5

Licentious Corinthians

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 established that stereotyping is a mundane and ubiquitous phenomenon. The hypothesis that Paul was influenced by ethnic stereotypes as he roamed the ancient Mediterranean should therefore hardly be controversial. The more challenging question is the extent of this influence and, in more immediately practical terms, whether we can detect any traces of it in what remains of the Pauline letter archive. In the two cases discussed in the preceding two chapters, this task was facilitated by Paul's spelling out, to an extent, stereotypical views of non-Jews as immoral and of Galatians as fickle. The interpretive task gets appreciably more complicated when direct statements about presumed collective traits are absent.

The present chapter takes the Corinthian correspondence as a test case to study the possible impact of ancient ethnic stereotypes on Pauline letters that do not feature any direct claim about what the people in question were collectively like.[1] Focusing on Corinth's reputation as a center of sexual licentiousness, Section 5.1 surveys ancient evidence for this understanding of the city and its inhabitants. I argue that this evidence is more relevant to Paul's day and age than is generally admitted. I then turn to assertions relating to Corinthian licentiousness in Paul's letters (Section 5.2) and explore the relationship to the evidence surveyed in Section 5.1. Does Paul's correspondence with Corinth reflect stereotypical assumptions about Corinth as an especially licentious place? This

[1] On the category of "ethnic," see above, pp. 21–28 and the reflections at the end of this chapter in relation to Corinth.

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central question is taken up in Section 5.3. Section 5.4 argues that irrespective of Paul's views of Corinth, his letters solidified a stereotypical view of the city and its habitants as utterly depraved. The cumulative evidence of classical and Pauline texts naturalized essentialist modes of thinking about ethnic difference; it confirmed for later interpreters that the profligacy and debauchery of Corinth were of epic proportions and continued unabated for several hundreds of years, suggesting that licentiousness was a trait intrinsic to the Corinthians.

5.1 LICENTIOUS CORINTH: ANCIENT EVIDENCE

There is no question that Corinth at one point enjoyed the reputation of a "sex capital." A wealth of sources attests to it. Famous exhibits include the verb κορινθιάζω ("to live in a Corinthian fashion," i.e., "live as a prostitute or pimp," or in the middle voice "to visit prostitutes"),[2] the related noun κορινθιαστής ("pimp" or "whoremonger"),[3] and the use of "Corinthian girl" (Κορίνθια κόρη) as a euphemism for prostitute (Plato, *Resp.* 404d, Aristophanes, *Lys.* 91). Some of Corinth's sex workers were familiar throughout the Greek world. Best known was Lais of Corinth, whose fame lasted for centuries. Whether sacred prostitution ever took place at Corinth is more doubtful. Several scholars have argued that sacred prostitution in the ancient world is a historiographical myth.[4] Strabo's account of a massive temple of Aphrodite at Corinth with more than a thousand courtesans dedicated to the goddess (*Geogr.* 8.6.20 [C378]) is in any case unlikely. Older sources do not mention the surely noteworthy phenomenon of sacred prostitution on such a massive scale, and archaeological research fails to support Strabo's claim of a temple that could hold so many individuals.[5] The general consensus at present is

[2] See BrillDAG 1161, s.v. κορινθιάζω.

[3] BrillDAG 1161, s.v. κορινθιαστής ("pimp"); LSJ, s.v. κορινθιαστής ("whoremonger").

[4] Stephanie Lynn Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Mary Beard and John Henderson, "With This Body I Thee Worship: Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity," *Gender & History* 9 (1997): 480–503, but see Craig A. Gibson, "Temple Prostitution at Aphaca: An Overlooked Source," *The Classical Quarterly* 69 (2019): 928–31.

[5] A key earlier article disputing Strabo's account is Hans Conzelmann, "Korinth und die Mädchen der Aphrodite. Zur Religionsgeschichte der Stadt Korinth," *Nachrichten von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* 1 (1967): 245–61. For more recent discussion, see Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity*, 153–209; John R. Lanci, "The Stones Don't Speak and the Texts Tell Lies: Sacred Sex at Corinth," in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven

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that there was no sacred prostitution at Corinth. This leaves open the possibility, considered likely by some, that sex workers actively participated in Aphrodite's cult and dedicated some of their earnings to the goddess.[6]

In the eyes of many New Testament scholars, such debates are neither here nor there, because Paul wrote during a later period. New Testament scholarship has placed great emphasis on the fact that Corinth was destroyed in 146 BCE and was rebuilt by Caesar as a Roman colony some one hundred years later, in or around 44 BCE. Evidence quoted by earlier generations of scholars to depict Corinth as a center of licentiousness is dismissed because it applies to Old Corinth, not to the city of Paul's day.

A good deal of more recent scholarship maintains that New Corinth was no different from other ancient (port) cities when it came to prostitution. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor argued, in a discussion that would have considerable influence on subsequent scholarship, "it is doubtful that the situation at Corinth was any worse than in other port-cities of the eastern Mediterranean."[7] E. P. Sanders similarly maintained that there is "no reason to regard first-century Corinth as more addicted to vice than other cities of similar size and circumstances."[8] Was Roman Corinth indeed no

J. Friesen, HTS 53 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 205–20; Gabriella Pironti, "L'Afrodite di Corinto e il 'mito' della prostituzione sacra," in *Corinto. Luogo di azione e luogo di racconto*, ed. P. Angeli Bernardini (Pisa-Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2013), 13–26, who argues (15) that other evidence that has usually been cited in support of this view only points in this direction when read through the lens of Strabo's account;. For a dissenting view, see Leslie Kurke, "Pindar and the Prostitutes, or Reading Ancient 'Pornography,'" *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 4 (1996): 49–75.

[6] Pironti, "L'Afrodite di Corinto e il 'mito' della prostituzione sacra," 13–26; Monica S. Cyrino, *Aphrodite* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 43.

[7] Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, 3rd ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 57

[8] E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* (London: SCM Press, 2016), 226. Other prominent examples include C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1971), 3: "In Paul's day, Corinth was probably little better and little worse than any other great sea port and commercial centre of the age"; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 2014), 3: "Sexual sin there undoubtedly was in abundance; but it would have been of the same kind that one would expect in any seaport where money flowed freely and women and men were available." For a different perspective, see Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 65 and the very recent discussion in Barry Danylak, *Paul and Secular Singleness in 1 Corinthians 7*, SNTSMS 184 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 169–74.

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different from other (port) cities? The answer is difficult to know. We do not, after all, have reliable statistics for much of anything in the ancient world, and we have little sense of how much sex work took place in Corinth and other ancient cities. Even when it comes to Old Corinth, solid data is unavailable. It is clear that Old Corinth was *depicted* as a center of prostitution, but this portrayal largely derives from Athenian sources, often hostile to Corinth.[9] Archaeology likewise cannot settle the question of the volume of sex work at Corinth because brothels (and other locales, like inns and taverns, in which prostitution frequently took place) are difficult to distinguish from private houses and other places of business. Graffiti and wall paintings that indicate meretricious activity have been richly preserved at Pompeii but not very well at Greek sites.[10]

Perhaps a more useful approach, then, is to analyze whether Corinth still enjoyed a *reputation* as a "sex capital" in Paul's day. We cannot be sure that there was significantly more prostitution in Corinth than elsewhere, but we can determine, to an extent, if the stereotypical understanding of Corinth as a sex capital survived the destruction of Old Corinth. For the interpretation of Paul's letters, this is arguably more significant. In order to understand Paul's response to the Corinthians, it is more pertinent what he and his contemporaries may have *thought* the inhabitants of Corinth were like, than any reconstruction of *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. Given the weight of scholarly opinion moving in the opposite direction, I will discuss a wide range of evidence of Corinth's ongoing reputation for sexual license in what follows in this section. Readers should feel free to skip ahead to Section 5.2 when this point has been established to their satisfaction.

The scholarly claim that Paul's Corinth was no different from other cities suggests that its reputation on this score was solely a thing of the past. The matter is not, however, quite so clear-cut. For one, the literature that attests to the reputation of Old Corinth remained popular throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Some of this evidence is available to us only because it has been preserved, fragmentarily, in a Roman-era source, Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae,* a text to which we will return below. Generally speaking, texts from the classical era were preserved

[9] See Kate Gilhuly, *Erotic Geographies in Ancient Greek Literature and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2018) on what the depiction of Corinth says about Athens.

[10] See Allison Glazebrook, "Is There an Archaeology of Prostitution?," in *Houses of Ill Repute: The Archaeology of Brothels, Houses, and Taverns in the Greek World*, ed. Allison Glazebrook and Barbara Tsakirgis (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 169–96.

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because they continued to be read and studied in later periods. These writings were not relegated to the archives but continued to influence later generations' understanding of the world around them. It would hardly be unexpected, then, to see the ancient reputation of Corinth reflected in later sources. While it is true that the city was (partially) destroyed and rebuilt, it is doubtful that later readers of sources that lampooned or lambasted the Corinthians would always carefully distinguish between Old and New Corinth.

Any failure to clearly distinguish between Old and New Corinth would, moreover, be understandable, because the cities were in some crucial respects not very different. The notion that Corinth was completely demolished and its population annihilated has been revised in more recent scholarship. A certain degree of continuity between the two phases of the city cannot be denied. The new city incorporated ancient buildings that had remained in place and the inhabitants (some of whose families had never abandoned Corinth) revived the old cults, reinstated control of the Isthmian Games, and adopted images and symbols related to the Greek city.[11] Roman-era inhabitants actively sought to encourage the notion that their city was a continuation of the ancient city. As Benjamin Millis has argued, "the early colonists of Roman Corinth, whatever their origins, were at pains to emphasize and promote their status not as interlopers but as legitimate successors and inheritors of the Greek city."[12] This perspective was accepted by some outsiders. Favorinus in various ways connected the Roman-era Corinthians with those of the classical past and even referred to the latter as their ancestors (πρόγονοι, Dio, *Or.* 37.1, 7, 16).[13] The later inclusion of Corinth in

[11] Benjamin W. Millis, "The Social and Ethnic Origins of the Colonists in Early Roman Corinth," in *Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies on Religion and Society*, ed. Steve Friesen, Dan Schowalter, and James Walters, NovT Supplements 134 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 10–33; Sarah James, "The Last of the Corinthians? Society and Settlement from 146 to 44 BCE," in *Corinth in Contrast*, ed. Steven J. Friesen, Sarah James, and Daniel Schowalter (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 15–37.

[12] Millis, "Social and Ethnic Origins," 15.

[13] The consensus view is that this oration was authored by Favorinus and erroneously attributed to Dio Chrysostom. For discussion, see Adelmo Barigazzi, *Favorino di Arelate, Opere. Introduzione, testo critico e commento* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1966), 298–300. Jason König, "Favorinus' *Corinthian Oration* in Its Corinthian Context," *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 47 (2001): 142, plausibly argues that "Favorinus' 'praise' of Corinth's Hellenism is in fact part of a consistent strategy of mocking his listeners for failing to live up to the heritage which they claim for themselves, teasing them with the possibility that they are not 'properly' Greek." For further analysis of Favorinus' oration, see also Cavan W. Concannon, *"When You Were Gentiles": Specters of Ethnicity in*

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Hadrian's Panhellenion suggests that this perspective was more widely shared since membership appears "to have required the demonstration (or at least plausible assertion) of a community's Greek ancestry."[14] Others, however, like Pausanias, disputed that the Roman-era inhabitants were true Corinthians.[15] "Corinthianness" was evidently malleable: rather than a clear-cut distinction between Greek and Roman Corinth, the relation to the classical past and, concomitantly, Hellenic identity, was subject to negotiation.

Importantly for present purposes, a substantial degree of continuity is apparent between the two phases of the city in its ongoing association with Aphrodite, among whose many ephitets were Aphrodite Hetaira ("courtesan") and Aphrodite Porne ("prostitute").[16] The goddess was of central importance in Roman Corinth, as she had been in Old Corinth.[17] At least three sanctuaries within the Roman city were devoted to her cult, with two more in the nearby harbor towns of Lechaion and Cenchreae.[18] These were fitting locations for the shrines, because the goddess was associated with the sea as much as with sex. The most famous of her sanctuaries was her temple on the summit of the Acrocorinth. Although prominently situated, it was of modest dimensions (ca. 10 x 16m, appropriately called a ναΐδιον by Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.6.21

Roman Corinth and Paul's Corinthian Correspondence, Synkrisis (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2014), 130–37.

[14] Daniel S. Richter, *Cosmopolis: Imagining Community in Late Classical Athens and the Early Roman Empire* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8, notes in this connection "the continuing importance of the assertion (often self-consciously specious and tendentious) of Greekness in terms of *genos* (descent) throughout the Hellenistic and imperial periods." For further discussion, see Romeo, "The Panhellenion and Ethnic Identity in Hadrianic Greece."

[15] See König, "Favorinus' *Corinthian Oration* in Its Corinthian Context," 156–60, who notes that this view is "not simply a reflection of the city's identity, but rather a provocative reaction and contribution to it" (159). In other words, Pausanias' emphasis on the distinction between ancient Corinthians and Roman colonists seems to be formulated in response to an alternative view that posited a high degree of continuity. On Pausanias' account of Corinthian identity, see also Concannon, *When You Were Gentiles*, 128–30.

[16] Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 13.559a, 13.571c, 13.572e–573a. The latter passage mentions a sanctuary of Aphrodite Porne at Abydus and a sanctuary of Aphrodite Hetaira at Ephesus.

[17] Donald Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 97: "Corinth was the 'City of Aphrodite,' and her traditional status was maintained by the Roman colonists. No divinity received more devotion in the city than she, and, after Poseidon, Aphrodite had more different coin types than any other divinity (17)."

[18] Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 97.

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[C379]). Its fame in the Roman world was due in part to its appearance on many Corinthian coins. Donald Engels argues that these Roman-era coins "may be regarded in part as promotional devices," which reminded "the bearer of one kind of entertainment all too freely available in the 'City of Aphrodite.'"[19]

Another shrine of interest is the structure known as Temple F on the West Terrace, built in the late first century BCE or early to mid-first century CE, and most likely dedicated to Venus/Aphrodite, suggesting that the cult of Aphrodite enjoyed unabated support around that time.[20] Likewise relevant in connection to Paul's stay in the city is the tomb of the famous courtesan Lais. Pausanias writes that if one goes up the road to Corinth from Cenchreae (as Paul almost certainly did, cf. Rom 16:1), one encounters "a temple of Aphrodite Melaenis (Black Aphrodite) and the grave of Lais, upon which is set a lioness holding a ram in her fore-paws" (*Descr.* 2.2.3–2.2.4). In explaining the significance of this tomb, Pausanias writes that the famous courtesan "so won the admiration of the Corinthians that *even now* they claim Lais as their own" (2.2.5).[21] If the Corinthians continued to do so in the second century, when Pausanias wrote, it stands to reason that they did so in Paul's day as well. Lais lived in the fifth century BCE, so Pausanias' assertion that the Roman-era Corinthians claimed her as their own (ἀμφισβητεῖν σφᾶς) is another indication that they understood themselves as the rightful heirs of the population of the classical era. A final pertinent artifact that Paul may have encountered as he reconnoitered the city is a votive plaque to Aphrodite listing the names of sex workers who offered prayers to the goddess during the invasion of the Persians. This plaque was still visible during the Roman era according to Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 13.573d.[22] Roman Corinth remained, then, as the second-century CE orator Aelius Aristides put it, "clearly Aphrodite's city" (σαφῶς τε Ἀφροδίτης τὴν πόλιν, *Or.*

[19] Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 52.

[20] Eric J. Kondratieff, "West Forum Temples and Terrace – Corinth Computer Project," accessed January 25, 2025, www.corinthcomputerproject.org/records/west-forum-temples-and-terrace/.

[21] Engels suggests that the tomb was "an attraction in the Roman era" (*Coman Corinth*, 98).

[22] For discussion, see Catherine Keesling, "Heavenly Bodies: Monuments to Prostitutes in Greek Sanctuaries," in *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 65, who notes that according to Pseudo-Plutarch and a scholion on Pindar, the women were not courtesans but ordinary women. It is possible that these are later attempts to sanitize the story.

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46.25). While there was nothing exclusive about the relationship between Corinth and Aphrodite (the goddess was worshiped elsewhere, and the Corinthians obviously worshiped other deities as well), there was undeniably a special connection between the goddess and this city, which remained intact after the partial destruction and rebuilding of Corinth.

Evidence that is more difficult to assess is Roman-era sources that make reference to Corinthian licentiousness but do so (primarily) in relation to the classical past. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 8.5, for instance, mentions the presence of courtesans at the Isthmian Games near Corinth, but the passage is set in the time of Diogenes of Sinope (fourth century BCE). Plutarch, *Amat.* 21 (*Moralia* 768a) cites "the great army of courtesans" (τῶν ἑταιρῶν μέγας στρατός) in Corinth, but the context is a story about Lais, the famous courtesan of the classical period. Maximus of Tyre, *Or.* 32.10 refers to the Corinthians as "hedonists" (Κορινθίων τῶν φιληδόνων) and suggests that the presence of courtesans was characteristic of the city (32.2), but the context is a debate about pleasure (ἡδονή) that draws heavily on classical exempla. While these texts are evidence that Corinth's reputation as a center of prostitution remained well known in the Roman period, they do not provide direct evidence that this reputation was thought to apply to Roman Corinth as well.[23]

The same is true of Strabo's account from the first century BCE, which, as noted above, refers for the most part to the classical period. Strabo mentions Corinth again when describing Komana, which he deems "a small Corinth":

> The inhabitants live luxuriously, with all their property planted with vines. There is a large number of women who work wih their bodies, most of whom are consecrated. In a certain way the city is a lesser Corinth, for there also, because fo the large number of hetairas, who were consecrated to Aphrodite, many visitors would come for a holiday at the place. The merchants and soldiers would exhaust their funds completely, so that this proverb arose: "Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth." This is it about Komana. (*Geogr.* 12.3.36 [C559])

[23] This is also the case with the possibly second-century letters of Alciphron, one of which (*Ep.* 24 [3.60]) describes Corinth as "a town charming indeed to look upon and abounding in luxuries (or: objects of pleasure, τρυφημάτων), but inhabited by people ungracious and unblessed by Aphrodite." Alciphron's letters are mostly set in fourth-century BCE Athens. See Patrik Granholm, "Alciphron: Letters of the Courtesans" (PhD dissertation, University of Uppsala, 2012), 13–15; Graham Anderson, "Alciphron's Miniatures," in *ANRW*, ed. Wolfgang Haase, vol. 34.3 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 2194–99.

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Strabo uses aorist and imperfect tenses to describe what transpired in Corinth, perhaps suggesting that the heyday of Corinth as a sex capital lay in the past, though this is arguably to invest the choice of tenses with undue temporal significance. The proverb "not for every man is the voyage to Corinth" was, in any case, current in Strabo's own day and is explained by him with reference to the costs associated with Corinth's prostitutes.[24] Strabo had already mentioned this saying in *Geogr.* 8.6.20 (C378), in a passage that identified prostitution as the main source of Corinth's famous wealth.[25] The proverb is further attested, with minor variations, in a range of Roman-era sources in Latin and Greek, which indicates that it was well known and widespread. Aulus Gellius fittingly dubs it a "frequens … adagium" (*Noct. Att.* 1.8). Ancient explanations of the proverb regularly cite Corinthian prostitution, which suggests that the view of Corinth as a center of prostitution remained in effect.[26] Yet in other instances, the saying is used to convey the view that some things can only be accomplished by some, not by everyone, and there is no immediate connection with prostitution.[27]

Other evidence more directly points to Corinth's ongoing reputation in this regard. (Pseudo-)Plutarch, *Proverbs used by the Alexandrians* 92 mentions the saying: "you seem about to sell 'piggie' in Acrocorinth" and explains it as follows: "Regarding the dissolute women available by the hour, i.e., you seem to be about to hire yourself out in

[24] On geographical proverbs in Strabo, see Daniela Dueck, "'Bird's Milk in Samos': Strabo's Use of Geographical Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 23 (2004): 41–56.

[25] 8.6.20: "It was also on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich; for instance, the ship captains freely squandered their money, and hence the proverb, 'Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth.'"

[26] Aulus Gellius (*Noct. Att.* 1.8); Diogenianus, *Proverbs* 16 (*CPG* 1:289): ἡ Κόρινθος πολλὰς εἶχεν ἑταίρας, αἳ τοὺς ἀφικνουμένους ἐδασμολόγουν ("Corinth had many courtesans, who would levy charges on those who arrived" [translations of *CPG* are my own]); Zenobius, *Proverbs* 4.37 (*CPG* 1:135): Κόρινθος πολλὰς εἶχεν ἑταίρας καὶ πολυτελεῖς, αἳ τοὺς ἀφικομένους τῶν ξένων ἐδασμολόγουν, τὰ ἐφόδια αὐτῶν ἀναλαμβάνουσαι. Διὰ γοῦν τοῦτο ἐπὶ τῶν τρυφᾶν βουλομένων [ἀπόρων] εἰρῆσθαι τὴν παροιμίαν ("Corinth had many courtesans, and expensive ones at that, who would levy charges on the foreign arrivals, taking their supplies. Therefore, the proverb was said of those who wished to indulge in luxury but lacked the means"); Pausanias, *Collection of Attic Words* (Ἀττικῶν ὀνομάτων συναγωγή), ο.39: διὰ τὸ τὰς ἑταίρας ὑπὲρ τῶν Ἑλλήνων εὔξασθαι, φασίν, ἐν τῷ μεγάλῳ πολέμῳ τῇ Ἀφροδίτῃ ἢ διὰ τὸ δυσείσβολον εἶναι τὸν πλοῦν, ἢ ἐπεὶ πολλαὶ ἦσαν ἑταῖραι καὶ τῶν πλουσίων μόνων ὁ πλοῦς ("This was said, they say, because the courtesans had made vows to Aphrodite on behalf of the Greeks during the great war, or because the journey was difficult to undertake, or because there were many courtesans and only the wealthy could afford the journey," my translation).

[27] E.g., Horace, *Ep.* 1.17.36.

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Corinth. For the female part is called 'piggie.'"[28] It is uncertain how common this proverb was, but other than the saying "not for every man is the voyage to Corinth," it draws a direct connection between Corinth and prostitution.[29] Plutarch's authorship is debated, with some scholars arguing the text goes back to the grammarian Seleucus of Alexandria.[30] Since Plutarch and Seleucus both lived during the first century CE, the evidence in either case suggests that during this period people continued to associate Corinth with prostitution.[31]

Also from the first century CE is the following passage from Martial that further reinforces the association between Corinth and (venal) sex:

> Although your home is not Ephesus or Rhodes or Mitylene but in Patrician Row, Laelia . . . you are always piling on the Greek – "my lord, my honey, my soul"– . . . Let the bed hear such expressions, and not every bed at that, but one made for a gamesome gentleman by his lady-friend. Do you wish to know how you talk, you, a respectable married woman? Could a waggle-bottom be more blandishing? You may learn all Corinth by heart and reproduce it, but, Laelia, you will not be altogether Lais (*tu licet ediscas totam referasque Corinthon, non tamen omnino, Laelia, Lais eris; Epigrams* 10.68).

The point of this epigram is that it is unfitting for Laelia, who has an impeccable Roman pedigree, to speak and act in a Greek – specifically Corinthian, and therefore whorish – fashion.[32] When Martial writes "you may learn all Corinth by heart," this refers to "all the Greek erotic language in the prostitute's repertoire."[33] The connection with Corinth and prostitution is strengthened by the closing reference to Lais, the famous Corinthian courtesan.[34] While Lais lived in the classical past, this

[28] *CPG* 1:334–35: Ἀκροκορινθία ἔοικας χοιροπωλήσειν: ἐπὶ τῶν παρ' ὥραν θρυπτομένων γυναικῶν· οἷον, ἔοικας μισθαρνήσειν ἐν Κορίνθῳ· τὸ γὰρ γυναικεῖον μόριον χοῖρος λέγεται.

[29] This is true also of the phrase Κορίνθιον κακόν ("Corinthian evil"), which is listed as a proverbial expression for prostitution in *CPG* 2:180. I have not however been able to identify instances that predate Macarius Chrysocephalus, the fourteenth-century source printed in this section of *CPG*.

[30] See Gertjan Verhasselt, "5271. [Plutarch], De Proverbiis Alexandrinorum 50 (?)," in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Volume LXXXI*, ed. J. H. Brusuelas and C. Meccariello (Wakefield: Egypt Exploration Society, 2016), 67–70.

[31] The saying is also mentioned in the Suda (α.1003; χ.601). At other points, the Suda similarly affirms the association of Corinth with prostitution (χ.4; ο.924).

[32] Patricia Watson and Lindsay Watson, eds., *Martial: Select Epigrams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 226.

[33] Watson and Watson, *Martial*, 229.

[34] For a similar reading of this epigram, see Charlotte Francis, "Martial Epigrammata, Book X: A Commentary" (PhD dissertation, University of Otago, 2007), 402–7.

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passage suggests that Corinth still functioned as a byword for prostitution in the first century.

A speech of uncertain date by Favorinus (c. 85–160) offers further support for the hypothesis that Corinth remained popularly associated with sexual license.[35] Alluding to a sexual scandal of some kind in which he appears to have been involved, Favorinus denies the charges by drawing on Corinth's reputation. Referring to himself in the third person he asks his Corinthian audience:

> Will you not test your memory to see whether any such thing has been done by him in Corinth? Although you live in a city favoured by Aphrodite beyond all that are or ever have been, nevertheless you have heard nothing of the sort regarding him, and, I venture to assert, no other Greek has either. Then do you believe that the man who has lived a decent life in Greece, in the midst of greater license and indulgence, has suffered transformation in Rome, in the presence of the Emperor himself and the laws? (34)

Favorinus' point is that the accusation lacks credibility since the Corinthians know that he did not engage in sexual impropriety even when he was in Corinth, the "city favoured by Aphrodite," where there is plenty of ἄδεια ("license," "impunity") and συγγνώμη ("excuse," "pardon"), where – as we might say – "everything goes." Favorinus argues that it is implausible that someone who stayed on the straight and narrow in Corinth would abandon that course once in Rome, a city characterized, in contrast, by lawfulness.

The notion of Corinth as a city of prostitution and erotic desire is also found in the Isthmian oration (*Or.* 46) by Aelius Aristides given at Corinth in 156 CE,[36] a significant part of which is in effect a panegyric on the city (par. 20–31):

> But [in Corinth] so great is the abundance of beauty, desire, and love (τῶν ἱμέρων καὶ τῶν ἐρώτων), which clings to it, that it chains everyone with pleasure and everyone is equally inflamed by it, while it possesses in itself 'love, desire, friendly converse, and allurement so as to steal away the mind' even of those who are proud of themselves, and it has whatever else there is in addition to these, everything that is called the charms of the goddess, so that it is clearly the city of Aphrodite. (*Or.* 46.25)[37]

[35] This speech has been transmitted as Dio, *Or.* 37, see n. 13 above.

[36] Charles A. Behr, *Aelius Aristides: The Complete Works* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 422.

[37] Translation: Behr, *Aelius Aristides*, 274. Greek text from Wilhelm Dindorf, *Aelius Aristides*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Reimer, 1829): ἀλλὰ δῆτα τοῦ κάλλους αὐτῆς καὶ τῶν ἱμέρων καὶ τῶν ἐρώτων ὅσον ἐξῆπται τὸ πλῆθος, ὡς πάντας μὲν ἀναδήσασθαι τῷ ἡδεῖ, φλέγεσθαί τε ἅπαντας ἐπ' αὐτῇ ὁμοίως, ἔχειν δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῇ φιλότητας, ἱμέρους, ὀαριστύν, πάρφασιν, ὡς κλέψαι τὸν νοῦν

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Aristides praises the city's abundance of ἵμερος, which denotes "desire, longing, lust," regularly with an amorous connotation.[38] That this is the sense here as well is indicated by the close association with ἔρως ("love, passion, desire," or perhaps here: "objects of desire").[39] The plentiful lusts and desires that Corinth has on offer have a "chaining" (ἀναδήσασθαι) and "inflaming" (φλέγεσθαι) effect on "everyone." Corinth owes this captivating quality to Aphrodite, a connection artfully established by Aristides by assigning to the city the very characteristics ("love, desire, friendly converse, and allurement so as to steal away the mind") that are said to belong to the goddess' bridle in Homer, *Iliad* 214–219.

A final piece of evidence to be considered here is found in Athenaeus' *Deiphnosophistae*, a text from the late second/early third century CE. The interlocutors at the fictive symposium that forms its subject have a great deal to say about prostitution at Corinth, much of it pertaining to the classical period. An exception to this antiquarian focus appears in the context of a debate between two participants, the *grammatikos* Myrtilus and the philosopher Cynulcus.[40] The former, although originally from Thebes, presently works in the city of Corinth, and in Cynulcus' eyes embodies everything that is wrong with the city (13.567a):

> you, you sophist, mingle in the bars, and not with companions (ἑταίρων) but with courtesans (ἑταιρῶν), acting like a pimp with no small number of them around you[41]

Myrtilus' métier at Corinth is described by Cynulcus as teaching the art of love (ἐρωτοδιδάσκαλος)[42] and writing about prostitutes (πορνογράφος).[43]

καὶ τῶν μέγα ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς φρονούντων, καὶ εἰ δεῖ τι ἄλλο πρὸς τούτοις πάντα ὅσα λέγεται τῆς θεοῦ φάρμακα, ὡς εἶναι σαφῶς τε Ἀφροδίτης τὴν πόλιν.

[38] BrillDAG 977, s.v. "Ἵμερος." [39] BrillDAG 827, s.v "Ἔρως."

[40] On the characters of Myrtilus and Cynulcus in *Deipnosophistae*, see Barry Baldwin, "The Minor Characters in Athenaeus," *Acta Classica* 20 (1977): 44–46.

[41] σὺ δέ, ὦ σοφιστά, ἐν τοῖς καπηλείοις συναναφύρῃ οὐ μετὰ ἑταίρων ἀλλὰ μετὰ ἑταιρῶν, μαστροπευούσας περὶ σαυτὸν οὐκ ὀλίγας ἔχων. My translation.

[42] Laura McClure, "Subversive Laughter: The Sayings of Courtesans in Book 13 of Athenaeus' Deipnosophistae," *AJP* 124 (2003): 264: "With the hapax ἐρωτοδιδάσκαλος, Cynulcus equates Myrtilus' status as a sophist and grammarian with his depraved lifestyle."

[43] On the meaning and usage of this term, see Madeleine Henry, "Athenaeus, the Ur-Pornographer," in *Athenaeus and His World: Reading Greek Culture in the Roman Empire*, ed. David Braund, John Wilkins, and Glen Bowersock (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 507: "A pornographos, to Cynulcus, is one who represents prostitutes in speech, in writing, or in pictorial form, one who publicly admits knowledge of prostitutes and shares this knowledge." See also Madeleine Henry, "The Edible Woman:

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Further developing the portrayal of Myrtilus as a lurid Corinthian, Cynulcus quotes a fragment from the Middle Comedy poet Eubulus:[44] "I went to Corinth. Although I had quite a good time there eating an herb called Ocimon ('Basil'), it disagreed with me; and I chattered away my tunic there" (13.567c). Cynulcus relates Myrtilus' explanation of this passage: "What a fine Corinthian sophist, who explains to his students that Ocimon is a courtesan's name!"

Myrtilus recognizes that his association with Corinth plays a key role in Cynulcus' denunciation of his person and begins his response by saying, "I will take as my starting point the lovely city of Corinth, since you criticized me for working as a sophist there" (ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τῆς καλῆς Κορίνθου, ἐπειδή μοι τὴν αὐτόθι σοφιστείαν ὠνείδισας, 13.573c). The speech that follows features a variety of quotations from classical sources that attest to the prominent place of sex workers in Corinthian society and their connection with Aphrodite. The depiction of Myrtilus as a sex-crazed Corinth-based sophist, and the attack against him on the basis of his association with Corinth, offers further proof that Corinth continued to have a reputation in this regard in Athenaeus' time.

In short, whatever the sociohistorical reality, which in many ways remains inaccessible to us, Roman Corinth was regularly viewed as a place that offered lust and passion in abundance, to paraphrase Aelius Aristides. It is reasonable to assume that Paul was familiar with this aspect of the city's reputation. He may well have been familiar directly or indirectly with some of the claims made about Corinth in classical and postclassical texts and would almost certainly have become aware of its reputation when he traveled to the city and experienced Aphrodite's local prominence.

5.2 LICENTIOUS CORINTH: PAULINE EVIDENCE

Porneia ("illicit sex") and cognate terms appear seventeen times in the undisputed letters, all but two of them (Gal 5:19, 1 Thess 4:3) in the Corinthian correspondence.[45] While Paul suspected non-Jews in general

Athenaeus's Concept of the Pornographic," in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. Amy Richlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 261–63.

[44] Eubulus, *Cercopes*, fr. 53.

[45] Paul uses other words in relation to sexual malfeasance as well, including ἀσέλγεια, κοίτη, and ἀκαθαρσία, but these terms appear less frequently and do not alter the impression that Paul is much more concerned about sexual deviancy in his correspondence with the Corinthians than anywhere else.

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of licentiousness (see Chapter 3, pp. 45–55), the Corinthians evidently stood out even among them. The earliest glimpse we catch of Paul's interaction with the believers in Corinth already points in this direction. Paul mentions a Previous Letter in 1 Cor 5:9: "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons" (Ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἐν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ μὴ συναναμίγνυσθαι πόρνοις). Whatever else this letter contained, it evidently featured a warning against associations with *pornoi*. The word *pornos*, in classical Greek used for male prostitutes, has a broader sense in Paul, which reflects the broadening of the semantic field of *porneia* in Second Temple Jewish literature. Whereas *porneia* generally referred to "prostitution" in classical and Hellenistic Greek, Jewish authors around the turn of the common era subsumed various kinds of sexual activity under this header, including adultery, incest, and exogamy.[46]

Even before writing the letter now known as 1 Corinthians, Paul was evidently concerned about "sexually immoral people" at Corinth. Yet his warnings against these individuals proved insufficiently clear, as he found himself forced to explain in his subsequent missive, now known as 1 Corinthians, that he did not mean "the sexually immoral *of this world*, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world" (1 Cor 5:10). What he had meant, he insists, is that Christ-following Corinthians should not "associate with anyone *who bears the name of brother or sister* (τις ἀδελφὸς ὀνομαζόμενος) who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber" (5:11). This clarification was prompted by the failure of the Corinthians to act against one of their own who engaged in *porneia* (5:1). Perhaps some Corinthians reasoned that Paul's requirement to shun sexually immoral persons in general was an unreasonable and impracticable demand.[47] Be this as it

[46] For succinct overviews of Second Temple Jewish usage of *porneia*, see Kyle Harper, "Porneia: The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm," *JBL* 131 (2012): 369–75; David Wheeler-Reed, Jennifer W. Knust, and Dale B. Martin, "Can a Man Commit Πορνεία with His Wife?," *JBL* 137 (2018): 387–90.

[47] It is another matter whether this was the reason or rather an excuse not to act against the person in question. A not necessarily mutually exclusive alternative is that the community did not sanction the man because of his high social standing. So, e.g., James Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), 53; Andrew D. Clarke, "Secular Practices of Christian Leadership: II. Beyond Reproach," in *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–6*, AGJU 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 85; John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth*, JSNTSup 75 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 139–41; Michael D. Goulder, "Libertines? (1 Cor. 5–6)," *NovT* 41 (1999): 347–48.

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may, Paul clarifies that this requirement only applies to fellow Christ-believers and that the community has a duty to act against so-called brothers or sisters who are *pornoi* but not against anyone else (5:12–13).

The details of the new case of *porneia* are unclear. Paul writes: "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality (*porneia*) among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife" (5:1). Scholarly reconstructions of what had taken place draw heavily on arguments from silence. Since Paul does not refer to the woman as the son's own mother, there is no blood relation. Since Paul does not call her his stepmother (μητρυιά) and does not use the word μοιχεία ("adultery") to describe the relationship, she was no longer married to the man's father; they were either divorced or he had passed away. Since Paul does not refer to the relationship as a marriage (γάμος), they were not formally married, even though the expression "having a wife" (γυναῖκα ... ἔχειν) signals something more than a one-off encounter.[48] Since Paul does not pronounce judgment on the woman (but only on the man), she was not a member of the community (5:3, cf. 5:12–13).

It is questionable how eloquent Paul's silence really is and if his failure to use certain words can carry the weight interpreters assign to it.[49] In the case of Paul's failure to punish the woman, for instance, the theory that she is not a member of the community is but one possible scenario. The egalitarian perspective it assumes (the man and woman bear equal responsibility for the relationship) does not comfortably fit the Roman patriarchal context. Perhaps the woman is not condemned because she did not enter into this arrangement of her own volition but was forced to do so by the "son,"[50] possibly for financial reasons.[51]

[48] Cf. 1 Cor 7:2, 12, 13, 29.

[49] Paul himself in his interpretive comments on his Previous Letter (1 Cor 5:9–10) may be understood as also implicitly advancing an argument from silence. If he had meant to say that the Corinthians were to avoid mingling with sinners outside of the assembly, he would have instructed them to avoid πάντως ("entirely") all of the *pornoi* τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ("of this world"), or so Paul suggests. As Margaret Mitchell puts it: "Look at the words, Paul implicitly pleads, even as he is in fact asking them to focus on *words that are not there*" (*Paul, the Corinthians, and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* [Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 19), emphasis original.

[50] Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 74 notes: "A number of explanations can be proposed for Paul not accusing the woman .... It could be that she is not a believer, or cannot be held responsible because she is not free, or is too young, or is known not to have chosen what happened. Yet she may be a responsible believer."

[51] Chow, *Patronage and Power*, 132–39, argues for the likelihood that the man wished to marry his stepmother as "a way to preserve or to increase family wealth" (138); Clarke,

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While it is clear that Paul condemns the man, he focuses his anger on the community, scolding them for their lackluster response and failure to condemn and exclude the person committing this act of *porneia* (5:2, 5:6). Despite Paul's previous warnings against *pornoi*, the Corinthians had failed to take proper measures when one of their own revealed himself to be such a person.

Following his instructions on how to deal with *pornoi* in general and this person in particular (5:3–13), Paul turns to another issue, a court case between believers before a secular court (6:1–11). If and how this connects to the incestuous relationship of 5:1 is debated,[52] but it is notable that Paul provides in this chapter a list of "wrongdoers" (ἄδικοι) that elaborates on the list of people to be avoided in the previous chapter (6:9–10; 5:10–11). Both lists begin with *pornoi*, suggesting that both issues were related, on some level, to illegitimate sex.

This impression is strengthened by the fact that *porneia* returns to center stage in the immediately following section, 1 Cor 6:12–20. In this part of the letter, it seems clear that the kind of illegitimate sex that Paul has in mind is prostitution. Paul asks rhetorically: "Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute (πόρνη)? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her?" (6:15–16). Paul's failure to cite a specific case has led some to suggest that he still has the relationship of 5:1 in mind.[53] It is in any case clear, though, that 6:12–20 is broader in scope. Paul does not restrict his comments to the specific case of 5:1 but offers a more general warning against *porneia*. Paul was evidently unconvinced that the man of 5:1 was the only one wont to engage in *porneia*, even if he does not accuse anyone directly of visiting prostitutes. If all Corinthian Christ-followers had been firm in their resolve against *porneia*, and the problem only pertained to a single rotten apple, the case could have been closed after 5:1–13.

Further suggesting that Paul conceived of *porneia* as a problem for a considerable group of Corinthians are two statements in this pericope

"Secular Practices of Christian Leadership: II. Beyond Reproach," 85, more cautiously, considers it "possible" that "the motivation for this incestuous relationship was financial." Chow does not, however, extend this line of thought to explain why Paul's anger is directed at the man only and assumes along with many other that she "is not a member of the church" (130).

[52] See Will Deming, "The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5–6," *JBL* 115 (1996): 289–312.

[53] Deming, "The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5–6," 304; for a critical evaluation, see Brian S. Rosner, "Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20," *NovT* 40 (1998): 338–40.

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frequently taken to reflect the Corinthians' point of view rather than Paul's: "all things are lawful for me" (6:12) and "food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" (6:13).[54] If that is correct, some of the Corinthians may have argued that visiting *pornai* was acceptable. It is also possible, however, that Paul is parodying their position and ridiculing their appeal to freedom by suggesting that, if applied absolutely, it would result in justifying visits to a bordello.[55]

The matter was certainly not merely hypothetical, though. Paul viewed *porneia* as a clear and present danger to the Corinthians. This is confirmed in the letter's next section, where Paul writes that "*because of cases of sexual immorality* (διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας), each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" (1 Cor 7:2). The plural instances of *porneia* to which Paul refers perhaps include the cases discussed in the previous chapters, but are likely broader in scope, since Paul argues on this basis for the general prudence of marriage. Paul made this statement in response to the view of some of the Corinthians that "it is well for a man not to touch a woman" (7:1). They had expressed this view in a letter to Paul, which may well have been occasioned by the Previous Letter, mentioned in 5:9. As Joseph Fitzmyer points out, Paul's advice "not to associate with sexually immoral people" in the Previous Letter presumably "raised questions in the minds of some Corinthian Christians about various topics, such as, 'Is sexual intercourse to be allowed at all?' 'Is it right for a man to touch his wife?'"[56] The reference to instances of *porneia* in 7:2 may be relevant in this connection. In the Previous Letter, Paul insisted that the Corinthians should steer clear of *pornoi*, but since the *porn*-word group could cover a wide range of activities, ambiguity remained about the kind of sexual activity Paul was concerned about. It stands to reason that some would have concluded that it might be better to avoid *all* forms of sexual interaction, thus leading to the view that "it is well for a man not to touch a woman" (7:1). Paul's response that marriage is advisable because of instances of *porneia* (7:2) clarifies that marriage (and intercourse within the context of

[54] The Corinthian perspective perhaps extends to the following clause: "And God will destroy both one and the other."

[55] For this suggestion, see Deming, "The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5–6," 311; Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 129.

[56] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 32 (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 273–74.

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marriage, 7:3–5) does not constitute or facilitate *porneia* but rather guards against it.[57]

Paul's next mention of a *porneia*-cognate appears in the context of a discussion of the consumption of idol meat (1 Cor 8–10). Toward the end of this discussion, Paul cites the example of the wilderness generation of Israel (10:1–5) and derives from their conduct a number of exhortations for the Corinthians, including: "We must not indulge in sexual immorality (μηδὲ πορνεύωμεν) as some of them did" (10:8). Given the broader context of eating idol meat, and the immediately preceding injunction not to become idolators (10:7), it is possible, though by no means necessary, that the *porneia* that Paul has in mind entails sexual activities in cultic contexts.

The final mention of *porneia* appears in a section of 2 Corinthians in which Paul discusses his third visit to Corinth. Paul fears that "when I come again, my God may humble me before you, and that I may have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness that they have practiced" (πενθήσω πολλοὺς τῶν προημαρτηκότων καὶ μὴ μετανοησάντων ἐπὶ τῇ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ καὶ πορνείᾳ καὶ ἀσελγείᾳ ᾗ ἔπραξαν, 2 Cor 12:21). That ἀκαθαρσία, πορνεία, and ἀσελγεία all refer to sexual malfeasance is suggested by the singular article and singular relative pronoun governing the triad.[58] Paul had indicated in the previous verse that he was concerned about various forms of disunity in the community as well but only with respect to this trio of sexual sins does he worry that "many" who engaged in this previously will not have repented even when he visits Corinth for the third time. This suggests that from Paul's perspective, a substantial share of the Corinthian community had been committing sexual sins of various sorts during much or even all of the time that he had known

[57] For a recent, alternative reconstruction of the background of 1 Cor 7:1b, see Danylak, *Paul and Secular Singleness,* 192–213. Danylak proposes that the Corinthians' perspective is found in its original formulation in 7:26b and is reproduced by Paul in adapted form in 7:1b to make the point that refraining from marriage is good only if it entails sexual abstinence. Importantly for present purposes, Danylak does not dispute that Paul's response is informed by concerns about the prevalence of *porneia*.

[58] Thomas Schmeller, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther*, vol. 2, EKK, 8 (Neukirchen-Vluyn; Ostfildern: Neukirchener Theologie; Patmos-Verlag, 2015), 361, notes that the three nouns "weitgehend synonym gebraucht sind (*ein* gemeinsamer Artikel!)" (emphasis original); cf. Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 2:869: "The vices specifically named here are all related to sexual misconduct."

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them.[59] Indeed, not much seems to have changed since Paul penned 1 Cor 5:1–2; then as now, their sexual malfeasance constituted grounds for mourning (πενθέω, used by Paul only in these two contexts) and then as now, serious punitive measures appeared necessary (1 Cor 5:3–5; 2 Cor 13:2). It is significant that Paul affirms in 2 Cor 12:21 that these people actually practiced (ἔπραξαν) what he considered sexual malfeasance. Elsewhere, with the exception of the individual of 1 Cor 5:1, it is not entirely certain if anyone actually engaged in *porneia* or if Paul was warning against what he regarded as a potential problem.

In sum, from Paul's earliest interactions with the Corinthians (the letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9) up to his final letter (or one of his final letters),[60] *porneia* presented a significant challenge. Paul discussed *porneia* more frequently in these letters than anywhere else and at times did so apparently unprompted by any specific incident.

5.3 STEREOTYPICAL ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CORINTH IN PAUL'S CORRESPONDENCE

I have argued that Corinth's reputation for sexual license continued into the Roman period, even if it was not quite as prominent as during the classical era. We have also seen that Paul, in his epistolary interactions with the believers in Corinth, was unusually concerned about *porneia*. Rather than dismissing this overlap as merely coincidental, I suggest that it is more plausible that the exceptionally high number of warnings against sexual license in letters to a city with a notable reputation in this

[59] Cf. Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: WJK, 2003), 301: "There is still a serious problem of sexual immorality at Corinth, despite Paul's strong admonitions in 1 Cor 5–6. Paul had apparently warned the Corinthians about such immorality on the occasion of his second (painful) visit, and now he is fearful that the situation is still not resolved." As noted above, the issue can be traced back even further, to the Previous Letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9.

[60] The integrity of 2 Corinthians has been debated for over two centuries and various scholars have argued that 2 Cor 10–13 was followed by one or more letters that are presently part of the canonical document. In Margaret Mitchell's view, for instance, 2 Cor 10–13 was followed by two more letters, one that comprises 2 Cor 1:1–2:13; 7:5–16; 13:11–13, and a final one presently found in 2 Cor 9 (Margaret M. Mitchell, "Paul's Letters to Corinth: The Interpretive Intertwining of Literary and Historical Reconstruction," in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen, Harvard Theological Studies 53 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005], 307–38). For an overview and evaluation of various hypotheses, see Paul B. Duff, *Moses in Corinth: The Apologetic Context of 2 Corinthians 3*, NovT Supplements 159 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), 18–51.

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regard reflects the influence of stereotypical assumptions about Corinth and its inhabitants.

Paul did not have objective access to "what really happened" in Corinth. Basic though this point may be, much mainstream New Testament scholarship still regularly assumes or implies that we can reconstruct the reality that Paul responded to by "mirror reading" his letters. Yet what that mirror reflects is, at best, Paul's *perception* of what happened, not any "bare facts."[61] This is an important distinction, because there is no question that substantial variety exists in how human beings perceive the same data and that their perceptions are influenced by a variety of factors, stereotypes prime among them.

The social-cognitive studies discussed in Chapter 2 suggest that people perceive and evaluate the same actions very differently depending on the perceived identity of the protagonist. I argued that the methodological point to be derived from this is that if the evaluation of an individual closely matches the stereotypical view of the social group to which they are assigned, this stereotype has likely exerted influence on the perceiver. If a person is deemed particularly aggressive, and a stereotype of aggression related to that person's ethnic identity obtains in the cultural context of the observer, it is reasonable to assume that the evaluation of the action has been impacted by this stereotype. Even if the act *was* aggressive from the perspective of the protagonist, the observer is likely to view it as relatively *more* aggressive.

In the case of the Corinthian correspondence too, there is significant overlap between stereotype (Corinth as a center of sexual license) and perception (Paul's understanding/fear that *porneia* was a widespread issue), which suggests that the former impacted the latter. Impact in this context means that while the perception is based on certain facts, the way in which these facts have been interpreted and the significance that is attached to them have been influenced by stereotypical assumptions. Put differently, we may ask if Paul would have offered a similar assessment and paid an equal amount of attention if the same events had transpired

[61] This is not quite the same as hypothesizing that Paul is misrepresenting or misunderstanding the situation (either or both of which are of course possible) but rather to make the more fundamental point that even if Paul was accurately informed and fairly representing the situation, his perspective is not some carbon copy of any supposedly objective reality. Like all human beings, Paul was actively constructing reality rather than simply reproducing the facts; human perception is the result of a complex interaction between sensory input and cognitive processing.

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in a different city. Would Paul have included so many reminders about the dangers of *porneia*, even when not immediately prompted by concrete problems? Would Paul have responded similarly forcefully ("hand him over to Satan!") if something along the lines of 1 Cor 5:1 had happened elsewhere? Or was he determined to respond forcefully especially in this Corinthian context, which was full of desires and lusts, ready to chain and inflame people (so Aelius Aristides)?

That Paul was personally familiar with the Corinthians does not much matter. Stereotypes do not vanish once people establish a degree of familiarity.[62] They are usually adjusted only to the extent that is required to accommodate conflicting information. Paul's perception of the Corinthian believers, then, was not simply the accumulation of his personal encounters with them but a more complex equation that involved prior expectations about the city and its population, adapted and adjusted based on his experiences with them.

As noted previously, it is plausible that Paul was to some degree familiar with the reputation of Corinth before he first arrived there. Manfred Beller reminds us that "when people from various countries and cultures meet each other ... there is no such thing as a pristine encounter. Our attitudes are culturally determined."[63] When Paul made his way around Corinth, he encountered much that would have confirmed culturally determined expectations about the licentiousness of Corinth's populace: the central place of Aphrodite in the city's architecture, the propagation of her cult on the city's coins, the respect paid to the tomb of a prostitute from the past, and perhaps a plaque with the names of sex workers on display for the general public. Any perceived sexual malfeasance by the Corinthians would have reinforced Paul's sense of the city and its inhabitants as licentious. Even if it was not objectively worse than in other cities, this behavior would be more readily noticed by Paul and assumed greater significance for him under the influence of his stereotypical assumptions about the city and its populace. This would then explain why he warned so forcefully and frequently against *porneia*, even if there was not always some specific issue or incident to elicit these admonitions.

[62] See pp. 34–36 above.

[63] Manfred Beller, "Perception, Image, Imagology," in *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters. A Critical Survey*, ed. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, Studia Imagologica 13 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 7.

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Paul also lacked direct access to the Corinthian situation in the sense that he relied on reports from others. Apart from the letter from the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:1), he was informed about Corinthian goings-on by "the people of Chloe" (1 Cor 1:11), visitors like Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:17), and his aides Timothy and Titus (1 Cor 16:10–11; 2 Cor 7:13). That information reached Paul via a multistep process means increased opportunity for stereotype influence. The perception of the situation at Corinth of at least some of these informants may well have already been influenced by Corinth's reputation, to the effect that the reports that Paul received placed a relatively strong emphasis on (potential) sexual malfeasance.[64] Corinth's reputation, then, may have effected the amplification of the problem of *porneia* in the Christ-community at two subsequent stages: in the perception of informants like Timothy and in the interpretation of their reports by Paul.

While the scenario that Paul's emphasis on *porneia* is to be explained at least in part in terms of the effects of Corinth's stereotypical reputation on this score is plausible, it is admittedly ultimately impossible to prove. The different evaluation of the same action performed by a white and a Black protagonist in the study by Duncan could only be demonstrated in the controlled environment of an academic experiment.[65] In real life contexts, it is much more difficult to know to what extent stereotypical expectations have impacted the evaluation of a person as, for example, aggressive or unreliable, or if this evaluation was based on a relatively accurate perception of a social situation. Further complicating the matter is the possibility that Corinth's reputation for licentiousness attracted people intent on "selling piggy" (or purchasing it), to the effect that this reputation may have functioned akin to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Arguably, then, Paul's emphasis on *porneia* is to be explained as the result of a variety of factors. There may have been comparatively much sexual license in the city, and there were some real instances of *porneia* among the believers, which under influence of stereotypical expectations Paul and his sources noted more quickly (and along the lines of which they interpreted ambiguous behavior), and to which Paul therefore accorded particular significance in his interactions with the Corinthians.

[64] This may be true also for reports by the Corinthians themselves. People regularly internalize to some extent stereotypical claims about their social group. See pp. 212–12.

[65] See p. 31.

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5.4 RECEPTION HISTORY

Awareness of the considerable influence of stereotypes on how we perceive and evaluate social situations cautions against a straightforward equation of social reality with description, such as we have, in rhetorically inflected form, in Paul's letters. Throughout the history of interpretation, readers have, however, taken Paul's references to *porneia* as dependable evidence of the conditions of social life at Corinth. When combined with evidence from the classical period, this intimated to many of Paul's interpreters that the city remained an epicenter of depravity over the course of many centuries, suggesting that the Corinthians suffered from "engrained vices" that remained stable in the longue durée.[66]

Such assumptions are reflected in many colorful descriptions of the city by Pauline scholars, some of the finest examples of which date to the Victorian age. Corinth was "the very metropolis of refined debauchery,"[67] so "conspicuous for its depravity," and home to such "abysmal profligacy" that it warranted the name "new Gomorrah."[68] Interpreters were aware of the chequered history of Corinth but considered this irrelevant as far as the city's essential character was concerned. Frederick William Robertson (1816–53), who enjoyed considerable popularity in the nineteenth century, especially posthumously, described it as "the hotbed of the world's evil, in which every noxious plant, indigenous or transplanted, rapidly grew and flourished . . . Corinth now in the apostle's time, as in previous centuries, became a proverbial name for moral corruption."[69]

Such dim depictions of Corinth were rhetorically powerful and theologically useful: Paul's letter evinced that the rays of the Gospel's light

[66] Marcus Dods, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1888), 98.

[67] Thomas Ainger, *The Fifteenth Chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians: Explained and Illustrated*, 2nd ed. (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1860), 51–52.

[68] Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul* (London: Cassell & Co., 1883), 403.

[69] Frederick W. Robertson, *Sermons on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 5. On Robertson, see Leonard W. Cowie, "Robertson, Frederick William (1816–1853), Church of England Clergyman," *ODNB* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2004). Similarly, e.g., Ezekiel Blomfield (1778–1818), *The Life of Jesus Christ; with a History of the First Propagation of the Chritian Religion, and the Lives of the Most Eminent Persons Mentioned in the New Testament* (Bungay: C. Brightly, 1809), 434: "An universal corruption of manners soon prevailed; so that Corinth in its second state became as debauched as it had been in any former period whatever."

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could reach even into the darkest of places.[70] Yet it would be unduly reductive to explain its appearance solely in utilitarian terms. It came about primarily as a result of reading Paul's Corinthian correspondence in light of classical depictions of the city and vice versa, in a kind of interminable hermeneutical feedback loop.[71] Classical portrayals of the Corinthians as particularly licentious led the Pauline interpreter to readily notice and emphasize this element in Paul's letters, and awareness of Paul's emphasis on *porneia* had a similar effect on how the classical evidence was construed. Paul's attention to *porneia* rendered classical accounts about Corinth's sexual license relevant and confirmed their accuracy for many New Testament scholars.

The problem of *porneia* in Corinth, then, was arguably amplified twice or even thrice: not only Paul's sources and Paul himself may have been particularly attentive to (potential) *porneia* as a function of their prior understanding of Corinth (as argued in Section 5.3), Pauline interpreters, likewise aware of the city's reputation for sexual license, also paid outsize attention to claims about illicit sex in Paul's correspondence. The effect of these various interpretive moments was cumulative and resulted in the titillating portrayals of Corinth as an utterly depraved city, some representative samples of which were quoted above. As a result, although Paul never in fact claimed that Corinth was a cesspool, his letters contributed substantially to the construction and distribution of this understanding of the city and its inhabitants.

What effect did the combined image of classical and Pauline Corinth exert on how modern interpreters viewed the contemporary world?

[70] So, e.g., Joseph S. Exell, *No. 1–3. I–II Corinthians*, vol. 7, The Biblical Illustrator (Ada: Fleming H. Revell, 1887), 431: "You might be tempted to say – Ah! no Christian could remain pure in such a place. So some of the young men of Corinth thought, and the apostle wrote to them that it was an entire mistake. I believe some of you young men have just the same notion that these Corinthians had. You say London is quite as trying to one's principle as ever Corinth was. Perhaps so; yet even in Corinth there were those who remained proof against contamination."

[71] Chrys Caragounis, "'Fornication' and 'Concession'? Interpreting 1 Cor 7, 1–7," in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, ed. Reimund Bieringer, BETL 125 (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 544–45, observes that "in the light of the ancient information regarding the proverbial immorality of the city … the interpreter of [1 Corinthians] comes to his task, even if unconsciously, with an attitude, a pre-understanding, an evaluation which is prejudicial to the Corinthians, and thus a hindrance to a correct understanding." The same dynamic is apparent when classical literature is read "in the light of Paul." Although it is debatable whether this was an entirely fair depiction of contemporary scholarship at the time Caragounis wrote these words, it certainly fits nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship.

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In contrast to the alleged descendants of the Galatians (variously identified as the Irish, French, Welsh, Scots, and Germans) and contemporary "pagans" (with the "discovery" and exploration of unfamiliar continents, there seemed more than ever), the Corinthians were not a significant population group in the nineteenth century. The city suffered considerably during the Greek War of Independence in 1821 and had to be rebuilt after the earthquake of 1858.[72] There were nonetheless many "Corinthians" to be found in the nineteenth century, because the word had made its way into the English language as a synonym for a profligate or licentious person.[73] It is difficult to say if this materially impacted how actual Corinthians were perceived, but the use of the demonym in this manner did encourage ethnic stereotyping inasmuch as it conveyed that a population group could be reduced to an essential trait and that this trait was shared by everyone with this ethnic or geographic background. This usage of "Corinthian" can be traced back to Plato and Aristophanes (Corinthian girl), but the popular image of Corinth presupposed here was likely due to a significant extent to the letters of Paul as they were expounded by many of his modern interpreters.

The essentialist understanding of Corinth(ians) as licentious may seem difficult to sustain given the city's destruction and refoundation in a different garb, not to mention the dynamic nature of its populace due to the continuous influx of people via its two ports.[74] In the mind of some of Paul's nineteenth-century interpreters, it was, however, precisely the changing nature of the Corinthian public that explained the city's consistently low morality.[75] The licentiousness of Corinth had to do with the

[72] Cf. Joseph Agar Beet, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1882), 16: "The city of Corinth has lingered to our times, and is now rising; or rather is being rebuilt nearer to the coast. It suffered greatly during the war of liberation. In A.D. 1851 Mr. Lewin counted only fifty houses. It is now a straggling, uncouth, and rather unhealthy town of 8000 inhabitants."

[73] According to *OED*, one meaning of the noun "Corinthian" in sixteenth- to nineteenth-century sources is "A wealthy man; a profligate idler; a gay, licentious man; also, a shameless or 'brazen-faced' fellow"; the adjective was used with the meaning "'Relating to the licentious manners of Corinth' (Johnson), profligate. In 19th century use: given to elegant dissipation."

[74] For a recent argument emphasizing the multi-ethnic and "heteroglossic" makeup of Corinth, see Ekaputra Tupamahu, *Contesting Languages: Heteroglossia and the Politics of Language in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

[75] Although I have not seen this connection drawn in nineteenth-century sources, it is worth noting that Cicero also considered the problem of port cities to be one of excessive mixing: "Maritime cities also suffer a certain corruption and degeneration of morals; for they receive a mixture of strange languages and customs, and import foreign ways as

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"mixture of races."[76] Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford and later Dean of Westminster, wrote in his introduction to 1 Corinthians that Paul faced in that city "the mixed populations and mixed belief of a degenerate race."[77] It was broadly agreed that race-mixing led to bad morals. As an anonymous author put it in the *London Quarterly Review* of 1888: "In social life [at Corinth] there was visible the corruption which nearly always springs from the mixture of races, for it is a sadly established fact that such intermixture results in the mutual infection with strange vices rather than the communication of new and unwonted virtues."[78] Corinth was a place "where mingled the streams of Oriental licentiousness and of yet coarser Roman vice."[79] Paul encountered in this city a "mongrel and heteroge-

well as foreign merchandise, so that none of their ancestral institutions can possibly remain unchanged" (*Rep.* 2.7)

[76] Revere Franklin Weidner, *Studies in the Book: Containing Studies on the Early Epistles of St. Paul, Including I. and II. Thessalonians, Galatians, I. and II. Corinthians, and Romans*, Studies in the Book 2 (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1890), 53: "Nowhere was there a greater mixture of races, and Corinth was a fair representative of the civilized world in the days of Paul, and the new Corinth was as profligate as the Corinth of the past."

[77] *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians: With Critical Notes and Dissertations*, vol. 1 (London: Spottiswoode and Co., 1855), 4. Similarly, e.g., W. G. Andrews,"Foreign Missions in the First Century," *The Spirit of Missions* 60 (1895): 192.

[78] Anonymous, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," *London Quarterly Review* 69 (1888): 26. See also Robertson, *Sermons on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians*, 4–5: "Men from all quarters of the globe met in the streets of Corinth .... Now, one reason why a population is always demoralized by an influx of strangers continually going and coming is this ... men, when they mix together, corrupt each other; each contributes his own vices and his irreverence of the other's good, to destroy every standard of goodness, and each in the contact loses his own excellences. Exactly as our young English men and women on their return from foreign countries learn to sneer at the rigidity of English purity, yet never learn instead even that urbanity and hospitality which foreigners have as a kind of equivalent for the laxity of their morals. Retaining our own haughtiness, and rudeness, and misanthropy, we graft, upon our natural vices, sins which are against the very grain of our own nature and temperament. Such as I described it was the moral state of Corinth."

[79] William Dawson, "The Doctrine of St. Paul," *Church Work* N.S. 5 (1878): 448. The notion of "oriental licentiousness" is sometimes echoed in relatively recent scholarship. Cf., e.g., Ralph P. Martin, 2 *Corinthians*, 2nd ed., WBC 40 (Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 2014), 30: "Corinth's chief shrine was the temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and life. In Corinth her cult appeared in a debased form, because of the admixture of certain *oriental influences*. This meant a low moral tone and sexual perversion in a possibly attested cult of sacred prostitution" (emphasis added).

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neous population of Greek adventurers and Roman bourgeois, with a tainting infusion of Phoenicians." This last quote is from Frederic William Farrar, whose work would go on to have a great deal of influence. His claim about the mongrel population and tainting Phoenician infusion would frequently be approvingly quoted, even as recently as 2020.[80] Farrar was described by a contemporary as "one of the most learned and eloquent Christian writers and preachers of this day"[81] and certainly did much to deserve this reputation. Trained at King's College London and Trinity College, Cambridge, he was a Fellow of the Royal Society, Dean of Canterbury and Chaplain in Ordinary to Queen Victoria. Farrar wrote several highly influential exegetical studies and commentaries on New Testament texts. He was also a notable proponent of scientific racism.[82] This shines through in comments like the one quoted above about the tainting influence of the Phoenicians. For Farrar, as for the authors previously quoted, it was not just the alleged influence of this specific ethnic group but, more generally, the mixed nature of the Corinthian population that explained its immorality.[83] Paul's Corinthian correspondence attested in their view to the inferiority of "mongrel races," just as his letter to the Galatians attested to the inferiority of Celtic races and the apostle's comments on "heathens" evinced the inferiority of non-Christian races. This, then, is another example of how Paul's letters fashioned lenses, a series of categories, with which to make sense of the contemporary world. The Corinthian Correspondence, read along these nineteenth-century lines, legitimized essentialist thinking about population groups as morally depraved and lent support to segregationist claims that "race-mixing" inevitably leads to moral degeneration.

[80] David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2020), 12.

[81] Joseph Parker, *Apostolic Life as Revealed in the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2 (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 243.

[82] For his views on race, see Frederic W. Farrar, "Aptitudes of Races," *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* 5 (1867): 115–26; Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 115–16, provides a helpful summary.

[83] Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul*, 164: "Cities liable to the influx of heterogeneous races are rarely otherwise than immoral and debased . . . . It seems as though it were a law of human intercourse, that when races are commingled in large masses, the worst qualities of each appear intensified in the general iniquity." Similarly, Frederic W. Farrar, *The Messages of the Books: Being Discourses and Notes on the Books of the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1884), 209.

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CONCLUSION

While little can be said with any degree of certainty about the volume of venal sex in Roman Corinth or of other activities that Paul would have construed as *porneia*, there is good evidence to suggest that Corinth's *reputation* for sexual license continued into the Roman era. This chapter has argued that it is likely that this understanding of the city contributed to Paul's extraordinary emphasis on *porneia* in his letters to this city. Research on how stereotypes impact human perception suggests that it is plausible that under the influence of this stereotypical understanding of Corinth, Paul (and his sources) readily noticed evidence of sexual licentiousness, construed ambiguous evidence along these lines, and registered contradictory evidence to a lesser degree.

By pursuing this line of argument, this chapter has sought to steer a middle course between what might overly schematically be called "older" and "newer" scholarship. Older scholarship regarded Corinth as a cesspool of moral corruption, whereas more recent scholarship frequently asserts that Roman Corinth was no different from any other (port) city. The implication of the latter view is that it is entirely coincidental that Paul put such remarkable emphasis on avoiding sexual licentiousness in letters addressed to a place famous on that score. I have argued that this is an implausible scenario and that the connection is better explained as a function of an ongoing stereotype about Corinth and its inhabitants.

One final question remains to be addressed: Should this stereotype be classified as an *ethnic* stereotype? In several ways, the Corinthian case tests the limits of that category. One complicating factor is that much of the ancient evidence centers around the city of Corinth rather than its inhabitants. It seems reasonable, however, to assume a high level of correspondence between the reputation of a city and that of its inhabitants, even if it did not apply to all of them in equal measure. A more serious difficulty is that while it is not particularly controversial to refer to the Corinthians of the archaic and classical periods as an ethnic group, the matter is more complicated for the Roman period due to the significant influx of people from elsewhere.[84] It is important to recall in this connection that people can

[84] On the Corinthians of earlier periods, see, e.g., Simon Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides. Vol. 2, Books IV–V. 24* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 104; Nino Luraghi, "The Study of Greek Ethnic Identities," in *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Jeremy McInerney (Malden: Wiley, 2014), 223. Pauline scholars also sometimes refer to Corinthians as an ethnic group or speak of a Corinthian ethnicity/ethnic identity. E.g., Concannon, *When You Were Gentiles*, 138, 140.

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have multiple identities at the same time (e.g., Corinthian and Jewish)[85] and that at least some Roman colonists presented themselves as legitimate Peloponnesians and descendants of the Corinthians of the past; in contemporary parlance, we might say that they claimed an authentically Corinthian ethnic identity for themselves.[86] This claim was accepted by some and disputed by others, effectively illustrating the malleability and contestability of ethnic identity. The Corinthian example certainly continued to be relevant to discussions about ethnicity in later eras, specifically the question of the mixture of ethnic or racial groups, for which Paul's Corinthian letters were marshalled as a powerful cautionary tale.

[85] See pp. 26–27. [86] See pp. 112–13.

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