his definition of man's mastery of his actions.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Herein is found the theological reason why man can acquire slaves but not enslave himself; cfr. at n. 10.

⁶² For example, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*: I qu. 29 art. 1 (resp.): *dominium actus sui* as a characteristic of *persona*.

⁶³ Bonaventura, *Commentaria in lib. II Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*: dist. 25, art. 1, qu. 1, ed. Adolphe Charles Peltier, *Opera omnia Sancti Bonaventurae* 3 (Paris: Luis Vivès, 1865): 200–201.

⁶⁴ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De perfectione spiritualis vitae*: cap. 11 lin. 116–19: ‘Nihil autem est homini amabilius libertate propriae voluntatis. Per hanc enim homo est et aliorum dominus, per hanc aliis uti vel frui potest, per hanc etiam suis actibus dominatur.’ (‘Nothing is dearer to any man than the freedom of his will, whereby he is lord of others, can use what he pleases, can enjoy what he wills, and is master of his own actions;’ this and all other translations of texts of Aquinas are taken from <https://aquinas.cc/> [accessed 04.12.2023]).

⁶⁵ Cf. Bonaventure, *Commentaria in lib. II Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*: dist. 25, art. 1, qu. 1 (my emphasis): ‘Illa autem potentia dominium habet ex libertate respectu objecti, quae non est arcata ad aliquod genus appetibilis, sed nata est omnia appetibilia appetere, et omnia fungibilia respuere. [. . .] Nam voluntas in rationabilibus non solum compescit manum exteriorem, vel pedem, sed etiam compescit seipsam et refraenat, incipiens odire frequenter quod prius diligebat. Et hoc ex sui ipsius imperio et dominio.’ (‘This has the facility to domination, with regard to an object, because of the liberty, which is not restrained to desirable things, but has been given to desire the desirable and to spurn the

Considering these definitional complexities, one might ask, how can we imagine man as the “owner” of his actions? A jurist would never formulate a question in this way. As previously suggested, in Roman law, ownership can only be imagined regarding external and corporal things. Nevertheless, Thomas and perhaps Bonaventura, also use the legal meaning of *dominium* to justify why people acquire ownership of worldly goods (as does Locke some four hundred years later). The Roman *occupatio*, the appropriation of ownerless things, thus acquires an anthropological basis: ownership of one’s action is extended to the thing seized and therefore constitutes the agent as its owner. Starting from freedom of action, the High Scholastics thus arrive at a justification for the acquisition of private property.⁶⁶

3.3 Corresponding Concepts: Free Will, Property, and Freedom

Whether or not private property can be justified theologically has been discussed by theologians since the third century.⁶⁷ We do not need to rehash this discussion in detail here because it leads us away from our subject. However, one point is still important for us to consider. Namely, that since the late thirteenth century, there has again been a fundamental dispute about whether Jesus had private property, whether Christians are allowed to have private property and whether the Church should organize itself without property. In the so-called “Poverty Controversy”, fought mainly from the early fourteenth century (under Pope John XXII) onwards, both theological and legal arguments have been deployed for and against propertylessness. Strict proponents of the Franciscan movement, on the one hand, strove to define the concept of property as narrowly as possible in order to avoid the need to construe diverse notions of property and trust as prohibited. John XXII, on the other hand, argued that every right that conveys the use and yield of a thing should be classified as property. In his *opus nonaginta dierum*, William of Ockham sought to refute the pope’s argument. There, Ockham defines property according to two criteria: property only exists

profitable things. [. . .] Because will rational beings not only tempers hand or foot, but as well tempers and bridles itself and thus it starts to hate what it desired before. And from that one has sovereignty and property of one’s own.’).

⁶⁶ For more details see Martin Schermaier, “Dominus actuum suorum. Die willenstheoretische Begründung des Eigentums und das römische Recht,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Romanistische Abteilung* 134 (2017): 49–105, esp. 61–76.

⁶⁷ Martin Schermaier, “Habebant omnia communia. Überlegungen zum Gemeineigentum in Philosophie, Theologie und Recht,” in *De rebus divinis et humanis. Essays in honour of Jan Hallebeek*, eds. Harry Dondorp, Martin Schermaier, and Boudewijn Sirks (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 201): 241–63; still useful because of its rich material are Otto Schilling, *Reichtum und Eigentum in der Altkirchlichen Literatur. Ein Beitrag zur sozialen Frage* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1908); Paul Christophe, *L’usage Chrétien du droit de propriété dans l’écriture de la tradition patristique* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1963); Charles Avila, *Ownership: Early Christian Teaching* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1983).

if (first) the entitled person can reclaim the thing from anyone and (second) he can do with it whatever he wants.⁶⁸

Ockham's second criterion is new, at least regarding Roman law. Yet, it is not entirely new from a theological perspective. The Church Fathers already condemned wealth (in connection with the parable of the rich young man⁶⁹) solely if the owner attached his heart to a thing.⁷⁰ For Ockham, however, it is not the heart, but – more precisely – the will that is decisive: the *voluntas* of the owner turns possessions into sinful property. Free will thus not only explains why someone acquires property, but conversely, property entails the owner's power and discretion to deal with the thing he owns as he wills. In this way, the acquisition and content of property are both described in terms of a will theory.

There is still another connection between will and freedom, which becomes apparent when one considers the ownership of human beings by other human beings or institutions. According to Roman law, a slave is the property of his *dominus*. Under Ockham's new definition of property, this right means that the owner can use a slave as he pleases. If one applies this definition to contemporary (i.e., late medieval) dependency relationships, they cannot be classified as slavery: a master cannot do as he pleases with his vassals, nor with bondsmen or serfs, nor with apprentices or domestic workers. Therefore, they cannot be considered slaves, even if they are still called *servi* or *ancillae* in legal language.

It is hardly a coincidence that the first jurist to adopt Ockham's definition of *dominium*, Bartolus de Saxoferrato, is also the first jurist to decisively state that slavery does not exist among Christians.⁷¹ However, in his statement, he does not refer to the *dominium in se ipsum* but to a text by the classical jurist Ulpian (*Digest* 49,15,24), in which the latter explains who was considered a prisoner of war and could therefore be enslaved. Prisoners of war (and thus slaves) would only be made in the case of war by foreign powers against the Roman people. Bartolus translates this principle into the circumstances of his time: in the politically fragmented Europe of the fourteenth century, he equates Roman citizenship to membership in the Roman Church.⁷² In wars between Christian rulers, Bartolus sees it as a matter of customary law that no prisoners of war should be taken in order to enslave them.⁷³ Therefore, according to Bartolus, Christians could not be enslaved in Christian countries.

68 Cfr. Schermaier, "Dominus actuum suorum": 72–76.

69 Mark 10:17–26; Matthew 19:16–27; Luke 18:18–27.

70 On this Schermaier, "Habebant omnia communia": esp. 249–50 (with further references).

71 Bartolus de Saxoferrato, *Commentaria super secunda Digesti Novi*, ad D. 49, 15, 24 (Turin: Nicolaus Bevilacqua, 1574): fol. 227 v.–228 r.; on this Thomas Rübner, "Die Rezeption des römischen Sklavenrechts im Gelehrten Recht des Mittelalters," in *Sklaverei und Freilassung im Römischen Recht. Symposium für Hans Josef Wieling zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Thomas Finkenauer (Berlin: Springer, 2006): 201–21, 214–19.

72 Cfr. Bartolus, *Commentaria*: ad D. 49, 15, 24, n. 3–6 (fol. 228 r.).

73 Bartolus, *Commentaria*: ad D. 49, 15, 24, n. 16 (fol. 228 r.): 'Certe de iure gentium antiquis moribus introducto deberet esse ius captivitatis et postliminii [. . .] sed secundum mores moderni temporis

It remains speculative to assert that this rule is linked to the notion that property is based on a specific theory of will. Bartolus does not establish such a link himself. Nevertheless, the following circumstances suggest that there is a connection.

a) Firstly, private property and slavery have constituted formative social institutions since the time of the Church Fathers. In theological terms, these institutions are not natural states but came into the world through the Fall of man and are permitted to continue by God under certain restrictions until the Last Judgement. Here it is advisable to consider Locke once again. Like earlier thinkers, he continues to deal with property and slavery together.⁷⁴

b) Secondly, a conceptual link between property and slavery can be observed not only in Ockham's definition but also from the legal construction of *dominium*: as his master's property, a slave cannot simultaneously be *dominus sui actus*. The master's property also covers the slave's actions. Yet, because every Christian is personally responsible before God, he must remain *dominus sui actus*. Christians being slaves of other Christians would eliminate or at least restrict this principle of personal responsibility.

c) Finally, as one might imagine based on the last point, Bartolus expends significant energy in his argument that, since the enslavement of a Roman by Romans was already prohibited by Roman law, through membership in the Roman Church, this prohibition is extended to all who share faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of national origin and across national borders.

Christian thinkers in Bartolus' time had at hand all the arguments needed to conclude that, based upon the theoretical relationship between free will and man's self-rule, slavery should be rejected, at least among Christians. Indeed, the *dominium in se ipsum* would be the perfect legal argument to support the position that no one can be the property of another person. Anyone who accepts the *dominium in se ipsum* as a legal maxim must exclude slavery among Christians. Every Christian is, per definition, *dominus* of himself. This early theory of self-ownership constituted a narrative that has survived, barely interrupted, to our days: slavery exists only where a person becomes the property of another person, thus an object of his *dominium*. According to this definition, other forms of dependency, even those of extreme asymmetrical nature, are not slavery.⁷⁵ Slavery has thus become not only a social or legal concept but

consuetudinis antiquitus observate inter Christianos quantum ad personas hominum non observamus iura captivitatis et postliminii nec venduntur nec habentur servi captivi.' (For sure, according to ancient mores the law of captivity and postliminium had been introduced [. . .] but according to the mores of modern times we do not, among Christians, adhere to the rights of captivity and its reversion as observed in antique costumes and captive slaves are neither sold nor kept').

⁷⁴ Ch. 4 and 5 in his Second Treatise.

⁷⁵ See also Richard J. Helmholz, "The Law of Slavery and the European Ius Commune," in *The Legal Understanding of Slavery. From the Historical to the Contemporary*, ed. Jean Allain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 17–39; according to Helmholz, the concept of *servus* recedes into the background because the different semi-freemen had to be treated differently in different contexts.

an ideological one: what slavery is depends on the range and scope of freedom and property.

4 *Dominium in se ipsum* as a Source of Fundamental Rights

That which modern readers might propose as a conjecture was self-evident in the moral-theological discussion of Bartolus' time. Yet, as we try to wrap our minds around the discourse of another period, we can conclude without further ado that generations of engagement with the *dominiatio sui actus* lead to the conclusion that everyone is his own master, *sui dominus*. As argued by Thomas, for example, 'homo constituitur dominus sui ipsius per liberum arbitrium'.⁷⁶ free will establishes ownership of oneself.⁷⁷ In recent decades, there has been intensive research on the idea of property of oneself, its preconditions and, above all, its consequences for philosophical and legal discussions. Some see it as the foundation of subjective rights and, thus, the basis for the modern concept of human dignity. The works of Brian Tierney⁷⁸ and Annabel Brett⁷⁹ are worth mentioning here. That said, we do not need to enter into this discussion in order to shed light on the consequences of *dominium in se ipsum* for the discourse on freedom.

4.1 Legal Implications of *dominium in se ipsum*

I only want to give a few examples of how the concept was used and how it might have contributed to the development of the modern notion of human dignity. Thomas Aquinas referred to the *dominium in se ipsum* as the area for which man is responsible because of his free will. If man transgresses God's commandments while acting upon such responsibility, he sins. However, subsequent generations of theologians un-

76 Thomas, *Summa Theologica* II-II 64 art. 5 ad 3: 'Man is made master of himself through his free-will.' There it says further: 'et ideo licite potest homo de seipso disponere quantum ad ea quae pertinent ad hanc vitam, quae hominis libero arbitrio regitur.' ('wherefore he can lawfully dispose of himself as to those matters which pertain to this life which is ruled by man's free-will').

77 Thomas, *Summa Theologica* I-II qu. 1, art. 2; ii-II, 1 u. 66 art. 1; idem, *summa contra Gentiles* 3, 81 and 3, 111 (this and further references in Brian Tierney, "Dominium of Self and Natural Rights before Locke and After," in *Transformations in Medieval and Early-Modern Rights Discourse*, eds. Virpi Mäkinen and Petter Korkmans (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006): 173–200, 180.

78 Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law and Church Law, 1150–1625* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997).

79 Annabel S. Brett, *Liberty, Right and Nature. Individual Rights in Later Scholastic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

derstood the *dominium in se ipsum* as a subjective right of man founded in natural law. They, therefore, proceeded differently than Thomas: instead, they endeavoured to measure the content and scope of *dominium* by considering how far such ownership extends without becoming sin. Thus, “ownership of oneself” is no longer merely a metaphor for the free human will but is equated with a right to one’s own body.⁸⁰ The link between free will and self-ownership can be seen, for example, in the way Henry of Ghent discusses the classical question⁸¹ of whether a person condemned to death is allowed to escape.⁸² Although Henry does not speak of the *dominium* in Thomistic terms, that is, in reference to *proprietas* of one’s own body or *potestas*, he concludes that the condemned person, as the owner of their body, has a greater right to it than the *iudex saecularis*, who only has some kind of limited right to it:

To understand this, one has to know that on a certain thing, one might have power or a right in a double sense: one concerns property on the substance of a thing, and the other concerns the use by treating the thing in a certain way. The secular judge has by no means more power or right in the first sense on the body of the condemned than he has on his soul. But he only has (power) in the second sense, which consists in three forms: to capture the body, to enchain or imprison it, or to put it to death. Only a devout soul (a soul under God) has power as regards property in the substance of the body, and therefore he is bound to guard his right, without (making use of) another’s wrong.⁸³

The condemned person’s “ownership” of his body and the punitive power of the state are described here in the terminology of Roman property law. The judge has only the right to deal with the body of the condemned person in a certain way. Henry classes such a right as a right *in rem*, like an *usus* or an *ususfructus*. Just as the owner is not allowed to deprive the usufructuary of the thing, the condemned person is not allowed to escape. Only if the judge neglects the condemned person, for example, by

⁸⁰ Matthias Kaufmann, “Welches Eigentum gehört zum Menschenrecht auf Freiheit?” in *Freiheit als Rechtsbegriff*, eds. Matthias Kaufmann and Joachim Renzikowski (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2016): 115–34 does not sharply distinguish both aspects (the legal and the theological) on *dominium in se ipsum*.

⁸¹ ‘The problem is as old as Socrates [. . .]’, says Tierney, in *Natural Rights*: 80 and Brian Tierney, “Natural Rights in the Thirteenth Century: A Quaestio of Henry of Ghent,” *Speculum* 67 (1992): 58–68, 60.

⁸² Henricus de Gandavo, *Queastiones quodlibetales*, Quodlibetum IX, qu. 26 (‘Utrum condemnatus morti licite possit abire, si tempus et locum habeat’), in *Henrici de Gandavo opera omnia*, vol. 13, ed. Raymond Macken (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1965): 306–9, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aGvC4Jzoo1QKdhgF1z37_3n-riWubdCx/view [accessed 25.03.2024]; on this in detail Tierney, *Natural Rights*: 83–89 and Tierney, “A Quaestio of Henry of Ghent”: 62–66.

⁸³ ‘Ad cuius intellectum sciendum est quod supra rem aliquam dupliciter haberi potest potestas sive ius: una quoad proprietatem in substantia rei, alia quoad usum in actione aliqua exercenda circa rem. Primam potestatem aut ius nullatenus habet iudex saecularis super corpus damnati plus quam super animam illius, sed secundam tantum, quae consistit in tribus, scilicet in corpus capiendo, in vinculo sive incarcerando, et in occidendo. Potestatem autem quoad proprietatem in substantia corporis sola anima habet sub Deo, et tenetur ius suum in hoc custodire absque iniuria alterius.’

not imprisoning or guarding him, does the condemned person have a right to flee. This consideration clearly shows that, by the thirteenth century, the *dominium in se ipsum* had become a right *in rem* to one's own body.

The example discussed by Henry of Ghent seems far-fetched, perhaps even absurd to us, when it comes to describing a man's right to his own life. By contrast, the example given by Konrad Summenhart, a theologian and canonist from Tübingen of the late fifteenth century,⁸⁴ is much more practical. His most famous work is *De contractibus*, about contracts. Summenhart attempts to base his understanding of contract law of his time on moral-theological doctrine. In other words, he examines canon and Roman law to see whether it is correct from a moral-theological perspective.⁸⁵ Of course, he also assumes that free will establishes man's ownership of himself.⁸⁶ Therefore, he discusses (among other things) whether a person can grant someone a claim to surrender his own body. In his view, a contract of employment concluded for an indefinite period is paradigmatic for such a claim. Such a contract would be similar to slavery, though selling oneself into slavery is impossible⁸⁷ under natural law. In the end, however, Summenhart considers an employment contract for an indefinite period or a lifetime to be valid. The arguments put forward in favour of this are rather pragmatic: if such agreements were invalid, a series of employment relations, whether in the church and monasteries or the profane sphere, could not be filled.

Summenhart's explanations are valuable to us in two ways: on the one hand, they represent one of the earliest attempts to define dependent labour in legal terms and to justify it from a moral-theological perspective. On the other hand, all this is done under the banner of man's free self-determination; it is therefore described as a (partial) problem of the inalienable freedom of man, the *dominium in se ipsum*.

Later theologians, especially those of so-called Spanish Scholasticism, continued this discourse. Well-known⁸⁸ is the work of Balthasar Gómez de Amescúa, the *Tracta-*

⁸⁴ On Summenhart, see Helmut Feld, "Summenhart, Konrad," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie (NDB)*, vol. 25, ed. Maximilian Lanzinner (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2013): 705–6; Jussi Varkemaa, *Konrad Summenhart's Theory of Individual Rights* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

⁸⁵ The "moral transformation" of contract law is not – as Decock assumes – the achievement of the Second (or "Spanish") Scholasticism, but started already in late medieval jurisprudence and theology; cfr. Wim Decock, *Theologians and Contract Law. The Moral Transformation of the Ius Commune (ca. 1500–1650)* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers 2013).

⁸⁶ Cf. Konrad Summenhart, *De contractibus licitis vel illicitis tractatus*, tract. 1, quaest. 1) Venice: Franciscus Zilettus, 1580): 5–6; an interesting circular argument: *anima* belongs to itself, body belongs (property = right) to the soul; freedom is a right as well, and one that entitles to act (with reference to I. 1.1).

⁸⁷ Summenhart, *De contractibus*, tract. IV, qu. 74, p. 335–38; on that Tierney, "Dominium of self": 183–85.

⁸⁸ Especially since the publication of Maria Sole Testuzza, *Ius corporis, quasi ius de corpore disponenti. Il Tractatus de potestate in se ipsum di Baltasar Gómez de Amescúa* (Milan: Giuffrè, 2016).

tus de potestate in se ipsum, which was published at the beginning of the seventeenth century (1604)⁸⁹. This treatise discusses all imaginable circumstances in which a person could give up his freedom. The vast majority (such as suicide, self-mutilation, and self-sale into slavery) are considered sinful and unlawful. Others (such as a permanent employment contract or prostitution) are accepted under certain conditions. However, Gómez de Amescúa, also questions whether one may sell one's name or one's honour.

It is obvious that scholastic theology thus initiates a discussion that anticipates our modern discourse on fundamental rights both in public (“human rights”) and in private law (“personal rights”). Indeed, the scholastic foundations of modern human rights theory might be the most important aspect of the theological discourse on freedom. Two brief examples will make this linkage clear. By the sixteenth century, the rule *puella est domina sui corporis* argued in support of the assertion that an unmarried woman could have intercourse if she pleased. Neither her father nor anyone else has control over her body. Although the woman sins, she is legally entitled to have sex.⁹⁰ Furthermore, today's heavily disputed question about compulsory vaccination was already discussed in late scholastic literature.⁹¹ Within the scholastic corpus, coercive medical treatment might offend personal liberty, but it is legally arguable if the common welfare requires such treatment.

4.2 Not Only Christians

All these examples of personal freedom are discussed in the sources under the phrase *dominium in se ipsum*. However, within the texts surveyed thus far, personal liberty is not yet addressed as a universal right. This changed significantly at the beginning of the sixteenth century when the “New World” came into the view of theologians and jurists. With the “discovery” of new continents, the question arose as to whether the indigenous people were to be treated like Christians or like infidels (such as Muslims). Debates on this issue included the question of whether they could be enslaved. In 1511, the Dominicans of the Convent of Santo Domingo had already spoken out against their enslavement in the *encomienda* system.⁹² They argued that the Amerindians were endowed with reason and were, therefore, just as human as the Spaniards.

⁸⁹ Baltasar Gómez de Amescúa, *Tractatus de potestate in se ipsum* (Palermo: Erasmus Simonis, 1604).

⁹⁰ On this cfr. Sven K. Knebel, “‘Puella est domina sui corporis.’ Sexuelle Selbstbestimmung in der Theologie um 1600,” in *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 61 (2014): 141–79.

⁹¹ Cfr. Jan-Luca Helbig, “So wahr dir Gott helfe. Die Impfpflicht im Lichte der spanischen Scholastik,” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, 15.12.2021, no. 292: 5.

⁹² Furthermore, see Tilman Repgen, “Die gleiche Menschennatur. Einige Annäherungen an die Gleichheit im Recht,” in *Von formaler zu materialer Gleichheit. Vergleichende Perspektiven aus Geschichte, Kranz der Disziplinen und Theorie*, eds. Stefan Grundmann and Jan Thiessen (Tübingen:

Similar arguments were brought forward by Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484 / 85–1566)⁹³ and, a few years later, by Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546). They argued that the Amerindians are rational beings and, therefore, able to have property in land and goods, not because they are Christians but because they are humans. Both de Las Casas and de Vitoria refuted the traditional (Aristotelian) position espoused by Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490–1573). De Sepúlveda argued that the Amerindians were natural-born slaves, while his interlocutors declared that they were free irrespective of whether they were *fideles* (believers) or not.

Let us have a look at de Las Casas' later arguments in the *Principia Quaedam*:⁹⁴

From this principle we deduce, 1: the infidels are entitled to ownership on things. This is proved by the fact, that God made other creatures which are inferior to man, without distinction for every rational creature and for the help of all peoples [. . .] and he did not distinguish between believers and non-believers. This is why we must not distinguish either.⁹⁵

From this second principle we deduce, 1: even the infidels have ownership (on things) and jurisdiction on men as far as the duty to provide advice affords. This is proved: because every man, believer or non-believer, is a rational and social creature, and therefore society (or rather to live in society) is natural for all men.⁹⁶

All men, all things, all the land, all jurisdictions and all regimes are presumably free, if there is no proof for the contrary. This is proved: because from the very beginning of rational beings all are born free.⁹⁷

Mohr Siebeck, 2021): 31–66, esp. 38–45, with further references, e.g., to Michael Sievernich, “Anfänge prophetischer Theologie. Antonio de Montesinos Predigt (1511) und ihre Folgen,” in *Conquista und Evangelisation. 500 Jahre Orden in Lateinamerika*, ed. Michael Sievernich (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1992): 77–98.

93 Cfr. in general Marianne Mahn-Lot, *Bartolomé de Las Casas et le droit des Indiens* (Paris: Payot, 1982); André Saint-Lu, *Las Casas indigéniste: études sur la vie et l'œuvre du défenseur des Indiens* (Paris: Éd. L'Harmattan, 1982).

94 de Las Casas, *Principia quaedam ex quibus procedendum est in disputatione ad manifestandam et defendendam iusticiam Indorum* (Sevilla: Sebastianus Trugillus, 1546?); furthermore, see Patrick Huser, *Vernunft und Herrschaft. Die kanonischen Rechtsquellen als Grundlage natur- und völkerrechtlicher Argumentation im zweiten Prinzip des Traktates Principia quaedam des Bartolomé de Las Casas* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011): esp. 69–94.

95 de Las Casas, *Principia*, f. A IIr (Princ. 1): ‘Ex hoc principio sequitur. I. Apud infideles iuste esse rerum dominia. Probatur quia indifferenter pro omni rationali creatura et in ministerium cunctis gentibus fecit deus alias creaturas homine inferiores [. . .] nec distinxit inter fideles vel infideles: ergo nec nos distinguere debemus.’

96 de Las Casas, *Principia*, f. A IIIr (Princ. 2): ‘Ex hoc secundo principio sequitur. I. Apud infideles sunt etiam dominia et iurisdictiones super homines in quantum importat officium consulendi. Probatur: quia omnis homo tam infidelis quam fidelis est animal rationale et sociale et perconsequens societas seu viuere in societate est omnibus hominibus naturale.’

97 de Las Casas, *Principia*, f. A IIIv (Princ. 3): ‘Omnis homo, omnis res, omnis terra, omnis iurisdiction, et omne regimen [. . .] presumuntur libera, nisi contrarium probetur. Probatur: quia ab origine creature rationalis, omnes liberi nascebantur [. . .].’

In these texts, de Las Casas concedes to all people, believers and non-believers alike, that according to God's will and the order of natural law, they can own property and are free to do so. For him, however, freedom and property do not depend on each other – as they did in the doctrine of High Scholasticism – but are independent rights of every human being. All are free because God created them free; all can acquire ownership of the goods of this world because God has entrusted the earth to all people. This assertion by de Las Casas can be justified via reference to the Stoic doctrine of natural law as well as from the theology of the Church Fathers. The moral-theological approach, which based ownership of oneself on free will and the ability to acquire ownership of external goods, retreats before the arguments of the sixteenth-century bishop of Chiapas.

In an early work by de Las Casas,⁹⁸ the arguments that he later refined in *Principia Quaedam* still sounded somewhat different:

We have to consider that the one is deemed to be a free man, who is master of his will, according to Aristotle [. . .]. Hence, they have the free possibility to dispose of their own people and things, as they want.⁹⁹

Here, freedom is still understood – following Aristotle and Thomas – as the freedom to act. However, even at this early stage, de Las Casas no longer refers to the scholastic freedom of will when he speaks of freedom. Rather, it is – similar to ancient philosophy – freedom of action *par excellence*.

This “secular turn”, as I would like to call it, is not sporadically recognized in the relevant literature. Only a few authors suspect de Las Casas to diverge (at least partially) from scholastic moral theology.¹⁰⁰ Those who elide the differences between antique philosophy and Roman law on the one hand and scholastic philosophy on the other are not able to realize that de Las Casas did not keep up with the antique concepts but returned to them diverging from the will theory of late antique and medieval theology.¹⁰¹ But de Las Casas was not the one and only to separate *dominium in se*

98 Bartholomé de Las Casas, *Explicatio quaestionis: utrum reges vel principes jure aliquo vel titulo, et salva conscientia, cives ac subditos a regia corona alienare et alterius domini particularis ditioni subjicere possint*, ed. Wolfgang Griesstetter (Jena: Johannes Gollner, 1678): 8, § 1 n. 4.

99 ‘Est autem considerandum, quòd ille dicitur liber homo, qui est sui arbitrij secundum Aristot. I. Metaph.l.fin.ff.de lib.hom.exhib. Vnde habent facultatem liberè, de personis proprijs et rebus disponendis, prout volunt.’

100 E.g., Rolando Pérez, “Las Casas’ Articulation of the Indian’s Moral Agency. Looking Back at Las Casas through Fichte,” *Ethnic Studies Review* 43 (2020): 77–93.

101 As, for example, Thomas Francis Xavier Varacalli, “The Thomism of Bartolomé de Las Casas and the Indians of the New World” (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 2016), https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2663&context=gradschool_dissertations [accessed 25.03.2024]: esp. 141–46; Manuel Méndez Alonzo, “Between Thomism and Roman Civil Law: The Eclectic Concept of Liberty of Bartolomé de Las Casas and his Theoretical Defence of Native Americans during the Sixteenth Century,” *Ars and Humanitas* (2017): 281–92.

ipsum from the capacity to discern right and evil. As previously referenced, a comparable approach can also be found in Francisco de Vitoria (1485–1546). De Vitoria was one of the first theologians who tried to justify the right of indigenous peoples to their land with moral-theological and legal arguments. In his *relectio de Indis*,¹⁰² he argued that the Amerindians themselves were the owners of their land because they, too, were *domini sui actus*.¹⁰³ De Vitoria based this *dominium* on the *liberum arbitrium*, which was due to all rational creatures. Behind this argument lies the debate about whether heretics or sinners could also be owners, which was a question relevant to the formation of a theological basis for *dominium in se ipsum*. De Vitoria's point, however, is that whether someone can be an owner according to divine or human law is not a matter of orthodoxy or freedom from sin. For him, the theological question is whether someone can use his body rationally.¹⁰⁴

That the Amerindians are also rational is inferred by de Vitoria from the organization of their community.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, what is the basis of the *liberum arbitrium* of the Amerindians, which makes them owners of themselves? As his interlocutors regularly point out, the Amerindians know neither God nor divine law, which is embodied in the Christian tradition. Vitoria reshapes the blank space created by this question into a detailed justification for his conviction that natural law can also be followed by those who do not know its divine origin.¹⁰⁶ Vitoria did not deny that the *lex naturalis* was

102 Francisco de Vitoria, *De Indis, sive de iure belli Hispanorum in barbaros*, ed. Johann Georg Simon (Cologne: Augustus Boetius, 1696); repr. in *Franciscus de Victoria, De Indis et de iure belli relectiones being Parts of Relectiones Theologicae XII*, ed. Ernest Nys (Washington: Carnegie Institution: Washington, 1917), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015039506772&view=lup&seq=284&skin=2021> [accessed 25.03.2024].

103 On this already Anselm Spindler, "Der Handlungsbegriff als Grundbegriff der praktischen Philosophie. Francisco de Vitorias Thomas-Rezeption und ihre Wirkung auf die Relectio de Indis," in *Francisco de Vitorias "De Indis" in interdisziplinärer Perspektive*, eds. Norbert Brieskorn and Gideon Stiening (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog 2011): 61–95.

104 Cfr. de Vitoria, *De Indis*: sect. 1, qu. 5–7 (p. 317–23).

105 de Vitoria, *De Indis*: sect. 1, qu. 23 (p. 333): 'Nec [. . .] ex hac parte impediuntur barbari ne sint veri domini. Probatur, Qvia secundum rei veritatem non sunt amentes, sed habent pro suo modo usum rationis. Patet, Qvia habent ordinem aliquem in suis rebus, postquam habent civitates, quae ordine constant, et habent matrimonia distincta, magistratus dominos, leges, opificia, commutationes, quae omnia requirunt usum rationis: item religionis speciem: item non errant in rebus, quae aliis sunt evidentes quod est indicium usus rationis.' – transl. by John Pawley Bate, p. 127: 'The Indian aborigines are not barred on this ground from the exercise of true dominion. This is proved from the fact that the true state of the case is that they are not of unsound mind, but have, according to their kind, the use or reason. This is clear, because there is a certain method in their affairs, for they have polities which are orderly arranged and they have definite marriage and magistrates, overlords, laws, and workshops, and a system of exchange, all of which call for the use of reason; they also have a kind of religion. Further, they make no error in matters which are self-evident to others; this is witness to their use of reason.'

106 In detail, Anselm Spindler, "Der Handlungsbegriff als Grundbegriff der praktischen Philosophie": 89–90.

founded in God's creation, but according to him, even those who have not heard of God can distinguish between good and evil. Natural law reveals itself to every living being endowed with *anima rationalis*. Within de Vitoria's thought, this acknowledgement provides a secular framework for the *liberum arbitrium*. It is not faith in God but man's reason that reveals the natural order. The turn toward humanity's rational capacity, rather than being Christian as a foundation for self-ownership and freedom, marks an essential step from the concept of a divine natural law to one arising from the sociality of man.

Had Summenhart and other predecessors of the Spanish scholastics known about the New World and not written in a world divided between members of different faiths, this secular-natural law approach might have emerged earlier.¹⁰⁷ However, there is little point in speculating about alternative possibilities in the historical formation of concepts here. Only the encounter with people who had not yet heard of the Christian God nor rejected him like the Muslims or heretics led the theologians to a new justification of freedom based on natural law.

Vitoria says little about the freedom of the Amerindians. Since they were owners of themselves and, therefore, also owned their land, it was obvious to him that they were not slaves. Elsewhere he writes,¹⁰⁸

Again, this is the difference between freemen and slaves [. . .] that masters exploit slaves for their own good and not for the good of the slaves, while freemen do not exist in the interest of others, but in their own interest.

This argument that free men act in their own interest, not for that of others, is rather general. It expresses what we have already assumed for Bartolus: he who is the owner (of himself) cannot be the property of another. Here, too, the indirect reasoning that we know from medieval philosophy still echoes: external freedom (i.e., not being a slave) seems to be a reflex of internal freedom. Yet, several points remain unclear. Specifically, one might ask, if a person sells himself, does he lose the *dominium* over himself, and is he, therefore, no longer responsible for his actions? There seemed to be only two ways out of this dilemma: either one ruled out life-long enslavement altogether,¹⁰⁹ or one looked for a separation of *dominium proprietatis* and *dominium actionis*, i.e., a conceptual separation between ownership of property and ownership of action.¹¹⁰

107 Cfr. Repgen, "Die gleiche Menschennatur": 49 (concerning Wycliff).

108 De Vitoria, *De iure belli*: 428–29: 'Item in hoc differunt liberi à servis [. . .], quòd domini utuntur servis ad propriam utilitatem non servorum: liberi autem non sunt propter alios, sed propter se.' Transl. by John Pawley Bate: 170. On this aspect of the discourse, see Merio Scattola, "Das Ganze und die Teile. Menschheit und Völker in der naturrechtlichen Kriegslehre von Francisco de Vitoria," in *Francisco de Vitorias 'de indis' in interdisziplinärer Perspektive*, eds. Norbert Brieskorn and Gideon Stiening (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 2011): 100.

109 So did the Dominican de Soto, *De iustitia et iure*: 296, lib. 4, quaest. 2, art. 2.

110 This was the solution of the Jesuit Ludovicus de Molina, *De iustitia et iure opera omnia*, vol. 1 (Geneva: Marcus Michael Bousquet, 1733): 111–12, sect. 38, esp. n. 5; on that Danaë Simmermacher, *Eigen-*

Only de Las Casas turns *libertas* outwards and thus returns to a distinction according to *status*, which was also present in Stoic philosophy and late-classical Roman law. With him, freedom is no longer freedom of will and a consequence of the *dominium in se ipsum*. Rather, it is a freedom founded in creation, which belongs to everyone from birth.

5 Some Conclusions

This marks the end of our short journey through the medieval history of ideas. The goal of our trek was not to explore the concept of freedom in general but to grapple with the differences between the way the concept of freedom was constructed in late antique and medieval philosophy. Both pre-Christian and Christian philosophy used the concept of *dominium in se ipsum* to figurate human freedom. But only Christian theology founded such *dominium* on the concept of free will as defined by the Church Fathers, especially St Augustine. Therefore, we can conclude that “freedom” in the high and late middle ages was grounded primarily in the inner freedom of men as freedom of will. In the early modern period, with the Late Scholastics, freedom once again became an innate right – just as pre-Christian philosophy, especially ancient Stoicism, and even some Church Fathers had advocated. Thus, some representatives of Late Scholastic theology can be seen as ancestors of Enlightenment thought. As we can see in Locke, modern philosophers did not abandon the concept of *dominium in se ipsum*, but they no longer used it as a signum for freedom from domination. They referred back to two distinct concepts of freedom: the freedom to act as distinguished from freedom from domination. The former is an innate right, the latter a prerequisite of moral imputation.

Despite this evolution in thought, the construction of freedom as *dominium in se ipsum* had a lasting impact on modern discourses. On the one hand, it gave rise to the formulation of personal rights, especially the right to self-determination. On the other hand, it changed the terminologies of freedom and slavery. From the concept of *dominium*, which was based on the theory of will, it was concluded that slaves were mere objects of their master’s will and that their owners could deal with them arbitrarily. Compared to Roman law, this represents a dramatic tightening of the legal situation of slaves: they are not only property of their owners but totally subjected to their will. Conversely, it was argued that Europe did not know slavery because all Christians had a *dominium in se ipsum*. The “secular turn” initiated by de Las Casas and Vitoria did not abrogate such terms and arguments. Instead, it opened the discourse to an argument which had taken a back seat since the times of the Church Fathers: liberty

tum als ein subjektives Recht bei Luis de Molina (1535–1600). Dominium und Sklaverei in De Iustitia et Iure (Berlin: De Gruyter 2018): 205–10.

is an innate right. Until then, moral theology did not emphasize this argument. Though God's creation knew neither individual property nor slavery, *ius gentium* conceded the existence of both institutions after the Fall. Therefore, slavery was not condemned at all but remained a provisional facility.

In modern literature, de Las Casas is famous for having been an advocate for the freedom of the Amerindians. Little attention is paid to the way his arguments partly diverged from contemporary philosophy and theology, thus laying the groundwork for modern discourses on human rights. Nevertheless, we should not overlook the fact that de Las Casas did not apply his arguments universally. Indeed, in his early works, he was among those who proposed the enslavement of African natives to alleviate the labour shortage in the New World, which was presumably exacerbated by his proposals about the freedom of the indigenous peoples.¹¹¹ This mixture of ideas could have contributed to the catastrophe of the transatlantic slave trade. Europeans, on the other hand, for another three hundred years lulled themselves into a complacent peace of mind because they themselves knew no slavery.

If we now return our attention to John Locke, we will see that although he adopted a secular concept of natural law similar to that found in Late Scholasticism, he otherwise stood on the firm foundation of the *dominium in se ipsum*. The only novelty: he wrote in English.

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¹¹¹ More sophisticated is Lawrence Clayton, "Bartolomé de Las Casas and the African Slave Trade," *History Compass* 7 (2009): 1526–41.

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John Coffey

William Wilberforce and the Ambiguities of Christian Antislavery

1 Introduction: Evangelicalism and Antislavery

According to Roy Porter, ‘the campaigns in England which secured first the abolition of the slave trade [in 1807] and then of slavery itself in the British Empire [in 1833] were led by Evangelical Christians and Quakers, not by the liberal intelligentsia.’¹ It is a striking claim, not least because Porter himself was an avowed member of the liberal intelligentsia and a keen advocate of secular Enlightenment values. The claim does require qualification: some members of the liberal intelligentsia played a vital role in the abolition campaigns or in their ultimate success: notably the Whig politicians Charles James Fox, Henry Brougham, and Charles Grey. Some Evangelicals mixed with the liberal intelligentsia, writing for the *Edinburgh Review* or helping to found the non-confessional University of London. Moreover, the British abolitionist campaign was an ecumenical coalition, bringing together activists from across the ecclesiastical spectrum, from Unitarians to high church Anglicans. We miss much if we focus exclusively on Quakers and Evangelicals.²

Yet Porter was summing up received wisdom: historians tend to agree that Quakers and Evangelicals were central to British abolitionism.³ Much has been written about the Quakers, but in this chapter, I will focus on the Evangelicals, especially Anglican Evangelicals, and on their most prominent figure: the politician William Wilberforce, who was not only the parliamentary spokesman for the abolitionist campaign from 1789 to 1823 but also one of the most influential religious figures of his generation. Indeed, some historians have written of ‘the age of Wilberforce’.⁴

In English, the noun “Evangelical” is used to refer to the pietist, revivalist, or populist Protestants who first emerged as a major force in Anglo-American religious life

1 Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1990): 68.

2 On the role of Unitarians, see Anthony Page, “Rational Dissent, Enlightenment, and Abolition of the British Slave Trade,” *Historical Journal* 54 (2011): 741–72. Christopher Leslie Brown’s *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) highlights Quakers and Evangelicals, but also notes the orthodox Anglicanism of Granville Sharp and the latitudinarian connections of Thomas Clarkson.

3 See Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975); Brown, *Moral Capital*: ch. 6–7; John Coffey, “Evangelicals, Slavery and the Slave Trade: From Whitefield to Wilberforce,” *ANVIL* 24, no. 2 (2007): 97–119.

4 Notably Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

during the Evangelical Revival or the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s.⁵ Evangelicals, in this usage, are the children of John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and (on the German side) August Herman Francke and Nicholas von Zinzendorf. They argued that Protestant Christianity had become sleepy, lukewarm, or “nominal”. Thus, they set out to revive it by promoting authentic “heart religion”. In his religious bestseller, *A Practical View*, published in 1797, Wilberforce contrasted the ‘prevailing religious system’ of the educated classes with the ‘real Christianity’ of the New Testament. The book was republished many times in Britain and the United States: it was also translated into other languages.⁶

Pietists and revivalists could be found across the denominations. The Methodists were a direct product of the revivals, and Baptists became another key constituency, but Evangelicalism also made inroads into established churches: the Anglicans in England, the Presbyterians in Scotland, and the Congregationalists in New England. By the late eighteenth-century, Britain was experiencing a new wave of evangelical revival: Evangelical Dissenting chapels sprung up across the nation, and a growing number of parishes fell under the sway of the “serious” clergy.⁷

On both sides of the Atlantic, Evangelicals made major contributions to the anti-slavery movement. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, had denounced the slave trade as ‘the sum of all villainies’. He also castigated American slavery as ‘the vilest that ever saw the sun’, and in the late eighteenth-century, American Methodists had (for a couple of decades) condemned slavery, even in the American South. ‘The collapse of evangelical antislavery’ in the early nineteenth century was described by the historian Henry May as ‘the most lamentable fact in American religious history’.⁸ Nevertheless, the second wave of American abolitionism after 1830 was fuelled (in the northern states) by the Second Great Awakening. Many leading activists who demanded immediate emancipation were evangelical Christians: William Lloyd Garrison was a Baptist,

5 See two classic modern studies: David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); William Reginald Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

6 William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country contrasted with Real Christianity* (London: Cadell, 1797). See John Wolffe, “William Wilberforce’s *Practical View* (1797) and its Reception,” in *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History*, eds. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008): 175–84.

7 See Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); John Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers, and Finney* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006).

8 Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976): 328. See also Donald Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780–1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997): 92–94, 138–39, 155–56.

Lewis Tappan a Presbyterian, and Theodore Dwight Weld, a protégé of the Presbyterian evangelist Charles Grandison Finney.⁹

Moreover, on both sides of the Atlantic, black Protestants emerged as pioneering abolitionists. In late eighteenth-century London, the Calvinistic Methodist Olaudah Equiano published a seminal slave narrative, while in Philadelphia, the black Methodist ministers Richard Allen and Absalom Jones were important players in the antislavery movement.¹⁰ In a later generation, black abolitionists like Frederick Douglass were also steeped in the language and narratives of the Bible. In the United States, however, they confronted a powerful phalanx of proslavery Evangelicals.¹¹

In the case of Britain, proslavery sentiment was much weaker among revivalists and pietists, though it was more widespread than is often realized. Evangelicals became a central constituency in the abolitionist movement, an assertion which holds true of both the elite metropolitan leadership and the grassroots campaign, especially after 1800. The original twelve-man Abolition Committee, founded in 1787, had consisted of nine Quakers and three Anglicans.

In the early nineteenth century, however, the abolitionist leadership was reorganized around William Wilberforce and his inner circle, which included two other significant figures. First, Zachary Macaulay, a veteran of Jamaica and Sierra Leone, who edited abolitionist periodicals and raised a famous son: the historian and liberal imperialist Thomas Babington Macaulay.¹² Second, James Stephen, a maritime lawyer who had lived in the British Caribbean before becoming the chief strategist behind the Slave Trade Abolition Acts of 1806 and 1807. His son, James Stephen Jr, drafted the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833.¹³ Wilberforce, Stephen, and Macaulay were adult converts to Evangelical religion: they were also ardent supporters of the Bible Society and various missionary societies. Evangelicals were also important to the abolitionist campaign at the grassroots level, especially in the 1820s and 1830s. In 1823, the leading

9 James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997): ch. 2.

10 Vincent Carretta, "Olaudah Equiano, Phillis Wheatley, and the Black Evangelical Experience," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Evangelicalism*, ed. Jonathan Yeager (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022): ch. 30.

11 Charles Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

12 There are two substantial recent studies on Macaulay, one sympathetic, the other more critical: Iain Whyte, *Zachary Macaulay, 1768–1838: The Steadfast Scot in the British Anti-Slavery Movement* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), and Catherine Hall, *Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

13 There is no major study of James Stephen Sr, though James Stephen Jr has received more attention. On the former, see Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition*; on the latter, see Zoe Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections, 1815–45: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Alan Lester, Kate Boehme and Peter Mitchell, *Ruling the World: Freedom, Civilization and Liberalism in the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): part 1.

activist, Thomas Clarkson, advised Macaulay to build a new antislavery network using the mailing lists of three evangelical groups: the Bible Society, the Wesleyan Methodists, and the Church Missionary Society: ‘If we could get Names from the 3 Societies’, Clarkson wrote, ‘We might write then throughout the whole Country and awaken it.’¹⁴ Britain’s evangelical public was galvanized in the antislavery cause, and in the early 1830s, 90 percent of English Methodists signed petitions against slavery.¹⁵

The question I will address in this chapter is why? Why were British Evangelicals so agitated about the Atlantic slave trade and West Indian slavery? What, according to Evangelicals like Wilberforce, was wrong with slavery? Furthermore, what does this tell us about the nature of their abolitionism? How did their religion prompt them to abolish slavery but also to reinforce colonial dependency?

Some historians have taken an essentialist approach to the problem of evangelical antislavery, arguing that Evangelicals were naturally predisposed to becoming abolitionists or that there was at least an elective affinity between Evangelicalism and abolitionism. Most notably, Roger Anstey identified five “religious forces” that were formative in antislavery: (1) Arminianism, (2) redemption, (3) sanctification, (4) post-millennialism, and (5) denominationalism. He argued, for example, that because Evangelicals were preoccupied with the idea of redemption, they were inclined to preach liberation from both spiritual and physical bondage.¹⁶

However, most scholars recognize that the connection between Evangelicalism and antislavery was contingent rather than necessary. Several of the founding fathers of modern Evangelicalism were complicit with slavery: Jonathan Edwards purchased at least one domestic slave for his household; Zinzendorf, on his visit to Caribbean plantations, preached subordination to enslaved people citing the biblical curse of Ham; and George Whitefield purchased enslaved Africans to work on the land of his Georgia orphanage, doing so while slavery was still illegal in the colony.¹⁷

Moreover, in the American South, especially after 1820, Evangelicalism and slavery often went hand in hand. In a recent book, Ben Wright argues that the “conversionist” religion of Evangelicals was less likely to inspire abolitionism than the “purist” religion of Quakers and Unitarians. For Evangelicals, the most urgent priority was mass conversions: thus, they often collaborated with plantation owners who supported missionary work. Purists, by contrast, were more interested in the quality of religious devotion among the faithful than the quantity of converts: they were also more likely to court

14 Huntington Library, Zachary Macaulay Papers (mssMY143): Thomas Clarkson to Zachary Macaulay, 8 June 1823.

15 See Roger Anstey, “Parliamentary Reform, Methodism, and Anti-Slavery Politics,” *Slavery & Abolition* 2 (1981): 209–26.

16 See Roger Anstey, “Slavery and the Protestant Ethic,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 6 (1979): 157–81.

17 For a good recent overview, see Paul Harvey, “Slavery,” in *Oxford Handbook of Early Evangelicalism*, ed. Jonathan Yeager (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022): ch. 24.

ostracism by denouncing slavery.¹⁸ In the case of British Evangelicals, however, things were to turn out differently. Their missionary drive put them on a collision course with Caribbean slaveholders.

2 Wilberforce and his Critics

Before returning to the broader question related to abolitionism among British Evangelicals, we should introduce our principal figure: William Wilberforce.¹⁹ Born into wealth and privilege, the son of a Baltic merchant who had twice been mayor of Kingston-upon-Hull, Wilberforce was educated at St John's College, Cambridge, before going straight to the House of Commons in 1780 at the age of twenty-one, as the member of Parliament for his hometown. He soon became close friends with another MP, William Pitt the Younger, the son of a former Prime Minister. Pitt himself became Prime Minister in 1783 at the age of twenty-four and held the office for the better part of two decades. Meanwhile, Wilberforce became MP for Yorkshire, England's largest county constituency.

In 1785, however, he was shaken by a religious awakening. Wilberforce then turned his back on "nominal" Christianity. He became a "serious" Christian and began keeping an introspective spiritual journal. In that journal, in 1787, he wrote his much-quoted statement: 'God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.'²⁰ For the next thirty-eight years as an MP, he would campaign against the Atlantic slave trade and (eventually) against colonial slavery.

In the nineteenth century, Wilberforce was the world's most famous (or notorious) abolitionist. Harriet Beecher Stowe's renown may have eclipsed his following the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and Frederick Douglass is arguably more celebrated today, but for most of the century, it was Wilberforce's name that resounded across the Atlantic world. It helped that it was a resounding *name*: Wil-ber-force. In the black republic of Haiti, his portrait hung in the villa of the President, Alexandre Petion, alongside those of Raynal and Gregoire, Alexander the Great and Toussaint L'Ouverture.²¹ In the northern half of Haiti, the black emperor Henri Christophe, en-

18 Ben Wright, *Bonds of Salvation: How Christianity Inspired and Limited American Abolitionism* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 2020).

19 There are numerous popular biographies of Wilberforce. The best short introduction to his life is John Wolfe, "Wilberforce, William (1759–1833)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), <https://www.oxforddnb.com/> [accessed 15.08.2023].

20 Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 5 vols. (London: John Murray, 1838): i. 149 (hereafter *Life of Wiliam Wilberforce*).

21 Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture* (London: Allen Lane, 2020): 333.

gaged in extensive correspondence with Wilberforce and Clarkson.²² In the United States, Wilberforce was hailed by black abolitionists, who named one of the first independent black colleges in his honour, i.e., Wilberforce University in Ohio. Furthermore, in 1858, shortly before he ran for the presidency of the United States, Abraham Lincoln acknowledged the abolitionist's renown: 'School-boys know that Wilbe[r] force, and Granville Sharp, helped the [antislavery] cause forward; but who can now name a single man who labored to retard it?'²³ Already in 1858, Lincoln was thinking about posthumous fame – he recognized that taking a stand against slavery might secure one's place in history.

Despite his iconic status, or perhaps because of it, Wilberforce was and is a controversial figure. In his lifetime, his abolitionism was often attacked from the conservative Right by proslavery lobbyists who accused him of ignoring poverty at home to focus his telescopic philanthropy on slavery abroad.²⁴ Wilberforce had never travelled outside Western Europe. He was depicted as an ignorant philanthropist with a reckless disregard for the consequences of his actions. In one satirical cartoon, produced after the outbreak of the revolution in St Domingue, he was depicted as "The Blind Enthusiast", who has falsely accused innocent planters (who are here declared "Not Guilty" by Justice); he recklessly risks sparking further slave revolts in the Caribbean islands.²⁵ The word "Enthusiast" was carefully chosen. In modern English, it carries positive connotations, but to early modern ears, it signified religious fanaticism. It was well-known that Wilberforce had undergone some kind of evangelical conversion, and he was widely suspected of "Methodism" and enthusiasm. A later caricature, by George Cruickshank, showed Wilberforce presiding over a "New Union Club", an interracial political orgy in which puritanical white abolitionists are juxtaposed with chaotic scenes of black sexuality and violence, with the black activist Prince Saunders dominating at the centre. In the picture in the background, Wilberforce is carried to Heaven by two black angels (a satire on his reputation as a "Saint"). Cruickshank's depiction has been described as one of the most complex and racist caricatures of the period, but it captures how Wilberforce was viewed from the Caribbean, in the wake of the Barbados rebellion of 1816, as a man out of his depth, a pious "Saint" whose naïveté had unleashed chaos.²⁶

²² *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, eds. Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1840): i. 357–95.

²³ Abraham Lincoln, "Speech Fragment concerning the Abolition of Slavery," <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/lincoln-abolition-england-and-united-states-1858> [accessed 15.08.2023].

²⁴ On the proslavery, West Indian lobby, see Michael Taylor, *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* (London: Bodley Head, 2020).

²⁵ Richard Newton, "The Blind Enthusiast" (1792), https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_2007-7058-3 [accessed 15.08.2023].

²⁶ George Cruickshank, "The New Union Club" (1819), https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1868-0808-8458 [accessed 15.08.2023].

Yet Wilberforce was also attacked from the Left. Radical abolitionists complained that he was too cautious and deferential to government ministers, especially his close friend, Pitt the Younger, Prime Minister from 1784 to 1801, and 1804 to 1806. Since the mid-twentieth century, this critique has broadened in scope. Wilberforce's most influential critic was the Marxist historian and future Prime Minister of Trinidad, Eric Williams, who, after completing a doctorate at Oxford University, published a seminal book on *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944). Williams acknowledged that the abolitionists were 'a brilliant band', but he did not warm to Wilberforce:

There is a certain smugness about the man, his life, his religion. As a leader, he was inept, addicted to moderation, compromise and delay. He deprecated extreme measures and feared popular agitation. He relied for success upon aristocratic patronage, parliamentary diplomacy and private influence with men in office. [. . .]

Wilberforce was familiar with all that went on in the hold of a slave ship but ignored what went on at the bottom of a mineshaft. He supported the Corn Laws, was a member of the secret committee which investigated and repressed working-class discontent in 1817, opposed feminine anti-slavery associations, and thought the First Reform Bill too radical. [. . .]

The abolitionists for a long time eschewed and repeatedly disowned any idea of emancipation. Their interest was solely in the slave trade, whose abolition, they thought, would eventually lead, without legislative interference, into freedom. On three occasions the Abolition Committee explicitly denied any intention of emancipating the slaves. Wilberforce in 1807 publicly disowned such intentions.²⁷

Wilberforce was indeed fortunate to be remembered as 'the Emancipator'. The timing of his death did the trick. As he lay on his deathbed in 1833, the Slavery Abolition Act was passing through Parliament, and the coincidence ensured that his name became indelibly associated with emancipation. Having voted to abolish slavery in the Caribbean, the British establishment advertised its new-found virtue by laying Wilberforce to rest in Westminster Abbey. Yet he had retired from Parliament a decade earlier, and it was only in the final years of his parliamentary career that the abolitionists established an Anti-Slavery Society (1823), which was committed to "gradual" rather than "immediate" emancipation. For most of his career, Wilberforce focused on the abolition of the British and European Atlantic slave trade and the mitigation of West Indian slavery. For this reason, he might be called 'the ameliorator' rather than 'the emancipator'.

Yet it is worth observing that Williams and other black activists of his generation sounded very different from nineteenth-century black abolitionists, who were generally sympathetic or even enthusiastic about Wilberforce.²⁸ There are no doubt various reasons for this divergence. Black abolitionists had bitter personal experiences of enslavement and an acute sense of the overwhelming forces arraigned against them.

²⁷ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; repr. London: Penguin, 2022): 172–73.

²⁸ See John Oldfield, *The Ties that Bind: Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Reform, c. 1820–1865* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020): ch. 1.

They also typically shared Wilberforce's Christianity, whereas their twentieth-century counterparts tended to be more secular and, in Williams' case, Marxist. Finally, we should remember that Williams was not just reacting to Wilberforce but to the uses of Wilberforce. He was frustrated by the way Wilberforce had been co-opted as a national and imperial icon, Exhibit A in the moral case for the British empire.

In 1923, the Professor of Imperial History at Oxford, Reginald Coupland, had written a laudatory biography of Wilberforce, presenting him as the personification of humanitarian imperialism.²⁹ In 1937, just a few years before Williams wrote his landmark book, Wilberforce featured in a set of cigarette cards titled 'Builders of Empire' alongside the soldiers, sailors, and statesmen who had secured for Britain the largest empire in history. Apologists argued that Britain's imperial rule was benevolent, pointing to the nation's long campaign against the European Atlantic slave trade and African slavery as evidence.

In 2007, when Britain celebrated the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Wilberforce still loomed large as the British (under Tony Blair) marked a heroic moment in the national past. The movie, *Amazing Grace*, financed by the American Evangelical philanthropist, Philip Anschutz, breathed new life into the Wilberforce legend. Advertisements declared (in true Hollywood style) that "One Man Led a Movement that Changed the World". Critics complained that the anniversary had become a "Wilberfest", and black activists condemned the hero-worship of this archetypal "White Saviour".³⁰

As a result, the bicentenary drew attention to the dark side of Britain's history, and in subsequent years, the public has become much better informed about the nation's deep investment in racial slavery and how much it benefitted financially from the profits of forced labour. The Legacies of British Slavery project, based at University College London, and the Colonial Countryside project at the University of Leicester, have made it hard to avoid this historical reckoning.³¹ Yet, when statues of slave traders were toppled in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, some suggested that they should be replaced by statues of William Wilberforce.

Ironically, for all his fame and notoriety, there has been a lack of sustained scholarship on Wilberforce. The numerous biographies are written mainly by churchmen and politicians, including the former Conservative party leader and foreign secretary,

²⁹ Reginald Coupland, *Wilberforce: A Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923).

³⁰ On the 2007 bicentenary, see John Oldfield and Mary Wills, "Remembering 1807," *History Workshop Journal* 90 (2020): 253–72. See also the "Antislavery Usable Past" website: <https://antislavery.ac.uk/> [accessed 15.08.2023].

³¹ Legacies of British Slavery: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs> [accessed 15.08.2023]; Colonial Countryside: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/colonial-countryside-project> [accessed 15.08.2023].

William Hague.³² There have been critical reassessments by academic historians, but Wilberforce's manuscripts have lain largely undisturbed.³³ There is no edition of his diaries and journals, no catalogue of his thousands of extant letters, and no edition of his major speeches. Since the 1970s, historians of British antislavery have turned their focus away from Westminster to recover the forgotten histories of grassroots abolitionism, including the work of black and female activists. However, the abolitionist leadership is now garnering renewed attention. The Wilberforce Diaries Project is preparing a complete edition of his diaries for Oxford University Press (the manuscripts contain almost a million words). The project is also compiling a list of all his extant letters (currently five thousand, with many remaining to be catalogued).³⁴

3 Three “Secular” Arguments: Justice, Humanity, Policy

How might a reassessment of Wilberforce adjust our understanding of the relationship between evangelical religion and abolitionism? First, the sources indicate that evangelical abolitionism owed much to the Enlightenment and the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility. Wilberforce and various members of his inner circle were adult converts to evangelical religion; by the time of their conversion in their mid-twenties or early thirties, their moral formation was well advanced. In the early years of Wilberforce's diaries, there is no evidence of intense piety. He had been exposed to Methodism as a boy when he lived with his aunt and uncle following the death of his father, but his mother quickly removed him from Methodist influences. As a young man, Wilberforce attended church occasionally, associated with clerical friends from university, and rented a pew in a Unitarian chapel, suggesting that he identified with fashionable, urbane liberal Protestantism. His social life was a swirl of drinking, dancing, and gambling in gentlemen's clubs, soirees, and balls.

Antislavery sentiment could circulate in this urbane milieu, and Wilberforce himself claimed that he had long opposed the slave trade.³⁵ So did James Stephen. In old age, Stephen noted that as a young man, he despised evangelical religion ‘as narrow-

32 The three major biographies are Robin Furneaux, *William Wilberforce* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974); John Pollock, *Wilberforce* (London: Constable and Co., 1977); William Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner* (London: Harper Collins, 2007).

33 See the essays by Fiona Spiers and James Walvin in *Out of Slavery: Abolition and After*, ed. Jack Hayward (London: Frank Cass, 1985), and Padraic Scanlan, *Slave Empire: How Slavery Built Modern Britain* (London: Robinson, 2020). The one recent study of abolitionism to make use of Wilberforce's manuscripts is Anna Harrington, “‘The Grand Object of my Parliamentary Existence’: William Wilberforce and the British Abolition Campaigns, 1783–1833” (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2020).

34 <https://wilberfordiariesproject.com/> [accessed 15.08.2023].

35 *Life of William Wilberforce*: i. 147–48.

mindfulness and bigotry', yet 'regarded negro slavery as the greatest evil that ever afflicted suffering humanity, and the most opprobrious crime of my country'. 'It is not true then', he concluded, 'that zeal for Christianity, or what my opponents call enthusiasm in religion, made me an enemy to slavery. It would be much nearer the truth, for certain reasons, to say that this enmity made me a Christian.'³⁶

We will return to that last point later, but first, we need to underscore Stephen's claim that there were other reasons (besides religious ones) to detest slavery. As Anna Harrington has shown, Wilberforce's parliamentary rhetoric tended to downplay religion in order to persuade other MPs, who resented speeches that turned into sermons, of his position.³⁷ After his conversion, Wilberforce continued to read widely in secular literature: his diary documents this. In October 1797, for example, he was reading Burke on the French Revolution, a travel narrative of an English lady in France, newspapers, a novel (Moore's *Edward*), 'gettg Scripture by heart while walkg', and perusing Voltaire's *Candide* 'rapidly'.³⁸ Thus, it is important to note here that we cannot understand evangelical abolitionists simply by reference to their religion.

Irrespective of their religious standpoint, abolitionists typically presented a three-fold argument against the slave trade and slavery, appealing to Justice, Humanity, and Policy. A print by Joseph Collyer celebrating the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 portrayed Britannia flanked on one side by *justice*, with a bust of Wilberforce looking on.³⁹ James Stephen invoked justice when he described slavery as a crime. He had witnessed a horrific miscarriage of justice against enslaved men in a Barbados law court. He saw slavery as a violation of natural law because Africans were subjected to perpetual, hereditary slavery, something that could not be justified by the law of nations, which according to Grotius and other jurists, only permitted slavery in the case of prisoners of war or criminals. Furthermore, abolitionists often asserted that slavery violated natural rights or "human rights" because every person enjoyed a natural right to liberty. These juridical arguments, of course, were not purely secular; they were couched within a theistic natural law discourse. However, they made sense across the religious spectrum – from Deism to Methodism – and were articulated by heterodox and orthodox alike.

Secondly, abolitionists appealed to *humanity*. Slavery and the slave trade were inhumane. In Joseph Collyer's etching, Britannia herself was presented as the embodiment of humanity, with the chains of slavery trampled beneath her feet. Wilberforce was imbued with this fashionable humane sensibility. In his earliest diary, recording his journey to the Lake District in 1779, we see him swept up in the cultural currents of his age, revelling in the new craze for the picturesque, waxing lyrical about sub-

³⁶ James Stephen, *The Slavery of the British West India Sugar Colonies Delineated* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1830): xv–xvi.

³⁷ Harrington, "The Grand Object of my Parliamentary Existence": ch. 3.

³⁸ Bodleian, MS Wilberforce c. 34, f. 144 (Diary, October 1797).

³⁹ <https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-147314> [accessed 15.08.2023].

lime and awful mountain scenery.⁴⁰ As Brycchan Carey has demonstrated, the politician's first great speech against the slave trade in 1789 utilized the discourse of sensibility and showed the abolitionist to be "a man of feeling", one formed by the eighteenth-century's moral philosophy, novels, and poetry.⁴¹ Of course, the new cult of humanity was not purely secular. The language of benevolence owed much to the liberal Protestant theology of the early Enlightenment, with its benign depiction of God as the divine philanthropist whose goodwill extended to all humanity.⁴² The language of sympathy and fellow feeling had also flourished among Puritan and Pietist practitioners of "heart religion".⁴³ Yet Wilberforce had imbibed this cult of humanity before his evangelical awakening in the mid-1780s.

Third, abolitionists developed arguments from *policy* designed to appeal to hard-headed statesmen whom moralists or sentimentalists could not sway. As Collyer's etching shows, the British abolitionist movement appealed to patriotism. According to them, abolition would restore Britannia's moral capital, demonstrating that the British were indeed lovers of liberty. The abolitionists also appealed to imperial self-interest and economic efficiency. Stephen himself devised the strategy that led to the abolition of the slave trade, a strategy that deliberately downplayed moral or religious appeals, presenting abolition as a war policy. In 1806, Wilberforce retreated into the shadows as the government set out to abolish Britain's slave trade to foreign colonies in an effort to undermine France. Here, as Roger Anstey noted, was a rare case of humanitarianism masquerading as *Realpolitik*.⁴⁴

The abolitionists also took up Adam Smith's contention that free labour was (in the long run) more productive than slave labour. In 1787, Wilberforce had been invited by Henry Dundas to a private colloquium with Smith and involving Pitt as Prime Minister. Wilberforce made a careful study of Smith's classic work of political economy, *The Wealth of Nations*. Abolitionist engagement with free labour ideology led David Brion Davis to argue that the movement's appeal lay (in part) in its legitimating function: by setting up a binary contrast between free and slave labour, abolitionists legitimized industrial capitalism. Whether deliberately or not, this strategy masked the exploitative working conditions of British labourers.⁴⁵ Wilberforce himself inherited a fortune acquired in the Baltic trade and formed numerous connections with bankers, merchants,

40 William Wilberforce, *Journey to the Lake District from Cambridge: A Summer Diary, 1779*, ed. C.E. Wrangham (Stocksfield: Oriel Press, 1983).

41 Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2005): 145–73.

42 David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966): ch. 11.

43 Abram Van Engen, *Sympathetic Puritans: Calvinist Fellow Feeling in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

44 Roger Anstey, "A Re-Interpretation of the Abolition of the British Slave Trade, 1806–07," *English Historical Review* 87 (1972): 304–32.

45 David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

and industrialists. His vision of the future was commercial, not just religious. He believed that the consequence of his efforts would be the replacement of the blood-stained commerce of slavery with “legitimate commerce” between Africa and the advanced economies of Europe.⁴⁶

4 Religious Reframing of Justice, Humanity, Policy

So, what difference did evangelical religion make? The diaries and journals certainly record a dramatic shift in Wilberforce’s outlook in the mid-1780s. His comfortable progress was suddenly interrupted during a grand tour of France, Switzerland, and northern Italy in the summer and autumn of 1785. Accompanied by the devout Cambridge mathematician Isaac Milner, he began reading the Greek New Testament and a devotional work by the English Dissenter Philip Doddridge. He became convinced that his soul was in danger. Previously, Wilberforce had imbibed the optimistic soteriology of eighteenth-century Enlightenment Protestantism with its reassuring picture of a benevolent God and a broad path to heaven. Now he encountered a more alarming theology that emphasized human depravity, divine wrath, and the urgent need for repentance. His new religious journal recorded a regimen of self-examination and self-denial.⁴⁷ Even his daily diary became deeply introspective, peppered with laments about his failures, and laden with time charts that tracked how he had used and squandered time.

What is the connection between this earnest piety and Wilberforce’s abolitionism? It seems clear that it intensified and reframed the main arguments from Justice, Humanity, and Policy, with which he was already familiar. He came to understand the *injustice* of the slave trade as a desecration of the divine order. In the 1780s, the evangelical moral drama of personal conversion was projected onto the nation as a whole. Britain had recently lost half her New World colonies in the American War of Independence, a calamity that prompted soul-searching among pious Protestants. At Teston in Kent, a group of Evangelicals who gathered around the Reverend James Ramsay and his patron, Sir Charles Middleton, identified the slave trade as the empire’s greatest sin and the American calamity as a divine punishment. Evangelicals now called on the nation to repent of its “sins of oppression” or face further judgments.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See for example his speech on 9 July 1817 in *The Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time*, eds. William Cobbett and T.C. Hansard, 41 vols. (London: T.C. Hansard, 1804–20): xxxvi. 1323, 1330.

⁴⁷ See *William Wilberforce: His Unpublished Spiritual Journals*, ed. Michael McMullen (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Heritage, 2021).

⁴⁸ On Teston see Brown, *Moral Capital*: ch. 6.

This admonition to national repentance is what James Stephen had in mind when he explained that his abhorrence of slavery ‘made me a Christian’. The atrocities he had witnessed in the Caribbean outraged his moral sense, and Christianity provided an objective moral framework for this subjective instinct. In particular, the heightened providentialism of evangelical Christianity suggested that this violation of the cosmic order aroused God’s anger against Britain and its empire. In his youth, Stephen had imbibed “liberal” religious sentiments, and while he was never an atheist, he thought of Providence as somewhat distant and unconcerned about human affairs; conversion to evangelical religion provided him with a far more active view of Providence. In Stephen, Wilberforce, and other leading abolitionists, the discourse of ‘judicial providentialism’ loomed large: God was the Judge of Nations, and the slave trade (and slavery) were among the causes of his wrath. National repentance, however, could restore divine favour, as we see in Joseph Collyer’s depiction of Britannia. Abolition was presented as an act of atonement, a means of repairing the nation’s relationship with God. In Collyer’s image, now that the slave trade has been abandoned, Heaven’s rays shine down on Britannia. She has heeded the pleadings of religion, which stands by her side. Atonement has been made. Britain is now a righteous empire.⁴⁹

In reality, however, the British continued to enslave almost 800,000 people in their Caribbean plantations, and while British evangelicals agreed that the Atlantic slave trade was intolerable, there was more ambivalence about slavery. In 1807, when another MP suggested that Parliament should follow up the abolition of the slave trade with the abolition of slavery, Wilberforce protested that this was not on the agenda: the abolitionists had always distinguished between the two. ‘Immediate emancipation’ would be ‘injurious’ to the enslaved and ‘ruinous to the colonies’.⁵⁰ He knew that emancipation legislation stood little chance of passing in Parliament, and he believed that a process of amelioration would need to pave the way for eventual emancipation. With the ending of the slave trade, enslavers would have to improve the conditions of the enslaved, growing their population through breeding rather than working them to death and replacing them with new supplies from Africa. Benevolent planters and Christian missionaries had a vital role to play in mitigating Caribbean slavery and preparing enslaved persons for freedom. Indeed, for several years in the 1810s, Wilberforce and his circle were involved in managing slave plantations on Crown estates in Berbice, a failed experiment that was quickly curtailed.⁵¹ It is an episode overlooked by Wilberforce’s biographers.

Yet, as the 1810s wore on, Wilberforce, and especially James Stephen, became increasingly troubled by slavery and progressively doubtful that it would die out by a

49 See John Coffey, “‘Tremble Britannia’: Fear, Providence and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1758–1807,” *English Historical Review* 127 (2012): 844–81.

50 Speech on 17 March 1807, in *Parliamentary Debates*: ix. 143.

51 See Harrington, “‘The Grand Object of my Parliamentary Existence’”: 152–57.

gradual process of amelioration. Wilberforce's own thinking was shaped, at least in part, by reading the Hebrew prophets. In an unpublished diary entry for 1818, he notes:

My mind is very uneasy & greatly distracted about the Course to be pursued in the West Indian Matters – This is clear, that in the Sacred Scripture no National Crime is condemn'd so frequently & few so strongly as Oppression & Cruelty – & the not using our best Endeavours to deliver from them all our fellow Creatures – Jeremiah 6:6, 34:9 “this is a City to be visited, she is wholly oppression in the midst of her” from Ezekiel 16:49 (of Sodom's Crimes, “Neither did She strengthen the Hands of the poor & needy”) 22:7, 7:23, 29 – Zephaniah 3:1 – Amos 4:1 – 8:6 – Psalm 82 – Isaiah 58:6 &c – I must therefore set to Work – And O Lord direct & support & bless me.⁵²

Here, a decade after the abolition of the slave trade, Wilberforce concluded that Britain's atonement was incomplete. The nation was still involved in oppression and cruelty. Thus, like the ancient kingdom of Judah or the city of Sodom, it was still under divine judgment. At this point, it was not clear to Wilberforce how West Indian slavery could be ended. Gradual emancipation laws were in place in some American states but not in the slave societies of the South and the Caribbean. So, there was no clear roadmap to emancipation. Yet, Britain could not keep ignoring her national sins.

In explicating the *inhumanity* of slavery, the second type of argument mentioned above, abolitionists drew on Christian anthropology: slavery, they said, degraded and corrupted humans made in the image of God. First, it degraded the enslaved. After documenting how enslaved people in the Caribbean were brutalized, Wilberforce drew the lesson:

Ought [this] not to enforce on us, as by a voice from heaven, that we have been most cruelly and inexcusably degrading, to the level of brutes, those whom the Almighty had made capable of enjoying our own civil blessings in this world, [and] to be heirs of our common immortality?⁵³

For Wilberforce, the ‘moral evils’ of slavery were even worse than its physical evils. Under slavery, Africans were not treated as persons but as animals, ‘vendible chattels’ rather than ‘free agents’. Their ‘moral nature’ was disregarded. They were deprived of the goods required by ‘a rational and immortal being’: ‘personal independence’, ‘self-possession and self-government’, ‘the power of pursuing the occupation and habits of life which we prefer’, and the opportunity for social mobility.⁵⁴

To make matters worse, ‘white oppressors’ showed contempt for Africans by denying their equality and perpetuating ‘the old prejudice, that the Negroes are creatures of an inferior nature’.⁵⁵ Indeed, the Jamaican historian Edward Long had even

⁵² Wilberforce House and Museum, KINCM.2005.5787 (Diary, 8 March 1818).

⁵³ William Wilberforce, *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, in Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1823): 68.

⁵⁴ Wilberforce, *An Appeal*: 46.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: 43.

compared Africans to orangutans. Wilberforce protested that this racial prejudice was ‘astonishing’ and systemic:

All who know anything of the West Indies must be but too well aware that the great governing principle of the system is the depression of the black and coloured, and comparatively speaking, the exaltation, the almost deified superiority of the European race. This, indeed, as we have long contended, is the main spring of the whole machine. This it is, which extinguishes that sympathy which would otherwise excite in the white colonists kinder feelings towards their sable brethren.⁵⁶

Colour prejudice was fundamentally incompatible with the Christian doctrine of the unity of humankind. Africans were ‘invested with the moral dignity that was the undoubted attribute of all human beings’.⁵⁷ Slavery stripped the enslaved of dignity and subjected them to degradation.

In addition to degrading the enslaved, slavery corrupted the enslaver, dehumanizing both the oppressors and their victims. It is important to remember that Wilberforce was a moral reformer, reacting against the sexual revolution that had relaxed the mores of eighteenth-century England.⁵⁸ The second of his ‘two great objects’ was ‘the reformation of manners’. By manners, he meant “morals”, and in 1788, he founded a Proclamation Society to reform the morality of the British, including their sexual mores. This organisation attracted more support from the upper echelon of British society than the abolition movement: moral reformation was backed by King George III, the archbishop of Canterbury, and various members of the aristocracy. Many social conservatives who supported moral reformation did not support abolition, and many progressive reformers who supported abolition kept clear of the Proclamation Society, but for Wilberforce, the two causes were intertwined.⁵⁹

White society in the West Indies provided one of the most spectacular cases of British moral corruption. The culture of the enslavers combined authoritarianism and libertinism, thus blending domination and a disregard for Christian sexual taboos to create a situation in which white men engaged in systemic sexual exploitation of black women. From the 1780s onwards, abolitionists turned the image of the white Jamaican upside down: from being model colonial citizens, they were stereotyped as

56 Speech to the House of Commons, 15 June 1824, in *Parliamentary Debates*, new series (London: T.C. Hansard, 1825): xi. 1410.

57 Speech to the House of Commons, 9 February 1818, in *Parliamentary Debates*: xxxvi. 247.

58 Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 2012). On Wilberforce, see pages 65, 116–16, 261, 352–53.

59 The best analysis of the Proclamation Society is Joanna Innes, “Politics and Morals: The Reformation of Manners Movement in Later Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Inferior Politics: Social Problems and Social Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Joanna Innes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): ch. 5.

drunken, debauched, and godless.⁶⁰ Their moral corruption was evidence of a principal abolitionist contention: that slavery was soul-destroying, both for the enslaved and the enslavers, who themselves became spiritual slaves to their base passions. Wilberforce talked of slavery's 'depraving properties'. He could even say that slavery 'avenges' the injuries suffered by its immediate victims (the enslaved) by producing a 'depravation of moral character' among the enslavers. The members of the latter group were, thus, indirectly, victims of slavery themselves.⁶¹ Slavery posed a grave moral and spiritual threat. Wilberforce thought in terms of eternity, not just of time, of immortal souls, as well as perishable bodies. In line with an abolitionist reading of Matthew 16:26, he believed perpetrators could gain the whole world and lose their souls.

Emphasis on the depraving properties of slavery, in turn, led to a reframing of the third abolitionist argument: that the slave trade and slavery were *impolitic*. Politicians typically thought of the national interest in purely temporal terms, but abolitionists argued that this conception of policy was too narrow. Providence had to be considered because while righteousness exalted a nation, national crimes brought national punishments. Abolition of the slave trade and then of slavery was presented as a spiritual insurance policy, a means of restoring Britain's damaged relationship with Heaven and thus of securing the nation's future well-being and prosperity. Britain and its empire would only flourish if it underwent a moral reformation. To calculate the national interest without regard for Providence was to make a fatal mistake. Abolitionists, then, appealed not merely to altruism (or "humanity"); they claimed that abolition was in the national interest. According to them, it would refurbish Britain's reputation in the eyes of the world and restore Britain's favour with Heaven.⁶²

5 Millennialism and Human Progress

In addition to these elements of rhetorical *Realpolitik*, there was a further eschatological dimension to British antislavery that is often missed in modern scholarship. Wilberforce's generation witnessed the birth of the modern Evangelical missionary movement with the founding of the London Missionary Society, the Baptist Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society, and the Wesleyan Missionary Society. This development was underpinned by a millennialist faith in the future. Most promoters

⁶⁰ See Trevor Burnard and Richard Follett, "Caribbean Slavery, British Anti-Slavery, and the Cultural Politics of Venereal Disease," *Historical Journal* 55 (2012): 427–51.

⁶¹ *Substance of the Proceedings in the House of Commons on Thursday, July 25, 1822* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1822): 5.

⁶² See Coffey, "'Tremble Britannia!"; and Boyd Hilton, "1807 and All That: Why Britain Abolished her Slave Trade," in *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic*, ed. Derek R. Petersen (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010): ch. 2.

of missions advanced a modern version of millennialism, one that envisaged the gradual Christianization of the world. In contrast to earlier millenarians, they denied that the millennium would be inaugurated by the sudden, personal return of Christ. Instead, the millennium was the era of Christ's *spiritual* rule, and the personal return of Christ (the Second Coming) would only occur after the millennium. This eschatology has come to be known as postmillennialism, and it was mainstream among British Evangelicals.⁶³

Wilberforce and his circle were postmillennialist Protestants who anticipated the conversion of the Jews, Muslims, and Roman Catholics to the Protestant faith: they also believed that the worldwide triumph of Christianity would lead to the demise of slavery. By denying the *imminent* return of Christ, postmillennialism opened the prospect of centuries of human progress, through which the present age would morph into the millennial age. This eschatology was easily combined with the political economy of the Scottish Enlightenment and its stadial view of history progressing towards commercial society. It also made room for a new missionary and liberal imperialism. Britain and her reformed empire could have a vital role to play in the climax of world history: by spreading Christianity, commerce, and civilization, she could help to usher in the millennium.

Millennialists were not necessarily anti-slavery. In the eighteenth century, the enslavement of Africans had often been depicted as a *felix culpa*, a happy fall that had providentially exposed the heathen to the Christian Gospel. In the nineteenth century, some American Protestants developed a proslavery millennialism, in which godly paternalist slaveholders prepared the way for Christ's rule by evangelizing their slaves.⁶⁴ However, for British abolitionists, the Atlantic slave trade and Caribbean slavery were barriers to the spread of the gospel, not vehicles for it. As Christopher Brown has observed in relation to the Anglican abolitionists of the 1780s, 'the antislavery impulse [. . .] did not spring from the logic of the conversion experience. Instead, it originated in frustrated aspirations to propagate the gospel in the British West Indies'.⁶⁵

In 1819, while looking back on his long campaign against the Atlantic slave trade, Wilberforce told a missionary meeting that his greatest objection to this evil commerce was spiritual: it erected a three-thousand-mile barrier along the African coast, 'which shuts out light and truth, and humanity and kindness'.⁶⁶ By the 1820s, Caribbean slavery was viewed in the same way. The evangelical missionaries and their converts experienced constant obstruction and harassment by hostile white colonists.

63 David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990): ch. 3; Stephen Orchard, "Evangelical Eschatology and the Missionary Awakening," *Journal of Religious History* 22 (1998): 132–51.

64 Jack P. Maddex, "Proslavery Millennialism: Social Eschatology in Antebellum Southern Calvinism," *American Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1979): 46–62.

65 Brown, *Moral Capital*: 351–52.

66 Speech to the British and Foreign Bible Society, reported in *Episcopal Magazine* 1 (1820): 25.

Even where missionaries were allowed, the religious liberty of the enslaved was severely curtailed: they needed passes to attend chapel and were often forced to work on the Sabbath. Planters protested that Dissenting missionaries would destabilize slave plantations. Their prophecy seemed fulfilled when two major slave revolts erupted from missionary chapels: the first led by the black deacon Quamina in Demerara in 1823, the second by the black Baptist Sam Sharpe in Jamaica in 1831 / 1832.⁶⁷

Wilberforce was deeply invested in the missionary cause. Between the late 1780s and the early 1830s, his manuscript diaries record scores of meetings with evangelical missionaries, including Moravians, Anglicans, Lutherans, Wesleyans, Congregationalists, and Baptists. In speeches to missionary societies and the Bible Society, he exulted in the ‘bloodless triumphs’ of the Gospel; Satan’s dominion was ‘now declining’ as the ‘light of truth was diffusing’ and ‘spreading more and more through the earth’. He had no doubt that ‘the glories of the meridian day would infallibly succeed’ the morning sun, for ‘we are approaching the period when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth’.⁶⁸ In an 1822 speech to Parliament on slavery in the Cape Colony, he even told MPs of what he believed to be the nation’s eschatological mission:

We are engaged in diffusing the light of Divine truth throughout the earth, by our Bible societies, and by our Missionaries, whom we send to enlighten and to civilize, in the most distant countries, the victims of ignorance and depravity. What a contradiction would it be, if, while we are professing ourselves the servants, and diffusing the principles, of the Prince of Peace and Love, we were to be establishing a system utterly and irreconcilably at war with the rights and happiness of our fellow creatures – in short, a system which may be justly termed one grand violation of every law, Divine and human!⁶⁹

As Wilberforce gazed into the millennial future, he could foresee a time, centuries hence, when ‘the vast deserts’ of Africa ‘shall have become the seat of civilization’ and true religion.⁷⁰

For Wilberforce, then, the antislavery movement was part of a grander narrative: the eschatological triumph of Christ’s kingdom throughout the earth. Slavery blocked the road to the millennium, partly because enslavers were so hostile to missionaries, partly because slavery discredited Christianity in the eyes of both Africans and liberal sceptics, but also because slavery was the enemy of human flourishing. The spread of Christianity, commerce, and civilization depended on the freedom of rational, moral agents who enjoyed self-determination and self-governance.

⁶⁷ See Stiv Jakobssen, *Am I not a Man and a Brother? British Missions and the Abolition of the Slave Trade and Slavery in West Africa and the West Indies, 1786–1838* (Uppsala: Almquist and Wiksells, 1972); and Duncan Rice, “The Missionary Context of Anti-Slavery,” in *Slavery and British Society, 1776–1846*, ed. James Walvin (London: Macmillan, 1982): ch. 6.

⁶⁸ “Speech to the Wesleyan Missionary Society Annual Meeting,” 1823, in the *Scottish Missionary Register*, 1 June 1823, 265–66; *The Methodist Magazine* 11, no. 11 (1828): 424–26.

⁶⁹ *Substance of the Proceedings . . . July 25, 1822*: 7–8.

⁷⁰ *Substance of the Proceedings . . . July 25, 1822*: 34.

Nevertheless, there was also a tension – even a contradiction – between this ideal of independent self-rule and the belief in European cultural superiority. On the one hand, abolitionists qualified the binary contrast between European civility and African barbarism, documenting the nobility of African culture and the barbarity of the European Atlantic slave trade. Christian Europe and its empires, they argued, were in urgent need of moral reform. Africa and Africans had the same inherent potential as Europe and Europeans. In the next generation, it would be Henry Venn, the son of Wilberforce’s pastor (John Venn), who, as secretary of the Church Missionary Society, developed the three-self principle: the idea that indigenous churches should be encouraged to become self-governing, self-funding, and self-propagating.⁷¹ For these Anglican Evangelicals, Africans were equal by nature; it is misleading to suggest that ‘None of the leading abolitionists believed in the intellectual equality of black and white people’.⁷²

On the other hand, Wilberforce and his contemporaries had no doubt that, due to contingent historical developments, Europe was a more advanced, refined, and enlightened civilization. He rejected the racist claim that Africans suffered from “incurable barbarism” not because he denied the barbarism but because he saw it as curable. While Wilberforce believed in the *inherent* natural equality of Africans and Europeans, he took it for granted that Africans suffered from *ingrained* cultural inferiority.⁷³ Christian Europe had a mission ‘to enlighten and to civilize’, one that would prepare the way for a millennial age in which slavery would cease to exist throughout the earth.⁷⁴ That mission of emancipation would help to legitimize European colonial rule in Africa. The civilizing process in both Africa and the Caribbean would not be quick: it would require decades, even generations, of European paternalism. Enslaved Africans must be made ‘fit for the enjoyment of British freedom’ under colonial tutelage; after emancipation, they would become a ‘free and industrious peasantry’.⁷⁵ The ultimate goal was to see the emancipated ‘enjoying our own civil blessings in this world’; in the meantime, however, they were expected to be colonial subjects rather than equal citizens.⁷⁶ Here we see the ambiguities of Christian abolitionism on full display.

71 Wilbert R. Shenk, *Henry Venn: Missionary Statesman* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983): ch. 3.

72 Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 154.

73 On the distinction between “inherent” and “ingrained” inferiority, see Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

74 *Substance of the Proceedings* . . . July 25, 1822: 8.

75 Wilberforce, *Appeal*, 73–74; *Substance of the Proceedings* . . . July 25, 1822: 4.

76 On this theme, see Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge: Policy, 2002).

6 Conclusion

Taking the measure of Wilberforce and elite abolitionists, more generally, is no easy task. Much contemporary scholarship on abolition reflects a late modern suspicion of emancipation narratives or at least of those narratives inherited from old-fashioned Whig history. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, historians are increasingly struck by how little the abolitionists achieved and how much they were entangled with the forces of capitalism and imperialism.⁷⁷

From the very different vantage point of the nineteenth century, however, black commentators like Frederick Douglass were more sympathetic to the British abolitionist achievement and more conscious of the immense obstacles that Wilberforce and his allies faced. Douglass was also impressed by how effectively British abolitionists had mobilized Christianity. In his most famous speech, given to mark American Independence Day on the Fourth of July, the African American orator contrasted Britain with the United States, where “Christian slavery” remained a powerful institution and abolitionists were disillusioned with the Church:

There [in Britain], the question of emancipation was a high religious question. It was demanded in the name of humanity, and according to the law of the living God. The Sharps, the Clarksons, the Wilberforces, the Buxtons, and Burchells, and the Knibbs were alike famous for their piety and for their philanthropy. The anti-slavery movement *there* was not an anti-church movement, for the reason that the church took its full share in prosecuting that movement: and the anti-slavery movement in this country will cease to be an anti-church movement, when the church of this country shall assume a favorable instead of a hostile position towards that movement.⁷⁸

Douglass exaggerated the contrast, as he praised Britain in order to shame America. Yet it is hard to deny his point about the British abolitionist leadership: for them, abolition and emancipation were ‘a high religious question’.

⁷⁷ For a particularly stark example, see Kris Manjapra, *Black Ghost of Empire: The Long Death of Slavery and the Failure of Emancipation* (London: Allen Lane, 2022): 1: ‘Slavery constituted a centuries-long war against African peoples. And the emancipations – the acts meant to end slavery – only extended the war forward in time’.

⁷⁸ “The Meaning of July Fourth to the Negro,” Speech at Rochester, New York, 5 July 1852, in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Writings and Speeches*, eds. Philip Foner and Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999): 202.

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